

An Interview with
Emily Pulitzer

at the State Historical Society of Missouri St.
Louis Research Center, St. Louis, Missouri

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transcribed by Valerie Leri and edited by
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Oral History Program

The State Historical Society of Missouri

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International Women's Forum DVD 68

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PREFACE

The interview was filmed using a Canon XH A1S A camera on a tripod using a HDV digital tape. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets []. Any use of parentheses () indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [""] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [] indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [(??)] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Josephine Sporleder.

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MISSOURI-ST. LOUIS
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S FORUM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
DECEMBER 29, 2014
EMILY PULITZER INTERVIEWED BY DR. BLANCHE M. TOUHILL

Emily Pulitzer: ...Pulitzer, normally called Emmy by most of my friends.

Blanche Touhill: Would you talk about your youth, your family, the other kids on the block or who did you play with, your elementary school, your secondary school. Who has said to you, "Emily, you really have a quality that you could give back to the society" or "You can do what you want to do." I'd like to know that from your home situation, whether it was a neighbor or a family member or somebody in your family kind of setting, and then was there somebody in school, a teacher or a community person who said, "Emily, I want you to do this and this because I know that you'll really do a wonderful job and you can do these wonderful things," and talk about your leadership and with your playmates in elementary or secondary school. So just talk.

Emily Pulitzer: Well, I was born in Cincinnati and grew up in the country and I have a younger brother, a brother who's three years younger. My father was a head of an insurance agency that had been started by his grandfather and my mother largely was at home during the time we were growing up. During the war she helped out in my father's office and, as my brother and I got older, she became very involved in the Civil Rights Movement and after we left, she went to work as a travel agent. Both my grandfather, her father who had a company called Frank Tea & Spice Company and as a result they traveled widely so my parents traveled a lot because they enjoyed it and that, I think, gave Mother the idea of becoming a travel agent. So while I was growing up, there were not many of the mothers of my friends who worked. One woman who was kind of a surrogate mother in high school worked because she had to but most of my parents' friends, the women did not work outside of the home. The house that my parents built in 1938, when I was five years old, was, as I said, in the country. It was on a beautiful wooded nine acres of old beach forest and they asked an architect who was a friend who, in fact, was originally from St. Louis. His name was John Becker and his uncle was, I think, the mayor of St. Louis.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, yes.

Emily Pulitzer: And his wife, who was much better known, was Marion Rombauer Becker.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness.

Emily Pulitzer: And they were friends with my parents and John pushed them into building a contemporary house. It was an international style modern house. It turned out to be the most important and one of the earliest in the Cincinnati region and it was not something that parents set out to do. It was something he, as a friend, was able to push them and I remember them saying...well, he asked, "Would you like big windows," and they said, "Yes, we want to look at the woods." Anyway, it was a house that had an enormous influence on me and was different from everybody else's house. The other big influence in my childhood was the fact that my mother's youngest sister and a woman who married my father's brother and a third woman started what was then called the Modern Art Society in 1939 and it's like the Contemporary Art Museum here and it has evolved the way the Forum evolved into the Contemporary Art Museum. As a result of their shows, Mother and Dad bought some works of art which, again, were different from what other people had and people were much less hesitant to express their puzzlement and dislike. One of my favorite stories was of a little old lady who probably wasn't as old as I am, who came to see the house; people came from time to time to see it, and after she walked around, she said to Mother and Dad, "Well, it doesn't look the least bit like a gasoline station," which was obviously the word going around. So the architecture and the art which surrounded me and the woods were all very big influences. I think Marion Rombauer Becker was a big influence, which I didn't think of at the time but, looking back, because she was putting out the Joy of Cooking cookbook and a woman who lived not too far from us was helping her and she became the first paid director of the Modern Art Society and she was very much of a naturalist and she and my father were fascinated with wildflowers and the woods and in the spring, when I was in high school, he mostly drove the carpool, we would take a walk in the woods and look at the wildflowers in the morning. So part of my adult life has been living in what I call the country, though it's inner suburbs but it was

country when my husband grew up there. So when the leaves are on the trees, I think I'm in the country. But you ask about...

Blanche Touhill: Who among your family encouraged you, said, "You have a certain ability"?

