

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MISSOURI-ST. LOUIS

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S FORUM PROJECT

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ANN RUWITCH INTERVIEWED BY BLANCHE TOUHILL

Blanche Touhill: Would you introduce yourself.

Ann Ruwitch: I'm Ann Ruwitch and I am now retired.

Blanche Touhill: Would you talk about the beginning of your life: your family, your siblings, where you were born, where you went to elementary school or high school, was there a teacher that really influenced you or was it a relative or did that all come later?

Ann Ruwitch: I think that I had a very wonderful childhood. I grew up in Bayonne, New Jersey which is a bedroom community of New York City. From the top of our house we could look at the Statue of Liberty and can't do that anymore because the trees are all grown up but we felt very connected to New York. My parents were good role models. It was a happy family. It was a protected life, lots of friends, lots of relatives and it was in...well, I was born in 1939 so it was right after the war. There was a lot of...born during the war so we had a war mentality. My parents had a thrifty war mentality and my siblings were born five-and-a-half and eight years after I was so I was basically an only child in the defining years of my early life. Bayonne, New Jersey is very ethnic. They had an oil refinery and Naval base, many, many European nationalities, primarily Catholic and we were Jewish and pretty much isolated because there was not a great deal of mixing. I have always said that I never met a Protestant until I went to college but it was a really happy life. We were focused and went to New York often. We went to "the shore" as we called Asbury Park and Belmar and all of those places and while I was growing up, there was nothing that really bothered me and I didn't have the sense that I was in a great environment or a difficult environment but when I look back to growing

up in Bayonne, I think it was an extraordinary place to grow up because it was extremely diverse. I was able to know all kinds of people, get along with all kinds of people. I went to a very big public high school. There were almost 700 people in my graduating class; only 20% of us went to college. We had some real stars in our class, some very famous people came out of Bayonne and it was nice and I'm really glad I grew up there. I have often told my children who grew up here in St. Louis that I learned a lot of life lessons that they never learned from being in a place like Bayonne. I walked to primary school, six blocks, came home for lunch, hot, always; my mother always gave me a hot lunch and also walked to high school, even though it was 10 or 12 blocks away; very active in the normal things: sports and I was a baton twirler in high school but the focus of our extracurricular life was at the Jewish Community Center and very cultural emphasis so exposed to the Arts, exposed to music, to theater all through that and my parents were both very active in that. So, between having that kind of a central social place for life and being near New York, I was exposed to all sorts of things in my growing up. My father was a pediatrician. My mother was a kindergarten teacher but she couldn't work because the doctor's wife didn't work and it was the first thing that I ever saw that was feminist when we grew up a bit and my mother decided she wanted to go back to work and my father really had a problem with that. So they solved it by having her be a substitute, only she was a substitute all the time. So she didn't really work; she just went to work. So that was, I think, my first exposure to seeing how women had certain defined roles that they didn't want to be in.

Blanche Touhill: Did they talk about college?

Ann Ruwitch: It was a given that we would go to college. Education was very important and so were all of the things that enhanced you: speech lessons; art lessons; piano lessons. Yes, I mean, there was no question that we wouldn't go to college. I had a cousin who lived in Manhattan who ended up being my guidance counselor and I applied to several schools and ended up at Connecticut College, which at that point was Connecticut College for Women and it's sort of funny because I would never choose an all-women's college now but it was a wonderful place. Again, it was happy but it was not...I was not very active there. I did fine. I majored in mathematics and almost to my senior year, realized I didn't want to major in mathematics and ended up really intrigued with the Arts, which

we had a family background in and although I got a degree in mathematics, I was not interested in it when I graduated from college.

Blanche Touhill: Were you gifted enough in the Arts to become like a musician or an artist or was it more of the interest in the Arts?

Ann Ruwitch: No, I was not gifted, even though I did all of those things but I've become a collector of art. My parents were collectors of art so that it was more from the history of art and when I graduated from college, through networking, I got a job at the St. Louis Art Museum in the Education Department.

Blanche Touhill: So you came from the East Coast to work at the St. Louis Art Museum?

Ann Ruwitch: No, I came from the East Coast to get married and live in St. Louis. I had been at Conn College and my husband was at Yale and everybody came back from Christmas vacation our senior year and was asked who has engagement rings. I mean, that was the expectation, that you'd get married and if you just happened to work, that was sort of a side bar. There were very, very few women in my graduating class who really were focused on a career. I mean, they all went to work but they were not very interesting and important jobs, the ones who were not married.

Blanche Touhill: They were working to getting some money before they got married or something?

