

An Interview with
Joan Lee Berkman

at *The Historical Society of Missouri* St. Louis
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Oral History Program

The State Historical Society of Missouri

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PREFACE

The interview was taped on a placed on a tripod. 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

WOMEN AS CHANGE AGENTS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

JUNE 14, 2016

JOAN LEE BERKMAN INTERVIEWED BY DR. MALAIKA HORNE

Malaika Horne: So, I'm Malaika Horne, as you know and this project seeks to interview women who are change agents and we want to have a conversation about your life, career, anything else you want to talk about. So, the first question: Talk about your early years, your youth.

Joan Lee Berkman: I came from a really close-knit family. There were three children. I was the oldest and the only girl. My mother said as a young child I was very healthy but a bit bossy. You know, I think that worked well for me over the years. Frankly, all I wanted to do was grow up because I saw the power of being older and grownups were in charge.

Malaika Horne: So, in elementary and secondary schools you attended, did... were you in charge there too?

Joan Lee Berkman: No.

Malaika Horne: Well, talk about anything.

Joan Lee Berkman: We lived in Clayton. I attended Meramac Elementary, Weddell Middle School, I graduated from Clayton High School. So I was very fortunate to have all my formative years and my early education with some of the best teachers I think in St. Louis and they really helped me at a very early stage of my life. Actually, as a young child, I was a bit shy but I had marvelous role models and I think I was waiting to just...I think I was a late bloomer.

Malaika Horne: To blossom.

Joan Lee Berkman: Yeah, I got a lot of nurturing.

Malaika Horne: So your family, your parents, your husband, your children, and their names, we want to get all of this in because sometimes women that I'm interviewing don't talk too much about that.

Joan Lee Berkman: (audio glitch here)....school, loved theater and opera. She had a career in

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classical and light opera until she met my father many years ago. They met in LA but he was practicing law in St. Louis so she moved to St. Louis with him and in between raising three children, my two brothers, Wally and Robert, besides myself, she established a highly successful drama school. She wrote the grid-iron shows for the bar association. She established a trouping theater that went into hospitals all over the region, entertaining critical children. I was her stage manager. She also authored a book, which landed her a PBS television series. So I had a front seat to

all of her successes and in addition to her unconditional love, I had her wise advice and counsel throughout the years. And needless to say, she was my best friend. And so my father and my brothers, we were all together but my mother was pretty much front and center in my life.

Malaika Horne: I remember your mother quite well, very impressive woman.

Joan Lee Berkman: She was an impressive woman, she was a friend to all of my friends. She didn't know a stranger and where she could help, she did and never a petty bone in her body, nor did I ever hear her ever say a bad word about anyone because if she couldn't say anything nice, she kept it shut. And that was very good advice.

Malaika Horne: Wow, what grace.

Joan Lee Berkman: Mm-hmm.

Malaika Horne: And did you mention your father's name?

Joan Lee Berkman: My father's name was Walter, originally from Peoria, Illinois, went to Stanford for his undergrad and then went to Washington University where he got his law degree. My father was actually stationed in AT 2 which was in Japan in World War II and brought back the Tojo papers manacled to his wrist and was quite an interesting character himself. But he was much older than my mother and he was a wonderful, loving father but my mother was the one that was pretty much in my day-to-day life and my father would say, "Whatever your mother says," and that's how it worked in our household.

Malaika Horne: That was pretty traditional?

Joan Lee Berkman: Yes, it was pretty traditional.

Malaika Horne: In that regard.

Joan Lee Berkman: Mm-hmm.

Malaika Horne: When you were growing up, what did you want to be?

Joan Lee Berkman: You know, that's an interesting question. I really respected my father and many times when he would take me to the dentist, it was next to his law firm downtown so at one time, I really thought I would be a lawyer because I was always sticking up for my neighbors and even our

household pets. They got into a lot of trouble so my parents really said I was born with a briefcase in my hand.

Malaika Horne: You talked about who encouraged inside the home. What about outside the home? I know you talked about your teachers that were very important.