Emily Pulitzer: I don't think anybody did but I think nobody said, "You can't," or "You shouldn't" and both of my parents graduated from college and, in fact, my mother's mother graduated from college which was very unusual. I did quite well in the local grade school and was very happy and then my parents took me out of that school, which would be sort of like Webster Groves and sent me to a city public school because the township in which we lived had no high school, which was what we would call today a magnate school. You had to pass an exam to get in. It was a non-district college preparatory high school and I did not do well and I hated it. I hated it socially, I hated the teachers who mostly were old ladies who had been there through the war and who really didn't like the kids. The kids mostly did very well and mostly went on to college and did very well but it was a difficult time for me. Wyoming, which was the local grade school, I'm Jewish and there was, I think, one other Jewish kid in the class and I was totally accepted and very, very happy.

Blanche Touhill: And that was in the country?

Emily Pulitzer: That was in the country. Well, it was, as I say, like Webster, it was, like, three miles from our house, the school. Then, high school, it was much more mixed. Grade school was segregated. There was a separate black grade school so I never knew any black kids.

Blanche Touhill: Until you went to high school?

Emily Pulitzer: Until I went to high school and, in a way, although it wasn't segregated, it was segregated because the lines that you crossed were pretty firm and you didn't cross too much so there was a large Jewish group, there was a large Christian group and there was a large African American group and they didn't mix terribly much. So, when I went to college, a woman who my parents knew who was the head of the art and architecture section of the public library in Cincinnati encouraged Mother to take me to meet the president of Bryn Mawr when she came to Cincinnati and it just sounded wonderful and, to my amazement, I got in and really enjoyed it. It was the first time that I was in a situation where you studied for the

sake of learning not to get better grades and it was small. I think our class was 100 or 120 girls and the dorms in which you lived had all four classes mixed together so you knew your classmates; you knew other classes in your house and you knew the people who you majored with. I was elected the president of the junior class which meant a great deal to me at that time. Going back and forward, you asked about playmates and there were three families within walking distance that had children. One lived in the house which I have since learned is the oldest structure in this village or the domain of the village and she was a few years older. Her father worked for the telephone company and he did a lot of...he was a lineman and so he did a lot of work on the trees. Another I've totally lost track of, but the third who was actually the closest, was a couple of years younger than I and she is a member of the IWF in San Francisco.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness!

Emily Pulitzer: And I frequently think, can you imagine these two little girls from the country both in the International Women's Forum and her parents were quite conservative and mine were not and she has a fabulous memory and she tells me about things that impressed her. For instance, she said, "You had purple tulips." I had only seen red and yellow tulips and she has frequently said, "Your mother was a real influence on me, encouraging me to do what I wanted to do, move forward" and, in fact, Mother and Dad were each real mentors to others. My first cousin whose mother was my father's sister went to work for the family company. It was his family just as much as ours and he said he went to work there because he wanted to work with my father.

Blanche Touhill: Isn't that nice?

Emily Pulitzer: Yeah, it really was. So it was a very positive...my father was very involved in community work, so much so that I sort of resented it and he did a lot of fundraising and would be very upset when he wasn't successful and I thought, I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to beat my head against a stone wall, and, in fact, it took many years before I...and I've never done much fundraising, perhaps as a result of that.

Blanche Touhill: What did your mother do in civil rights? You said that she began to be active in the Civil Rights Movement.

Emily Pulitzer: Well, there was an organization called Fellowship House and they would send a Jewish, a Christian and an African American person to talk to schools, churches, community groups and she was very involved in that. Then she went to Washington at one point. I'm not sure what she did but she was involved to the extent that some people objected to my father and said, "If your wife continues, you're going to lose my business."

Blanche Touhill: And what did he say? He said nothing, right?

Emily Pulitzer: He said nothing.

Blanche Touhill: That's right. I remember those days in my youth and there was a moment when the African American churches encouraged their members to visit the homes of people they worked with, Caucasians they worked with...

Emily Pulitzer: Oh, interesting.

Blanche Touhill: And I remember that my mother worked for the federal government and she entertained this woman who was a co-worker and her children and I don't remember the father coming but I do remember the woman and the children came and I think it was a Sunday afternoon or something and we all came down and we all sat around the table and it was a mark on my mind, that these two women worked together and there was no reason why the children didn't know the children in the other family.

Emily Pulitzer: Well, there was a lot of segregation during the time when I grew up. We had a wonderful African American woman who lived with us for a while and then built a house in a little African American community not too far away and I said, "Margaret, let's go to the movies," and she said, "No, I can't go with you," which really shocked me and then in high school...and I only became aware of it more recently...the African Americans...there was swimming in the high school and the African Americans swam in the last period on Friday and then they changed the water.