Ann Ruwitch: Right, a lot of secretaries, a lot of...yeah, they were not...I didn't know too many women who went to graduate school, who were interested in medicine or law or any of the things that are going on in the subsequent generations but I knew I wanted to have a job and I was able to get this job in the Museum and I loved it and I worked there until my first child was born.

Blanche Touhill: Now, what unit were you in in the Art Museum?

Ann Ruwitch: I was in the Education Department.

Blanche Touhill: And so you were dealing with the schools, the visits of the schools?

Ann Ruwitch: There was no Docent program at the Art Museum at that point. We were it. So my responsibilities were the mummy. I took kids through the Egyptian stuff for the mummy but they also gave me contemporary art

because nobody else in the department liked it and they were just beginning to build a good contemporary collection and I became the expert on that.

Blanche Touhill: Who was the head of the Museum at that time?

Ann Ruwitch: Her name was Jacqueline Ambler.

Blanche Touhill: I know the name.

Ann Ruwitch: And she was marvelous and she just sort of let us do what we could do and do it well. So I've always stayed connected to the Museum after that.

Blanche Touhill: And why do you think she hired you?

Ann Ruwitch: I think she hired me because the woman who ran the auditorium programs thought I would be good in the department.

Blanche Touhill: So you came out to interview?

Ann Ruwitch: Uh-huh, I did, yeah, I did and I think she was happy with me and we stayed friends afterwards. Right after I left, they did start a Docent program but at that point, it was...

Blanche Touhill: You were the Docent?

Ann Ruwitch: I was the Docent. There were, I would say...I can't remember everybody...maybe six to eight of us who were educators. I have never been a practicing artist which comes up in my later life when I was involved in the Arts where everybody assumed if I was doing something with the Arts, I was an artist and not a manager. Yeah, I have always...

Blanche Touhill: Did your math help you be a manager?

Ann Ruwitch: Probably. I'm sure that my math helped me as a skill with all kinds of things but I remember the first time I got a book that had no numbers in it, I thought, oh, dear, what am I doing in this? It really got too abstract and complicated for me and I thought, this is not what I wanted to do.

Blanche Touhill: So you quit when you were pregnant?

Ann Ruwitch: I quit right before I had my first child.

Blanche Touhill: So you were pregnant and then you...

- Ann Ruwitch: I was pregnant and I worked...
- Blanche Touhill: And you didn't intend to return?
- Ann Ruwitch: Oh, no, people didn't do that then. So I had two children, two boys, they're three years apart and led a very traditional...you know, raise your kids, buy a house, start a garden, get involved in some volunteer activities and...
- Blanche Touhill: What volunteer activities did you do?
- Ann Ruwitch: I joined a few organizations. At that point, this is the early '60s. Everybody I knew socially was a member of the hospital auxiliary or either the National Council of Jewish Women or the Junior League and I was active in the National Council of Jewish Women and I was always interested and active on the side that was not direct service. Most volunteers in those took care of people, worked for the poor, the sick, the children or whatever but I was interested in this new thing that was being talked about which was called "advocacy" and that was when the word, advocacy came into the fore and I always worked on things that were government relations issues. It was basically a volunteer lobbyist training program and I spend most of my time in the Pro Choice movement before Roe v. Wade came on the scene. I was involved with a group of women who worked with the state legislature. There was the most amazing woman named Deverne Calloway...
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, I knew Deverne.
- Ann Ruwitch: ...who really was in charge of our issue and we worked and worked and worked and we were really successful. Things, at that point, were much friendlier to the Pro Choice side than they are now.
- Blanche Touhill: In Missouri?
- Ann Ruwitch: In Missouri and then along came Roe v. Wade.
- Blanche Touhill: What year was Roe v. Wade? I sort of forget.
- Ann Ruwitch: It was...whatever I say, it's going to be wrong, but I would say the late '60s.
- Blanche Touhill: Okay...or early '70s?