Joan Lee Berkman: You know, my mother really was my greatest influence, inside and outside the home because she was very involved in the community. I will say, much later on in my career...I had been with the phone company for 30 years and I had lost my father while I was on a business trip and when my mother was diagnosed with an illness that we knew would not end the way we'd thought it might end, I took early retirement after 30 years with the phone company and Blanche Touhill called me over one day. We were at a community event and she had heard that I was thinking of taking early retirement and in Blanche's inimitable, "Come here, Joan," and we sat down and she gave me kind of Retirement 101, how to retire gracefully and have every bit "i" dotted, every "t" crossed so when it was my last day, I picked up my purse and my briefcase and I walked with my head up but everything was in order and I followed her instructions to a "t" so Blanche was very much a part of my life at that point and I appreciated that because when you retire, besides it being an emotional journey, just making sure that when you leave, it's on a high and that people remember you in such a way that you finished your job from start to finish and left them a foundation to move forward.

Malaika Horne: In college, were there any influences?

Joan Lee Berkman: Absolutely. I actually started at the University of Arizona in Tucson. I was a French and Spanish major. My aspirations at that time were to be an interpreter at the United Nations. My parents were in Paris right before my junior year and I had applied to go to the Sorbonne because you can't be an interpreter unless you really spend time and really speak the language every day. I could read French beautifully but to really conduct a conversation that was going to be meaningful, you needed to go there. Well, they came back, women were burning their bras in the street and there was quite a revolution going on and my parents said, "Not going to the Sorbonne." I was devastated. My French professor said to me... because I was working at the Arizona Wildcat, it was a student newspaper and I had the Girl Scout beat, fashion beat and the obits but my teacher

said to me, "You know, you're not bad." He said, "You ought to think about switching..."...in my mind it was journalism for fun...and he said, "Why don't you change your minor to your major. Go back home to the University of Missouri at Columbia" because at that time...and it still is... one of the top journalism schools in the country. He was right. It was one of the best decisions I ever made.

Malaika Horne: Very interesting. I'm going to switch here and this is a question we ask all the interviewees, about your grandmother, and the question is like this: Fifty years earlier, what do you think you would have been doing? So, for example, what did your grandmother do?

Joan Lee Berkman: I had two grandmothers.

Malaika Horne: Your grandmothers.

Joan Lee Berkman: My father's mother was a teacher and an accountant. My mother's mother was a fierce community volunteer and so they were a very interesting combination. They were as different as night and day and 50 years ago, think about it: you were relegated to a teacher, perhaps an accountant or a secretary but I have to tell you, 50 years ago, and even today, I would be honored...I'd say I would be privileged to be a teacher because I can't think of any other profession, other than being a full-time parent, to teach children life skills and their way around the block to be tomorrow's future leaders and I think if more mothers and more grandmothers paid attention to our kids and gave them that kind of direction, some of that tough love, maybe we wouldn't have as many problems as we have today.

Malaika Horne: Good point. And throughout your career, did you have any mentors, anybody who influenced you?

Joan Lee Berkman: You know, I was pretty much my own person. I kind of knew right from wrong. My father was an attorney. I sat at his knee and listened to him settle cases over the phone. My mother had a drama school, she had some pretty difficult personalities that she worked with over the years and again, like I said, my mother was really my greatest influence. In business, everybody needs a mentor and for me that was my mother and she was a highly successful business owner, which was unusual back then. She had a highly successful drama school. And so she helped me deal with work-related challenges. I always tell people, "Keep your problems

pretty much to yourself but you have to have a mentor that you can air those issues and you also should have a gut instinct. Don't ever go against your gut instinct." I don't know anyone who's ever said, "Gee, I'm glad I didn't follow my gut instinct." It doesn't work that way but my mother had a very gentle but firm way of dealing with people and I've tried to emulate that, not only in my professional but my volunteer work.

Malaika Horne: Well, as an aside, I still have your mother's book in my office and I look at it occasionally.