Blanche Touhill: Well, those are the little things that show you the segregation.

Emily Pulitzer: Yeah, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Well, those were times of big change though, the end of the '40s and then Brown versus the Board of Education, and then there was a lull until Martin Luther King.

- Emily Pulitzer: Yeah, and then there was a lull...
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, and there was the Public Accommodation Act that occurred between then, in that time too. Well, what did you major in in Bryn Mawr?
- Emily Pulitzer: Art history.
- Blanche Touhill: Why did you choose art history?
- Emily Pulitzer: Well, I didn't know what I was going to major in and I thought, you know, I've been talking about the art we have at home and I really don't know anything. Maybe I ought to try to learn and I took a course and really liked it and I had a professor who, for my senior project, encouraged me to work at the Philadelphia Museum and do research on some medieval sculpture that belonged Raymond Pitcairn and he had never allowed any work to be done on it. So nothing had been published and that was really my first research with objects. Then I also was allowed...and I don't know how the idea came about...I did an exhibition at the college of some works of art that were owned by the college and others by some of the faculty.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, that was a wonderful experience, both of those.
- Emily Pulitzer: Yeah, yeah.
- Blanche Touhill: Did you go into Philadelphia often from Bryn Mawr?
- Emily Pulitzer: Yes, yeah.
- Blanche Touhill: I love the Philadelphia Art Museum.
- Emily Pulitzer: Mm-hmm, it's wonderful.
- Blanche Touhill: And Philadelphia today is a wonderful place to visit if you're a tourist, with all the historical sections that they have really developed. They weren't developed in those days though, were they?
- Emily Pulitzer: No.
- Blanche Touhill: And the new Barnes Museum has moved in. I don't know whether that's a good idea or a bad one.
- Emily Pulitzer: Well, I visited the Barnes only once and it was not very far from Bryn Mawr.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, I visited out...

Emily Pulitzer: Yeah, but during college, they didn't want to have people and when my parents came for graduation, we went...and I don't know how we got in...but it was very difficult to have access.

Blanche Touhill: Well, today, it is such an open...you know, you have to make a reservation because they have such crowds but it's a very open...or you get the feeling they want you to come, but I thought the Philadelphia Art Museum was...I think I spent all day in the Philadelphia Art Museum. I went to Bryn Mawr for a higher education women's administration course. A lot of the women went home on the weekends, Saturday afternoon and Sunday and I didn't want to come back to St. Louis and then have to get on a plane so I would just go into Philadelphia and one of the first places I went to was the Philadelphia Art Museum and it was just...I love the St. Louis Art Museum but when you see the Philadelphia Art Museum, it's just...

Emily Pulitzer: Yeah. Well, and it was the first time that I had real contact with the city. Bryn Mawr originally was a Quaker school and they kept a lot of the best of Quaker beliefs and the American Friends Service Committee is based in Philadelphia so I went weekend work camp which was a fascinating experience.

Blanche Touhill: What did you do there?

Emily Pulitzer: Well, we helped paint or whatever but then on Sunday morning, we would go to court and observe what happened with the people they'd picked up the night before. So it was a real eye-opener in terms of civic justice, civil justice.

Blanche Touhill: It would be a shock, wouldn't it?

Emily Pulitzer: Oh, it was and I also had a great experience going to a work camp in Calabria in Southern Italy after my sophomore year in college...or junior, and the Americans were there through the American Friends Service Committee but there was an Indian and Mexican and English and German and it was an extraordinary experience because where we were in Calabria, between...on the sea but between two small villages, it was like the Middle Ages and if you went inland, it was even more like the Middle Ages. So it was a bit like the Near East...Middle East and the Middle Ages.

Blanche Touhill: It was frozen in time?

Emily Pulitzer: Absolutely and I asked a man who was leading it and who was from the area, "What happened during the war and were there lots of fascists in this area?" and he said, "No, there weren't any because they didn't do anything for us. They didn't get this far," and you know there's that famous book called Christ Stopped at Eboli. Well, Eboli was north of where we were but the Mafia was strong.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, I would assume, in Sicily and Southern Italy and, I guess....

Emily Pulitzer: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: There are a lot of interesting stories, aren't there, about the American Mafia and the Italian Mafia during World War II. So you graduated from college and did you have a job?