- Ann Ruwitch: Right. So volunteerism at that point was also trying to define itself as a profession and we were called professional volunteers. It was not just something to do on Tuesdays when you had nothing else to do so there was a tremendous amount of skill training and workshops and conventions and all kinds of things.
- Blanche Touhill: Assertiveness training?
- Ann Ruwitch: I didn't need that. I grew up very comfortable with those kinds of things which is one of the reasons I was good with advocacy. I think there were several reasons that I was good with advocacy: I was not afraid to get up and talk to people; I was a fairly decent debater, but, yeah, we learned all sorts of skills.
- Blanche Touhill: So, really, in your family setting, when you were young, people spoke up around the dinner table?
- Ann Ruwitch: Yes, but I have to tell you a little bit about dinner in my house. My father, as I said, was a doctor and, as many family doctors...well, he was a pediatrician but his office was in our house and he operated solo without a nurse and basically without an appointment book, although you could make an appointment but the doctor's hours were prescribed and anybody could show up at the house, ring the bell and come in, which is what the sign on the front door said. So I would bet that four out of five nights, we didn't really have dinner because he was having office hours and running up and down the stairs but we were always discussing things. My father was really interested in the world and in affairs and he was a very good debater and there were friends who came over for coffee at 10:00 o'clock at night, 11:00 o'clock at night and they were always discussing issues and my mother and a couple of friends, I remember...I have memories of them glued to the TV for the McCarthy hearings, for various things that went on. So this was all really important in our house.
- Blanche Touhill: And so there was discussion and so, really, when you became a mature woman, you continued that idea of discussing things.
- Ann Ruwitch: Right, and so I was asked to be on community boards. I got asked to go back into the Art Museum as I was on the Friends Board and then the Board of Trustees. I was asked to be on a lot of boards and I really liked

that and I think that I always made a contribution and since I was also a good fundraiser, as boards got to be more of fundraising operations besides support and working on programs, I was still asked to be on a lot of boards.

Blanche Touhill: But eventually you went back to work?

Ann Ruwitch: I did. I wanted to tell you one thing about my volunteer time which I'm very proud of which is starting what's called the Casa Program in St. Louis County, the court-appointed special advocates in the juvenile courts, putting volunteers on cases of kids who were abused or neglected and in foster care but I came at it from the management advocacy side rather than being a volunteer working with these kids. We were a model program, started in St. Louis. There were three places in the country that received money from a national foundation to do that and so I had done that.

Blanche Touhill: And that's a very successful program, even today.

Ann Ruwitch: Very successful, still going but, boy, it's still needed which is one of the reasons that it's...

Blanche Touhill: Are the charges against people who harm children, are they getting worse? Are they getting better? Are they the same?

Ann Ruwitch: I don't know but it was during my time as a volunteer that the child abuse hotline was formed. So I was involved in a lot of issues around...

Blanche Touhill: In the beginning?

Ann Ruwitch: ...around that in the beginning. I was also involved...because feminism started at that point and I worked with other women in the National Organization of Women and a few other things, on getting women appointed to boards and commissions on the state level. We were sitting my living room, looking...we worked primarily, at that time, with Governor Bond, who had been very good on this issue in his first term, so it was really early that women were able to get visibility and appointments...

Blanche Touhill: Yes, it was.

Ann Ruwitch: Then Governor Teasdale didn't do a very good job on that and then when Governor Bond came back, again we started. So we were in my living room, looking for whomever they had sent the names about and then there was one that said, "Well, here we need a Democrat for the Board of Election Commissioners in St. Louis County," going through the card file because there was no computer at that point. So we were on paper and nobody could come up with a name for that and so one of the women sitting there said, "Well, you're a Democrat," and I said, "But I don't want to do that," and she said, "But it pays \$7,500 a year," and I said, "Okay, I'll do that." That was, I suppose, my first job back in because it was a huge endeavor and I treated that as back in the workforce. So, from doing that, moving outside of 100% professional volunteer experience, I decided I wanted to work.

Blanche Touhill: Well, that's a good job too, isn't it? I mean, that was an interesting...

Ann Ruwitch: It was a very interesting job because we had some huge issues. By statute, the office is supposed to be even, Republicans, Democrats; it's supposed to be professional; it's supposed to be all sorts of stuff and it wasn't any of that. So, we had our hands full and one of the best things about that job was that I met my current husband. He was the Republican chairman and I was one of the two Democrats. It's a two-two office and he found the two of us could work better than the other two people that were on that board and so we really accomplished a lot together. Then...

Blanche Touhill: Isn't that interesting?

Ann Ruwitch: Oh, it's wonderful. That was...yeah, that's how I met John and it was fun. Then he went his way and I went my way and then 10 years later, we got married. So it was good.

Blanche Touhill: How did your current husband like the idea that you were now going out and working?

Ann Ruwitch: He liked it if it didn't upset his routine too much. I think that...our kids were...I started more of this once the kids went into school and as long as I could do all the things that I always did before and the house ran smoothly and he got his dinner, I could do whatever I wanted. He really did travel for business. In fact, there were two years that he was not

living at home because he was in Belgium or he was in Pennsylvania and so I was very used to my own routine and moving up and out. I think he was very proud of me. I think his parents were very proud of me because I was doing things that they didn't do, their friend's children didn't do and I would hear feedback.