Joan Lee Berkman: Well, when I retired for a nano-second, my mother and I rewrote one of her earlier books and we renamed it *Face Watchers: Wrinkles are Physical, Face Lines are Mental* and we taught people how to learn and act better than they felt with the destructive personalities at work, socially or at home. And that landed us a national speaking tour. But all of those kinds of things that are in that book, the special advice of how to underplay, walk away, save your face for another day, I learned as a very young woman. So when I got to college or when I got to my first job...and I was the first female manager at the phone number and people would try to get under my skin, I just wouldn't let them.

Malaika Horne: How did that work? How did you become the first female manager?

Joan Lee Berkman: Well, when I was at the University of Missouri in Columbia, I was selected to be a teacher's assistant, which was a pretty coveted position because you got first dibs on all the interviews, but I also had an internship at the university's Public Relations Office. I was smitten. I knew I wanted to pursue a career in communications and when various companies would come to the campus, I would see them first and so I got to kind of pick and choose. Interestingly, I interviewed and was offered jobs at the Leo Burnett Advertising Company in Chicago, DuPont in Wilmington, Delaware and Southwestern Bell in St. Louis and, you know, I think I made a really wise decision. I chose Southwestern Bell. They came on campus. They called my parents for permission to hire me because they'd never had a female manager.

Malaika Horne: So you started off as a manager?

Joan Lee Berkman: I started off as a manager six months before I even graduated college. I was still conversing with my boss and my parents said, "She can't start officially until she graduates" and so it was really fast. I would come back

to St. Louis and I started off in video production actually and they showed me the television studio, introduced me to the men who were twice my age that I was to supervise, which I thought was a very bad idea, by the way. You don't supervise people, number one. You can supervise people that are older than you, but you have to have the experience and have to have done your due diligence and earned the right and being that experiment was not a good experience for me. I learned very quickly.

Malaika Horne: I agree. I've been in that position myself.

Joan Lee Berkman: Yeah.

Malaika Horne: So around what year was that?

Joan Lee Berkman: 1973.

Malaika Horne: Okay, that's a good marker. Another big topic nowadays for women in particular is work/life balance. I know you're retired now but when...

Joan Lee Berkman: I'm not retired. I have a full service public relations, marketing and special events...

Malaika Horne: Let's talk about that first.

Joan Lee Berkman: Okay. Well, I retired for a nano-second. I think I took a break for about three or four weeks and I was bored to my gills and that's when my mother and I decided to co-author a book called *Face Watchers: Wrinkles are Physical; Face Lines are Mental*. We went on a national book tour. My mother got too ill to travel. We came back home, I got her situated. She said, "Stop looking at me. I'm not dying today. Get busy." And then I established a public relations, marketing and special events firm. The name is Face Watchers and we've been operating now for 12 years. My business partner is Jim O'Donnell. He used to handle national public relations for Citi Group and together we work with a group of for-profit and non-profit agencies in the St. Louis area. So I do enjoy my friends. I enjoy my significant other, Louis, he's the love of my life and our four kitty-kats but I enjoy my work. It's my juice.

Malaika Horne: Is there any specialty that you...or do you cover the whole gamut?

Joan Lee Berkman: When I worked for the phone company, I was the executive director of External Affairs managing government and community relations for the

company and I lobbied in Jefferson City and Washington, DC but prior to that, I started off in public relations and I held numerous positions in media relations, advertising, strategic planning, employee relations, charitable giving and video production. So that kind of laid the groundwork and I spent a lot of time in those areas before I managed government and community affairs for the company for Eastern Missouri and worked in Jefferson City as well as in Washington, DC. But I also handled the local government relations for St. Louis County in 27 different municipalities. So advocacy, public relations, media relations and I loved special events because I think, when I was working for my mother as a stage manager, I saw the master put those programs together. Everything's a show, whether you're working in Jefferson City on a piece of legislation, you are prepping someone for an interview to go on radio, television or print, know what you're going to say, how you're going to say it, what do you look like, what's your lead paragraph, what's the end. It's all a package. It's all a show. My mother used to say to me, "The minute you walk out the front door, it's show time."

Malaika Horne: Your life is just unfolding before me. This is so fascinating.

Joan Lee Berkman: It is, and you know, if you go out not looking well, you don't really have it all together.