Emily Pulitzer: No. I had spent part of a summer on the experiment in international living in France and I wanted to go back to France and so I went to the Ecole du Louvre for a year.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, how wonderful!

Emily Pulitzer: And partly lived in a pensione but then lived with a family which really helped my French and that was a terrific experience and I came back and I wanted to get a job and I wanted to live in Boston where my roommate lived and a couple of high school friends were also there and I couldn't find a job. So my parents said, "Well, why don't you come home and visit us" and when I did, they said, "Why don't you go to the Art Museum and talk to them and see if there's a job there." Well, they set up an apprenticeship for a man who'd been living in New York and for me and it was a really great experience. I worked in all the different curatorial departments and the Modern Art Society, which had become the Contemporary Art Center, was housed there so the man who headed that became a good friend and was a big influence and it was a really great experience.

Blanche Touhill: Was it a paid job?

Emily Pulitzer: Yeah, but I lived at home.

Blanche Touhill: So your career was starting?

Emily Pulitzer: It was started and I sort of was hesitant about coming back to Cincinnati because I didn't want to be with the people I'd grown up with and I found I didn't need to and there was a very fine musical quartet, the LaSalle Quartet that was based there and they traveled all over the world performing but they had house concerts and so I went to many of those and they performed the modern piece that they were going to perform on their regular concert and the second violinist became a good friend. Then, there was a French couple who lived in the woods near us that I became friendly with and an English couple who lived somewhere else. So I developed some friends that were really great.

Blanche Touhill: International.

Emily Pulitzer: International and interesting.

Blanche Touhill: And are interested in art?

Emily Pulitzer: Or the arts or just...more sophisticated people and so it was really a great year.

Blanche Touhill: The internship was for one year?

Emily Pulitzer: Yes, and I still wanted to live in Boston and so I went back to look for a job and I was hired by a woman named Agnes Mongan who had graduated from Bryn Mawr and who was the curator of drawings and I think she hired me for two reasons: one, because I had had that internship, and the other was because I had graduated from Bryn Mawr. She was very distinguished in the field and had lots of graduate students, even though she had no academic appointment, I don't think she had a Ph.D. but she had graduate students who worked under her and she wasn't such a great mentor for me but what she did was she left me alone and if I did what she needed to have done, I could do anything else I wanted.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, how nice!

Emily Pulitzer: Which really was. We were located on two different floors and I was in the drawing study room so anybody who wanted to see drawings came in and so I worked with faculty, I worked with students, I worked with just anybody.

Blanche Touhill: And that would expand your knowledge too?

Emily Pulitzer: Absolutely, and the Fogg has one of the great drawing collections in the country. So it was a great experience and then she said to me, "Well, you know, you can take graduate courses," which, of course, would never happen today and so I did. Working full-time, I would take one course a semester.

Blanche Touhill: Who was the academic organization?

Emily Pulitzer: Harvard.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, Harvard, oh.

Emily Pulitzer: So it was the Fogg Art Museum which is Harvard's art museum and so I got to know the faculty, I got to know graduate students over a six or seven-year period and it was an amazing group of students and the director of the museum, who also was a professor, liked to have a graduate student as his assistant for one or two years. He chose me to work for him one year and he was an incredible mentor and it was a fabulous experience because, again, he let me do what I saw that needed doing and so there was a relatively small entrance area where the mail was and where 150 kids would move through in a five or ten minute period and also information and I worked with an architect that I selected to rehab it a bit.

Blanche Touhill: What kind of projects did you do?

Emily Pulitzer: Well, that was one and the other was, the head of development, which was called the Friends Organization, was a young college graduate woman and they would cycle through and they wouldn't stay terribly long and I said to him, "You know, Radcliffe..." ...I guess everybody thought that was a job for a woman..."Radcliffe has a board and they have people who are raising money. Let's see if we can find somebody there who would want to work for the museum," and so I did and she stayed for many, many years.

Blanche Touhill: Helping to raise money?

Emily Pulitzer: Yeah, she was the head of what we would now call development or...I don't know, there are even newer names. So those were the two major things that I look back on as having accomplished. On the other hand, he used me as a backboard to bounce ideas off of, ideas that he had real

interest in doing and some that he really didn't but just wanted to think about.

Blanche Touhill: But, you know, it's nice that he did that...

Emily Pulitzer: Oh, it was fabulous.

Blanche Touhill: ...because that's the way you learn too.