Blanche Touhill: Well, the Board of Election Commissioners is a very important aspect of democracy.

Ann Ruwitch: I think we made an enormous contribution and that was 1980 to 1984 and I know...because I had learned how to write strategic plans and do all of that. I was put in charge of that kind of thing, in charge of job descriptions, in charge of cross-training, in charge of manuals...

Blanche Touhill: More professional...

Ann Ruwitch: So professionalized.

Blanche Touhill: Less political, didn't it? I know it's always been political but...

Ann Ruwitch: It became a non-corrupt operation which it was when we arrived but it didn't become less political. It should be political. That's what it is.

Blanche Touhill: No, I understand that aspect of it but I always, when I go to vote and I come in contact with that office, I marvel at how polite and how they try to really get you through...

Ann Ruwitch: I think they do a very good job and the manuals they use are still the ones I wrote. So I'm proud of that. But from there, my kids were getting older and then I really did go into the regular workforce and my first job...a series of, I guess, three major jobs, each about 10 years apiece but I was always...I treated them as a consultant and they all have a couple of things in common. They were never done before; they had no money, so I had to figure them out, raise my own salary and make them a success. So I was very entrepreneurial in what I did.

Blanche Touhill: And what were those jobs?

Ann Ruwitch: The first one, I went to work for Leadership – St. Louis. I was invited by Carolyn to come and write a community book called St. Louis Currents which we used as the basis for how this community worked and what they needed to learn and I did that and it was published a couple of times

after that. I don't think it's done anymore. It was very difficult, very difficult to get expertise in people who would be willing to do the research and write the stuff for us but I thought it was a good contribution. From there, I was hired by the Bi-State Development Agency to start a program for them on the building of Metro Link.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, of course, that was the time.

Ann Ruwitch: That was Metro Link and Metro Link had been in the planning stages for about 15 years and was getting a tremendous amount of community opposition and they decided that they would use the Arts as a tool for urban development and for community acceptance.

Blanche Touhill: And they still have that, don't they, Arts & Transit?

Ann Ruwitch: It's Arts & Transit and they, before I got there, had a committee of volunteers who had done the research, ran an international search, hired six artists and then they hired me. I was the fourth one hired for the management team at Bi-State and they said, "We have six marvelous artists who will be on the design team. We're not sure how that's going to work and there's no money; figure it out." So it was splendid. It was just wonderful but I went from the world of women to the world of men on that particular job and I was the woman at the management table twice a week and the management meetings with all of these engineers who had never...not even worked with a woman, they had never been in school...they go to school without women, or they did at that point. So they weren't quite sure what to do with me. They were the ones who said, "Oh, you're an artist, right?" "No, I'm not an artist," and I was managing these six marvelously creative people, all but one from out of town and I had to raise all this money and we made it work. We made it work because we had a powerful board and a powerful design review committee and they just had never heard of any of this before. So as long as I didn't shake it up too much and just glide through, they accepted most of the stuff that we wanted to do. They didn't have to pay for it because it was...

Blanche Touhill: Who paid for the Arts & Transit?

Ann Ruwitch: Well, I raised the money.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, you raised it?

Ann Ruwitch: I raised the money so the National Endowment for the Arts was the first grant and they got into it because they had never funded the Arts on a railroad before and the Regional Arts Commission, the Missouri Arts Councils, mostly foundation money. We didn't have a whole lot of private funders but we certainly had...and the agency paid for me. So, even though I say I have to raise my salary...yeah, so it was great. We did two things: one, we really got these talented people working with the architects and the engineers and I think that a lot of what they did has branded our Metro Link system and we also, because the community didn't understand what that meant, to work on a design team, they wanted something to look at, we started a public art program of local and regional artists and I hired somebody to run that for me. It was successful too because there were some wonderful things and it has succeeded and we were the first in the country to do it in the way that we did and I decided, part way through this, that if we didn't get the federal policies changed, nobody would be able to do it again. So after I got it set up and the artists got working, I got to work on my advocacy program of changing the Federal Transportation Authority's policies on purchasing, to allow this, a percent program of requiring it.

Blanche Touhill: So I knew that was in place but I didn't know that you were there before that was even...you put it into place?

Ann Ruwitch: I did put it into place.

Blanche Touhill: So there's a certain percentage of the budget that goes into art?

Ann Ruwitch: Right, and now they're beginning to change that so I got to call recently from the head the agency to come down and help him figure out what they were going to do. But we got all kinds of federal awards, presidential awards and it enabled other cities, really, to be able to do that. So I was there for eight years. I had done the Leadership – St. Louis job for three or four years and then I did Arts & Transit for eight and then I was offered the job of being the head of Grand Center.