Malaika Horne: That's true.

Joan Lee Berkman: And the minute you don't do that, you run into somebody you wish you had never run into and they go, "Joan, are you feeling okay?" So I learned that lesson very well. Do I relax? You betcha: work; home; friends; my own space. Work-life balance is hard and sometimes you give a little bit more to work, sometimes you give a little bit more to your family, sometimes you have to say, enough for me. There's no 50/50. Sometimes it's 80% your friends or your family. Sometimes you got to take that 80% back. So I think it's a draw. Number one, if you want to have any kind of work-life balance, you'd be very organized. You need to chill and you need to have a great good sense of humor and communicate and surround yourself with people that know how to communicate and if they can't, it's not going to work.

Malaika Horne: Very wise. Any leadership lessons...one of the questions is: In addition to leadership lessons in general, did anything impede your progress?

Joan Lee Berkman: Oh, sure, competitive colleagues, a not so nice boss, competitors in the industry, external business competitors, but the point was and is, knowing who you're dealing with, staying ahead of the game and never letting them get to you, never letting their words or their actions get into your head. Move on.

Malaika Horne: So those are the big challenges. Any failures?

Joan Lee Berkman: Oh, we always have failures. Anyone who's been in the lobbying business, the average piece of legislation takes seven years so we got beat up a lot. But the point was, understanding both sides of the aisle, getting to know the personalities, working side-by-side and understanding the middle ground. It's all compromise. But once you've got an idea or a concept that makes good sense, that's going to improve a situation and then you educate those around city hall or the state house or senate or congress, you can get people to rally around and you can build consensus. But it never happens just like that. No one's your best friend. No one's on your side. You work together but nobody gets everything they want. It's almost like a patchwork quilt. Hopefully that finished product makes good sense for all that it impacts. You know, when I was at the University of Missouri-Columbia, again, I mentioned I was a teacher's assistant, then I was an intern for the Public Relations Office which really kind of showed me what I wanted to do, believe it or not, for the rest of my life. I was fortunate. I was lucky. That doesn't always happen. But I was also elected president of my journalism class which afforded me the opportunity to get to know all the other students and the other sequences but I also had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to meet my idol who was a world-class journalist, former NBC anchor, John Chancellor. He was our graduation commencement speaker and before the commencement, he sat down with me because he wanted to know what I was going to say which I thought was fascinating...what do you care what some 20-year-old has to say? "What are you going to do? Tell me about your studies. Tell me about your family." He was bigger than life to me. His humility, his kindness stuck with me and I said, that's what a leader is supposed to be and I said, Joan, don't ever forget that. And with the guidance of my mother, who was such a major positive influence, to have someone like John Chancellor, Blanche Touhill and I watched my father in action, the fairest man, honest as the day is long, that's leadership.

Malaika Horne: Absolutely.

Joan Lee Berkman: You can't go wrong but when you mess with one of those, you're in trouble.

Malaika Horne: You certainly are. So is that your leadership style?

Joan Lee Berkman: Well, my style, in addition to having those as core values, I'm a pretty straight-forward person. What you see is what you get but I like to empower other people to do their job. I'm not afraid to jump in when I see someone getting off focus. I think that's important. I think leadership can be situational as far as the style is concerned. Sometimes you need to give a colleague a hug; sometimes you need to give a colleague a gentle kick in the pants.

Malaika Horne: A gentle kick?

Joan Lee Berkman: A gentle kick. Well, I don't want to be in trouble and I think we've gotten so politically correct over the years. If I think someone looks lovely, I'm going to say, "You look lovely today." It's a shame that people feel that they're going to be penalized because that's out of bounds. I believe in respect. I believe in understanding. You don't get sarcastic with somebody that you don't know, we're strangers, but sarcasm sometimes with someone you know very well can be very endearing. So know your audience.

Malaika Horne: Okay. Now, I'm sure you've looked at this question about leadership styles, the differences between men and women, or some people say there is no difference; others talk a lot about the differences. What do you think?