Emily Pulitzer: Absolutely.

Blanche Touhill: But your brain must have been similar to his in some way.

Emily Pulitzer: I don't know but I was only one of a whole series.

Blanche Touhill: I know, but I mean, just to be one of them.

Emily Pulitzer: But it was great and recently, the woman who did the research and wrote the cultural biography...and my husband was going through the archives at the museum and she found a letter that he had written to the president of the Rhode Island School of Design who was searching for a director of their museum and he wrote this glowing recommendation for me and at the end of the letter said, "Now, if you don't want a woman, I can suggest a man but he won't be as good."

Blanche Touhill: Oh, how wonderful!

Emily Pulitzer: But isn't that an amazing statement of the times?

Blanche Touhill: But he didn't know you when you were young and working in Boston?

Emily Pulitzer: No, no, no.

Blanche Touhill: This was years later?

Emily Pulitzer: No, no, this was when I was working at the museum.

Blanche Touhill: Well, how did you know him?

Emily Pulitzer: This was the director of the museum.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, not your husband to be?

Emily Pulitzer: No, no, no.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, how wonderful!

- Emily Pulitzer: No, this was research, the letter turned up in that research, yeah.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, how wonderful! Oh, for your husband's book?
- Emily Pulitzer: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: I see, I'm sorry.
- Emily Pulitzer: Because he was very involved with Harvard and, in fact, he remembered meeting me when he came to the drawing study. He was thinking about buying a drawing by Courbet and he wanted to see the museum's Courbet drawings which I showed him.
- Blanche Touhill: Did he buy the Courbet?
- Emily Pulitzer: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: How did you get to St. Louis? You stayed at the Fogg?
- Emily Pulitzer: I was at the Fogg for seven years and I was as far as I was going to go. It was a very well run museum. During the time I was there, the director let graduate students do exhibitions which turned out to be really major exhibitions. So it was a wonderful, stimulating time to be there but I knew that that was sort of it and I guess that's when he recommended me for RISD and I didn't get the job and the woman who was the head of conservation was a friend of the director of a museum nearby who had been appointed to be the director of the St. Louis Art Museum. It was Charles Buckley and so Charles was talking to Betty Jones, did she have any suggestions and she recommended me and Charles hired me and we started the exact same day in November of 1964 and the museum, at that time, was totally run down, totally non-professional. You could have driven a truck up to one of, I don't know, half a dozen entrances and hauled off anything you wanted. There had been a curator and an assistant curator and he had retired and married the assistant curator so she left. So there was virtually no staff, no professional staff and so it was a very exciting four years of building an institution, building a staff and everything we did was new and wonderful and different. So it was very, very stimulating.
- Blanche Touhill: How did you get to know the people in St. Louis?

- Emily Pulitzer: Well, in part because he was single and I was single and so I would be invited to places with him that probably as just a curator, I wouldn't have been but St. Louis has always seemed to me a very open place. If you want to meet somebody in some area, you could. My parents knew Dick and Flo Wild so they were hospitable to me and, in fact, they also knew Bill and Erna Eisendraff and I lived with them the first month-and-a-half I was in St. Louis while I was looking for an apartment.
- Blanche Touhill: Did you know that Bill Eisendraff used to volunteer his time to the development of this library?
- Emily Pulitzer: Oh, no.
- Blanche Touhill: In the early days and I got to know him and he told me some interesting stories about...he used to live where the arts on Big Bend and Clayton Road...
- Emily Pulitzer: No, his wife did.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, his wife lived there when that was the Stix Baer & Fuller...
- Emily Pulitzer: No, she was May Company.
- Blanche Touhill: She was the May Company, okay.
- Emily Pulitzer: Yeah, Buster May and Erna Eisendraff were first cousins.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, okay.
- Emily Pulitzer: And, in fact, Hortense Place which is in the central west end was named for Erna Eisendraff's mother.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, isn't that nice. Well, he was a lovely man and there was a point, during the early '80s...the late '70s and the early '80s and he introduced me to, I think it was Buster May and they gave some paintings to the University of Missouri – St. Louis. I went over with Mr. Eisendraff and picked them up but he was a very nice man. How he found the library at the University of Missouri – St. Louis, I do not know but he volunteered his time.
- Emily Pulitzer: That's great.
- Blanche Touhill: And we gave him an honorary degree.