Blanche Touhill: And that was when Grand Center was really just sort of in its early days, in its infancy?

Ann Ruwitch: Infancy, right. So that was a different set of men. Then I inherited Father Beondi and Bruce Coppick and David...what was his name, the head of the Fox...

Blanche Touhill: Yes, and then there was that St. (Rock's?) Church.

Ann Ruwitch: Oh, Maurice, not Father [inaudible 30:32:7], oh, he was wonderful. Anyway, this had been...you know, that area, so disinvested and the number one thing that made it turn around was when Father Reinert decided to stay there instead of moving out to the county. So he decided to keep St. Louis University in the city. The physical changes at the university are rightfully credited to Father Beondi but...

Blanche Touhill: But it was Reinert that made the decision?

Ann Ruwitch: Right, he was the visionary and...

Blanche Touhill: And in his vision, it would go all the way to the South Campus Medical Center?

Ann Ruwitch: Right.

Blanche Touhill: So it would really go from Highway 44...am I right?

Ann Ruwitch: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: All the way down to the Rock Church?

Ann Ruwitch: Right. So Richard Gaddes who had been the Opera Theatre was the first president and CEO and he was involved with setting the stage for the vision and getting it out in the community as a priority and he did a wonderful job with that but he didn't like politics at all and so after a few years, he said, "I'm going back to the opera," and he moved to Santa Fe. Then I was hired...

Blanche Touhill: When he was doing that, was he also out of the Opera Theatre...

Ann Ruwitch: No, he was finished with the Opera Theatre.

Blanche Touhill: So he had resigned from there and he was running Grand Center...not running Grand Center...

Ann Ruwitch: Well, he was running Grand Center.

- Blanche Touhill: Okay, running Grand Center and then he went back to Santa Fe...
- Ann Ruwitch: Then he went back to Santa Fe.
- Blanche Touhill: And now he's retired and McKay has taken the Santa Fe job?
- Ann Ruwitch: Right, that's right, and Richard lives in New York. I then came in and the area was totally dilapidated. The major institutions were in pretty good shape. The Symphony was there and doing fine; the Fox was there and doing fine. We got the Sheldon to be fine.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, I remember that. Who is the man that did the Shel...
- Ann Ruwitch: Well...
- Blanche Touhill: The fellow from Webster that was at Washington U.
- Ann Ruwitch: Yes, and I...
- Blanche Touhill: Lee Jardine.
- Ann Ruwitch: Thank you, Blanche. You have better recall than I do. He was fabulous and he walked in and he said, "This is never going to work unless certain changes are made" and he made that happen and so right after I started at Grand Center, Paul Roiter, who is still the executive director, came in and he was remarkable. Then my priorities were...the first priorities were to get all of the dilapidated buildings down and make sure that the streets were lit, basic infrastructure things. So we began on Washington Avenue in one block which has become just unbelievable and this was where Emmy Pulitzer has built her museum and the Contemporary Art Museum is there, the new Sheldon is there. So that was a huge project.
- Blanche Touhill: Now, where the Pulitzer is and Contemporary Art, those were buildings that you tore down?
- Ann Ruwitch: They were the Beaumont Medical complex, huge, dilapidated, tall, so we were able to work with the State of Missouri, because there were such very, very brilliant tax credit, historic tax credit, other tax credit programs that were available and that's what I did for a couple of years, is get those into place for the distract and got those things down and enabled people to do that. We had also just built the small Grandel Theatre that the Black Rep was in and has just left and I still don't know who bought it, if it's

been recently sold. So we worked on that kind of stuff for a few years and then I also worked on getting Cardinal Ritter prepped to move to St. Louis, to Grand Center which I think has just been a huge addition; worked on getting all the small groups to be happy in some of the buildings and it was just the most amazing job. So I think that management and political skills and a good sense of humor because it was a tough one; it was really tough.

Blanche Touhill: But you know, your previous experience was very helpful in all of that...

Ann Ruwitch: Oh, I think it was perfect.

Blanche Touhill: ...because you knew people that could open the doors to the political arena.

Ann Ruwitch: Right, and I just...in looking back at the jobs that I've taken, there's no one way to do them so you figure out what needs to be done and then you just wiggle your way through the maze and I was also able to hire, I think, really good people. I had really good people working for me.

Blanche Touhill: They were taking a chance though, weren't they?

Ann Ruwitch: We were all taking a chance. We were all taking a chance and...yeah, so I think it's really been fabulous.

Blanche Touhill: Where did you go after Grand Center? How many years were you at Grand Center?

Ann Ruwitch: I was at Grand Center between eight and nine years and then I retired.

Blanche Touhill: But you haven't really retired?

Ann Ruwitch: No, but I retired from the work world. My mother was quite ill and a couple of things happened.

Blanche Touhill: Did you bring her here?

Ann Ruwitch: No, she wouldn't come; she wouldn't come.

Blanche Touhill: So you had to go back and forth?

Ann Ruwitch: I went back and forth all the time. There were several things. I couldn't go out with people anymore and not judge how much money I was going to ask for and I said, that's not how I want to spend my life with my

relationships anymore. I had great friends and you can just ask people for money for just so long and I had done it very successfully. So that was one. My mother was sick and I was tired of the combative nature of the district and I thought, you know, I've been at it for eight years. We've made great, great successes so...

Blanche Touhill: So go out on a high note?

Ann Ruwitch: Yeah, so I did and I looked into several consulting...by this time, my first husband had died and I had looked into several joint ventures with friends who wanted me to be in the consulting business with them and it was a financial decision not to do it because, if I wanted to take Wally Ruwitch's Social Security and other benefits, I could only make \$11,000 a year. So I thought, I don't think I'll do that. But I've been out there in the community. One of the things on my volunteer boards that I felt very strongly about was that we needed not to take up the seats forever, that we really needed to turn it over, mentor other people and so the places that I really cared about, I worked with younger people and was able to get those boards turned around. The only one I stayed on and the only one I'm still on is the Contemporary Art Museum which I love.

Blanche Touhill: Let me talk about professional volunteers. I remember when that was really a very active group but today, we don't have professional volunteers like that anymore, do we?

Ann Ruwitch: I think we do but we also have so many women in the workforce that get their skills in a different place, that the volunteer organizations don't have to take that on as the way to get women out there. I think that the big volunteer organizations are still there. There are young women still doing the service things, the service projects for children, for...

Blanche Touhill: Well, are they working as well?

Ann Ruwitch: Some are and some aren't. I look at those names sometimes and I think, now, who are these women? I want to go find out who these women are but I think, through the feminist revolution, I think it changed, first of all, the fact that women could be out there in the work world, how to get out there, how to move ahead. Yeah, I think it's a different place. My daughters-in-law both work full-time. All my nieces work full-time.

Blanche Touhill: Do they still volunteer?

- Ann Ruwitch: Some do and some don't, yeah.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, it's a category which was so vibrant years ago and when I think of the professional volunteer, I don't...maybe they're just hidden but I don't have that same sense of vibrancy.
- Ann Ruwitch: Well, at that point, they were the leaders in getting women out there but women are out there in other ways.
- Blanche Touhill: In other ways now?
- Ann Ruwitch: In other ways.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, they were the leaders of getting women into the professional steams, yes, and to the management areas because they had had all this experience in these volunteer organizations.
- Ann Ruwitch: Just for the National Council of Jewish Women and I think it's the same for the Junior League. Let me just speak for NCJW. When I was involved, the volunteers did everything. Now there's an executive, paid executive director and staff and so that makes a big difference.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, that does, yes, that does.
- Ann Ruwitch: Yeah.
- Blanche Touhill: When you think of these places like the Wednesday Club or the St. Louis Women's Club on Lindel, you think that 50 years ago, those people were really active volunteers all the time. When I go to those events, I don't have the sense that they're so wrapped up in volunteerism anymore.
- Ann Ruwitch: Right. I used to get asked to speak at those. I spoke at them all the time, those...they were always very interested in what we were doing but they weren't going to do it.
- Blanche Touhill: But I think when they were founded, I think when the Wednesday Club was founded and the St. Louis Women's Club was founded, I think it was that attitude in the 1910, before World War I, that women were to get out and volunteer and change the world and I now go to those meetings and I think they're very interested in education, in books and in art, in culture but I don't get the sense that they have a cause.