Emily Pulitzer: Oh, that's very nice. Well, Washington U is doing a show which opens the 23rd of January of works of art acquired by the Washington University Gallery during his time as director because he came to St. Louis to be the assistant director of the art museum under Perry Rathbone.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, I did not know that.

Emily Pulitzer: And then when Perry Rathbone left to go to the Boston museum in, I think it was 1955, Bill did not get the directorship and Charles Noggle did and Charles Noggle was, it turns out, a very nice man but he was not a very good museum director and so it was at that point that Steinberg Hall was built and Bill became the first director there.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, at Washington U?

Emily Pulitzer: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: So, go on. So you came to St. Louis and you had an exciting time of rebuilding.

Emily Pulitzer: Exactly.

Blanche Touhill: And that was before they began to make changes to the architecture?

Emily Pulitzer: That's correct, although the auditorium had been built under Perry Rathbone in the early '50s and it being the late '60s, there was a great sense of need for expansion and an architect was chosen and the ideas were fairly grandiose and basically what happened was Charles Buckley built an institution that was bigger than he could cope with and particularly with building, a big building project. So the staff and the art storage was moved out of the building to a building on Delmar in University City because a lot of the storage area and office area was going to be turned into galleries and then there was to be this addition. Well, I left in the summer of '73 and within a year, Charles had retired and I think he basically had a nervous breakdown and what was left was the board and the architects at loggerheads with each other and the art and staff two miles away and it was into that mess that Jim Wood came and he was fantastic and, sadly, only stayed four years but he built the South Wing Building around the auditorium which is not great architecture but it functions and then he went on to be the director at the Art Institute of Chicago. So, it had gotten to the point...well, to be honest, Charles

Buckley was gay but in the closet and I think it took a big toll on him and he started hiring gay men who were ineffectual who he could kind of take care of and it got to the point where the only way I could please him was to fail which was not acceptable to me. So I was definitely going to leave and by that time, Joe's first wife had died and we had gotten involved with each other and so I got married and left.

Blanche Touhill: And how is your life as the wife of...he was a publisher, right?

Emily Pulitzer: He was a publisher and the head of the company, Pulitzer Company.

Blanche Touhill: Because I knew he went to work every day.

Emily Pulitzer: Oh, yes, very much so, and, although I don't think he really liked business, he was a very good businessman and I think he cared passionately about journalism.

Blanche Touhill: And the Post Dispatch was a well known, respected national paper.

Emily Pulitzer: Yes. So it was a very different life and...

Blanche Touhill: What was different about it?

Emily Pulitzer: Well, first of all, I wasn't working but I did do some independent curatorial work and two projects, one in St. Louis, which was the Richard Sara Sculpture [inaudible 40:04] downtown. I was appointed by the National Endowment for the Arts to be one of their jurors. There were three local jurors that the mayor appointed: Bob Orchard, Charles Buckley and Uto Coltermann who was teaching at Washington University, and there were three national jurors and I realized, after Richard was selected unanimously by the group of jurors, that the locals all went back to their full-time daily job and if something was going to happen, I was going to have to be involved and so Bob Orchard and I were the real pushers on that and it took a long time and three different mayors before it actually...

Blanche Touhill: Three different mayors?

Emily Pulitzer: ...before it actually happened, and it involved raising money.

Blanche Touhill: You had to knock down the buildings, didn't you?

Emily Pulitzer: No, no, it was an empty site.

- Blanche Touhill: It was an empty site already?
- Emily Pulitzer: Yeah, and then the other major project that I was involved in at pretty much the same time was to co-curate a first exhibition that was focused on Ellsworth Kelley's sculpture and I did that with a man who was a curator at the Whitney Museum, Patterson Sims, and it was shown at the Whitney and then at the St. Louis Art Museum and as a result of that experience, Patterson and Ellsworth Kelley and I have become great, great friends. So it was a very rewarding experience in many ways.
- Blanche Touhill: What kind of qualities do you have to have to be a curator?
- Emily Pulitzer: You have to care passionately about art. You have to know about art and do research. It depends whether you're working with a living artist, in which case, you have to get a lot of information from the artist and work closely in terms of how the work is seen and we did a catalogue resume of his sculpture up to that point which meant looking into his records and talking with him a great deal and it was a very, very satisfying experience.
- Blanche Touhill: How many years did it take?
- Emily Pulitzer: It took four years and usually if you work with somebody that long, you may not end up friends but Patterson and I have traveled together since then and are very close friends. In fact, I asked his wife to design the biography of Joe. She's a very fine graphic designer.
- Blanche Touhill: When you do that kind of thing, do you see it in your mind before you put it up or how do you decide what goes where? How do you decide the organization of the display?
- Emily Pulitzer: Well, to some extent, you do it chronologically, in this case. I think we had a model of the space and then models of the individual sculptures to scale and you can only do that so far. Kelley does that with all of his shows. He does installations in a model and with heavy sculpture, you pretty much have to do that but you always make changes once you're in the space.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, the other thing I marvel at is the concise nature of the descriptions. I always marvel that whoever's curating it, or if you get one of those audios, they tell you in a few sentences what the essence of that painting or that sculpture is and that's very hard to do. That takes a lot of effort.