- Ann Ruwitch: Well, I think there are a lot of parallels between the professional volunteer organizations and the International Women's Forum.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes. Now talk about that.
- Ann Ruwitch: One of the things I know that you've been interested in is how did we get in.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, how did you get in?
- Ann Ruwitch: I was asked and nobody had ever talked to me before. I didn't know about it and some of the women that I admire the most were in it and when I was asked, I got called and I thought it sounded wonderful because they spoke so highly of it and I was just so impressed with who was in it and I thought it would be fun because at that time, all I was doing was raising money. So, being with other professional women was really intriguing to me and, as you know, one of the conversations that the Missouri Women's Forum has had was, should it be interested in the International Women's Forum; should it just be a little entity into itself; should it do anything or shouldn't it do anything. I mean, when Harriet Woods was there, who was one of the people I loved the most and she thought that this group should be out there with a cause, with a project and that got soundly defeated because I think the women are out there on their own on so many things and just really, really enjoy each other. But I think the relationship with the International Organization has been cemented. It was something, when I was on the board, that I was really interested in and worked very hard to get a liaison who would constantly talk about it, give opportunities, go to those meetings, encourage people to think about it, and when you read what this organization is doing world-wide, it is so exciting to be part of it and to think that it's going to be the women in these third world countries who make the changes and bring them along. I did read in the New York Times or the Wall Street Journal a couple of weeks ago about this static 16% of women on corporate boards in America hasn't changed in years and years and years and that the woman who is now leading the charge has gone to the International Women's Forum to help get that changed. So I think that there are really important things that this organization...
- Blanche Touhill: I think this...

- Ann Ruwitch: ...has done and can be doing.
- Blanche Touhill: I think this group is filled with professional women and while they don't have a cause, per se, I think they, through networking, they get assistance for that volunteer effort that they're engaged in.
- Ann Ruwitch: I think absolutely. The first thing I did was ask all of my friends in the organization to be on the Grand Center board and they all said yes and they have made unbelievable contributions and I think that happens. I didn't use it as a professional career enhancer; I didn't look at it as something to put on my resume to get ahead. I don't know whether other women do that but I didn't look at it that way but the networking and learning from these other women on how to be successful and how to solve your problems...
- Blanche Touhill: And I think this issue of women on boards, on corporate boards, I think they have really embraced that.
- Ann Ruwitch: I hope so.
- Blanche Touhill: I think something will come out of that. I do believe something will come out of that because it was sort of a hidden sort of glass ceiling but I think it's now been unveiled and I think these women do have money and they do invest and I think in time it will turn public opinion. Public opinion will say, "I'm going to buy stock; who's on that board?" I do think there's something...I think it will come out positive.
- Ann Ruwitch: I think it will take another generation.
- Blanche Touhill: If you had been born 50 years before...should I ask that question...you would have been a mother and a volunteer?
- Ann Ruwitch: I would have been a mother and I don't think I would have been in the workforce. I think I would have been a mother with lots of interests and I don't know what I would have done with them. I look at my mother and she was a really good role model for me. She was involved in all sorts of stuff but...
- Blanche Touhill: I think you would have been a professional volunteer, sort of.
- Ann Ruwitch: I think it would have depended on where I ended up. I think that, if I had been in Bayonne, there wouldn't have been something like that. I think

about how lucky I am to have ended up in St. Louis when I think of what my friends who stayed in the New York area did and I don't think that they were professional volunteers. There was just nowhere to do that.

Blanche Touhill: How interesting.

Ann Ruwitch: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Let me pause for a moment. Talk about some of the awards you've gotten. I know you've gotten a lot of them but maybe name a couple that have a special meaning for you.

Ann Ruwitch: Well, I think I've gotten an award from every major thing that I've been involved in and one of the ones that I'm very proud of is the visionary award that was given to me by Grand Center after I left. It was the President's Award and I think that was one that I was really pleased to be validated for what I had done and I think actually all of them, when you're honored by your peers after you finish something or you're in the middle of it, so I have had several awards from the state for child abuse and neglect work and foster care work; I have had awards up and down the transportation industry; some that I've had to travel to very nice places to accept. So that's been a nice part of my life, not only have I felt that I've contributed and gotten my own personal reward but somebody else thought I had done something worthy and needed the recognition. I have watched when I think more women should have gotten rewards that men get every year, you got one of those, didn't you, finally?

Blanche Touhill: Yeah.

Ann Ruwitch: I think that...

Blanche Touhill: Not easily.

Ann Ruwitch: I think that's an area that we have not done a great job in. Those are all political decisions. I think that a lot of it, in a community like this, is social strata and we're getting away from that as things get more diverse. That kind of thinking will go and I think women will benefit from that. The other love of my life besides work and play, has been politics.

Blanche Touhill: How does it work when your husband is such a Republican and you're a Democrat?

Ann Ruwitch: Well, my husband is the last of the moderate Republicans in Missouri so he is clearly a Rhino or whatever else they're calling...I think they had an even more up-to-date name for these Republicans who have no power anymore. But he is in the traditional East Coast moderate Republicans and we agree on 80 to 90% so he could be a Democrat and agree on less than that. So we have lively conversations and we both know when to stop talking about it. There aren't too many things that we can't discuss. I think I could never be married to or involved with somebody who was not Pro Choice or Pro Israel or the rest of it, I think we can talk about and he's more fiscally conservative than I am but pretty liberal socially. So it's been interesting but nobody can understand what we talk about at dinner. I don't go with him...he doesn't go anymore but one of the things we did when we got on the election board, I think it was for self preservation, is we said, we are here serving the public and therefore we will not make any political contributions in the four years that we are here. That was wonderful. So that changed things. It's very hard on a board of four to put stuff like that through but that one I think we got through because they all thought that was a nice way to save money. We thought it was a better way to serve the public. I have been a foot soldier in certain campaigns. I have run a few campaigns. I have contributed to more campaigns than I care to think about. I will certainly support Hillary for President and I supported her last time. I think what's going on right now in Congress with Susan Collins and her bipartisan group around her is I think also got the potential to change the political arena which is frightening at this point. So I think that women are going to do that as well. I think we're more collaborative; we listen; we are just as wily as the rest of them, and I think that that maybe the corporate boards and the Congress, I think, are the places where I think we could make the biggest difference. So I look forward to those successes.

Blanche Touhill: Well, you've had a wonderful career in that you worked for things that are still in existence today and are growing.

Ruth Ruwitch: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Do you think you could have done that in New York?

Ruth Ruwitch: No, I don't.

Blanche Touhill: That's what you talked about when you came to St. Louis, it was an ideal place to come and make those kinds of changes.

Ruth Ruwitch: Yes, I think that it was a wonderful place. I have loved being in St. Louis. I have loved raising my children here. I think, as I said in the beginning, I think that they've lived in a different kind of environment. It's not been as mixed, diverse as mine. They didn't have the opportunities...I don't know, it was just different and I don't think that I would have had the chance...I think that, for what my career was, when I look at who's in the International Women's Forum in the major urban areas, they are definitely corporate, much more corporate than some of the people that we have here. We have really outstanding people who are in the non-profit world.

Blanche Touhill: And so their goals and their leadership ability have been able to affect the society.

Ruth Ruwitch: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Where, if you were in New York and you didn't come up through the corporate structure, it would be very difficult to affect change?

Ruth Ruwitch: I think so.

Blanche Touhill: And since there aren't many women...well, there are women now in the corporate world but they aren't yet as numerous as they are coming up in St. Louis.

Ruth Ruwitch: I think right now we've got loads of wonderful women who are in the corporate world.

Blanche Touhill: And being influential.

Ruth Ruwitch: I hope so. I don't know as many of them well as I would like to but they're here and...

Blanche Touhill: They are here.

Ruth Ruwitch: Yeah, and it's really good.

Blanche Touhill: Do your sons ever speak about the fact that you started things that are still going on? Do they know that?

Ruth Ruwitch: Yes, they grew up with it and lived it and certainly know about it and my older son...they're three years apart but my older son, who is now 51, I think is part of that generation that missed the community and my younger one is very, very active on all sorts of boards and so is his wife. They both know what I did and, as I said, so did my mother-in-law and my father-in-law. I mean, it was, like, "Oh, my God, my son married a star." So they liked it. They really liked it. It was very rewarding to have that come from them because my parents weren't here. I don't think my parents understood what I did with my life, I really don't. They didn't ask me the questions. They didn't know.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I find it so fascinating, particularly the Arts & Transit, how you did it and then you helped adjust the law so that it would go on in perpetuity and I think that's the kind of contribution you made. I think Grand Center rests on a lot of the work that you did, in just getting rid of those old buildings because you couldn't do anything until you were able to...

Ann Ruwitch: Right. I think that Grand Center has had three CEOs and we were each right for the time. It needed a vision to get on the map. It needed somebody like me to do it and...

Blanche Touhill: And now you have Vince.

Ann Ruwitch: ...and Vince is there.

Blanche Touhill: As the salesman?

Ann Ruwitch: He is and he's doing a great job, yeah, and it's moving. I mean, several of my dreams, of course, never came true for Grand Center because I didn't have the time and there wasn't the money.

Blanche Touhill: Well, you can't do everything.

Ann Ruwitch: Right.

Blanche Touhill: And the other thing that you did was this advocacy for children and that is a huge success in St. Louis.

Ann Ruwitch: Mm-hmm, it is.

Blanche Touhill: And it's such an important...

Ann Ruwitch: I've had a very happy life. I started happy and it's...

Blanche Touhill: Yes, that's right.

Ann Ruwitch: I've been very lucky, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Well, thank you very much.

Ann Ruwitch: Thank you very much for doing this.