Emily Pulitzer: Right, but then you also have to think about how does the work relate to the space it's in; how do you get a visual impression of the work in the clearest way, the most direct way possible, so what is next to what. I mean, the objects that you put in adjacent to each other is very important.

Blanche Touhill: Well, now that I think about it, putting out the newspaper, it maybe not have that artistic intensity but you do, when you put out a newspaper, you have to decide what articles go where, don't you?

Emily Pulitzer: Absolutely.

Blanche Touhill: And they have to somewhat pique the interest of the reader so that when you look at the headlines and you may read the main story, your eye has to go across the page and you see another story that you would be interested in.

Emily Pulitzer: Yeah. Well, after my husband died and I went on the board of the Pulitzer Company, Bill Wu, who was the editor at that point and who had been very, very close to my husband, decided he would give me a tutorial and I learned during this time that the news side didn't know what the ads would be that were placed so they had a block of space and then there was a block of space that was the advertising department and it was thought to be very important that the news and the advertising did not speak to each other because you didn't want advertising to influence news. So I was amazed that they wouldn't know what was going to be next to an article and conceivably it could be something totally inappropriate.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, or very negative and the ad would be positive.

Emily Pulitzer: Right. Well, and I said something to my brother-in-law who was the head of the company after Joe died, that I felt that newspapers were, in some ways, similar to museums and he was taken aback. He couldn't understand it. I said, "You know, we have to appeal to our current audience but we also have to appeal to younger, newer readers or visitors without losing the old," and I think it's very true.

Blanche Touhill: Yes. How long were you on the board?

Emily Pulitzer: I was on the board...Joe died in '93 and we sold the company in 2005 so it was a very tumultuous period. I had never been involved with newspapers or journalism except what I picked up from Joe and in the beginning, he didn't talk much about what was going on at work and bit by bit, I got him to talk more but I think I picked up his values and his concerns but, of course, times were changing and this was a very complex situation. There were three members of the family, three branches of the family who had board representation and the oldest was a cousin of Joe's and Michael's who had already turned his seat over to his oldest son who is a trust and estate lawyer in New York so it had nothing to do with journalism. Michael had four children and his wife had four children and it wasn't clear who would succeed Michael and I had a complicated family situation where it was totally unclear who would succeed me and I was the youngest of the three. So there was that issue, of how to continue the value control. There came a point when...well, we knew about the internet and we had consultants and did a lot of thinking and made a few investments which didn't turn out to be successful so we were paying attention but at one point, our CEO came to us and said, "We're not going to make our numbers and it's not going to get better," and so you coupled the family issues, the internet issues and the fact that our professional management was saying, "This isn't working" and if you didn't listen to them and you lost them, then where would we be? And so, my lawyer who was also on the board, Bill Bush and I talked to a number of people in the newspaper world. We had already sold our broadcast and actually the advice we got wasn't good but we didn't pay attention to it and so we sold in 2005, which was the last moment, and, of course, in hindsight, it looks brilliant, fortunate but I don't think we were so brilliant; I think we were responding to some very particular situations, one of which was, of course, the internet.

Blanche Touhill: Yes. I know that when I was at the University of Missouri – St. Louis, there were people from the Post Dispatch who were grappling with that and talking to the University of Missouri – Columbia, Journalism School as to what did they think the trends were and how was this all going to work out and how fast would it come and things of that nature.

Emily Pulitzer: Well, I remember one consultant saying, "Revolutions always take longer than you think and are always more profound."

- Blanche Touhill: And it was a revolution, wasn't it?
- Emily Pulitzer: Oh, total...
- Blanche Touhill: It was the communications industry changing.
- Emily Pulitzer: Yeah.
- Blanche Touhill: So then you went into the Beacon?
- Emily Pulitzer: Well, after we sold, John Sawyer, I guess, was the first person who came to me who had been head of the Washington Bureau of the Post Dispatch and he said, "Newspapers and television and magazines and radio are cutting back on their foreign bureaus. They're not sending reporters abroad and it's more important than ever that we know what's going on in the rest of the world," and he proposed paying journalists to cover issues, not battles, but underlying issues around the world and so I and David Moore who was Joe's cousin...but I was the main supporter of this which is called the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting and John has done an amazing job because they not only now...he had thought the newspapers like the Post Dispatch wouldn't send a reporter but would buy a story and very soon it turned out they wouldn't even spend the money to buy a story but papers like the Washington Post and the New York Times who in the past wouldn't have used an independent journalist, now do and so they have placed stories on the News Hour, on NPR, major magazines and the other thing they've done which is quite extraordinary is they bring the journalists to universities and high schools and work with...they have a large education program. So that has been a tremendous success and my feeling was that this money was made in journalism, that some day somebody is going to learn how to do good journalism and make money but at the moment nobody has and so not-for-profit journalism is crucial. Then when...
- Blanche Touhill: To keep the democracy alive.
- Emily Pulitzer: Absolutely and so then when Margie Freivogel, Bill Freivogel, Bob Duffy and others took quite generous buy-outs from the Post Dispatch and came to me to say they wanted to start what became the Beacon, I was one of their early and big supporters.

Blanche Touhill: And then just recently the Beacon and the University of Missouri – St. Louis’ public radio station, St. Louis radio...

Emily Pulitzer: KWMU.

Blanche Touhill: ...KWMU has...they affiliated or they...

Emily Pulitzer: No, they’re one. The Beacon basically no longer exists.

Blanche Touhill: And that provides professional journalism for a public radio station, which is wonderful.

Emily Pulitzer: Yeah, it’s been a great success.

Blanche Touhill: Let me ask two other questions...or three other questions: Is there some award that you’ve received that you’re really very proud of, if not award, a happening or something that made you understand you were confirmed in your choice of what you wanted to do with your life?

Emily Pulitzer: Well, I wouldn’t call it an award but I think the two things that I have done in addition to the not-for-profit journalism endeavors have been to create the Pulitzer Arts Foundation in a building that...I think it perhaps sounds immodest but I think is one of the great buildings in this city and is an absolute joy to be in.

Blanche Touhill: And is recognized as such.

Emily Pulitzer: And create programs within it that I feel have really made a major contribution to the community but also nationally and internationally. And then, the other endeavor that I’ve been involved in which was, I felt, a great honor to have been elected, was to the Board of Overseers at Harvard. So I feel, in the last 20 years since my husband died, I’ve had an education in journalism and business, I’ve had an education in higher education, I’ve had an education in architecture and building and of creating an institution. So I feel very fortunate to have had those opportunities. I think I was left with a lot of responsibility but also a lot of opportunity.

Blanche Touhill: If you had been born 50 years earlier, what do you think your life would have been like?

Emily Pulitzer: Well, I guess 50 years earlier would have been my grandmother and my grandmother played bridge and Mahjong and ran a very nice household

and raised three quite extraordinarily daughters and traveled and had a good life and enjoyed music.

Blanche Touhill: And would you comment on the International Women's Forum as an organization that you belong to.

Emily Pulitzer: Well, it's been a nice way to meet St. Louisans of different backgrounds and interests. I haven't been that involved on a national basis. I did go to one meeting in San Francisco where I saw my childhood friend and also somebody that I knew from high school.

Blanche Touhill: Is there anything else you want to mention before we close?

Emily Pulitzer: I've been very involved in Grand Center, the Pulitzer Arts Foundation is located there. Joe and I had bought a building which we had to give up so that the PBS Television Station could move to Grand Center. I was very actively involved in the University of Missouri – St. Louis radio station, moving to Grand Center. I've been on that board and have bought additional property around it so I feel that I've played a role and it's been a very important aspect of both community development and making a real difference in the city.

Blanche Touhill: And where is your office?

Emily Pulitzer: At the Pulitzer Arts Foundation.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, okay. Well, Emily, thank you so much for coming by. We have enjoyed conversing with you and you had a wonderful life.

Emily Pulitzer: I have, indeed. I feel very fortunate.