Joan Lee Berkman: I think it depends on your experience. I like to say individuals have different leadership styles. I have a lot of respect and admiration for some women who have marvelous leadership styles and some women, not so much. The same thing for men, I've had my share of marvelous male and female bosses. I will say I think women sometimes can be more detail-oriented than some men, but then I have found other men that are more detail-oriented than women. So I look at individuals. I will not label one way or the other.

Malaika Horne: Any big opportunities on the horizon?

Joan Lee Berkman: Oh, you betcha. With the internet and digital today, there are so many different opportunities for both men and women. I think women still need to feel their value a little bit more, particularly where salaries are concerned. That is the one discrepancy I still see with men and women. It's not the leadership so much, it's being really valued and paid for that value and not having to say you're sorry. Know who you are and not be afraid to say what your worth is. If someone doesn't understand your worth, you're in the wrong pew.

Malaika Horne: Let me ask you this, because I think there's a least two schools of thought about pay equity. Saul Sandberg's, where women need to really ask and push for salary increases, promotions. The other is this gender bias. Any thoughts on that, any advice to give women about how they need to get what they deserve?

Joan Lee Berkman: Well, first of all, I've always said the map is not always the territory. It's very important for you to do your due diligence wherever you're going to go, for whatever company, for whatever sect of the community that you want to work and find people that are working there and find out, how does it work there. Do you feel that you're treated fairly? How do they evaluate people for salary treatment? So part of it is your responsibility. Part of it, of course, is to perform. You don't walk in as a newbie right from college and say, "I deserve a six-figure salary" unless you're some kind of neuroscientist that requires that and no one else has those skill sets. So it depends what the skill sets and your experience are and doing your homework and knowing what the pay scale should be and then once you're in that business and you have those kinds of successes because any business, small, medium or corporate, normally has some kind of performance evaluation, either every six months or yearly where they review what you have accomplished and if you are exceeding your goals and your plans...and I hope every person that's out there has a strategic plan for how they're going to accomplish their job and stay on point and you exceed those goals and objectives, I would imagine that you have every reason to ask for a pay increase and a good boss that wants to retain talent and be a success depends on you and will take care of you.

Malaika Horne: So what comes up for me, because you said hopefully everyone does have the strategic goal or plan for their career, but it sounds like to me

that people need to really hear that over and over again because I'm not so sure everybody has that.

Joan Lee Berkman: I don't care what job you have, male or female, and if you don't have a supervisor or a managing partner that doesn't sit down with you to tell you what the company's goals and objectives are, you need to ask. You need to know what your goal is. What is your position description? And I know sometimes in a job position description, they have everything except the kitchen sink in there. You need to know what your top priorities are and what the expectations are. I now have a PR and marketing and special events firm and when I sit down with a new client, I want to know what their expectations are to make sure, number one, that they're realistic, that I can meet their goals and objectives and make sure that we're going to get along and we can accomplish those goals together, and all things being equal, you want to have chemistry as well. And you need to look at those goals and objectives on a fairly regular basis to stay on track and if you make mistakes along the way, that's, to me, one of the best life lessons is. Experience is the best life experience that you can possibly have.

Malaika Horne: You mentioned your PR firm and I'm very familiar with women of achievement. I go practically every year and you are the one responsible for the videos of these fantastic women. I think those are great...

Joan Lee Berkman: I co-chair the video committee for Women of Achievement. Susan Sherman and I have co-chaired the video coordination for Women of Achievement and we work with 10 outstanding women but we also have the wonderful facilitation of a professional firm by the name of Creative Producers. It is truly a labor of love but I have a background in video production, which is very helpful and like yourself, trying to get women to talk about themselves, it's not always easy. Really, honestly, I've never done a video like this. I consider my life personal. That is my life and so there are some things that I might not share other than my hobby and my life is the love of my life, Louis, and our four kitties, but other than that, other life issues are private but trying to do what you're doing, I'm enjoying the way that you're drawing me out because I probably shared more than I have in a long, long time.

Malaika Horne: Well, another question I wanted to ask you because you said you really love special events. Anything recently or anything in the past that you really enjoyed doing or was very successful?

Joan Lee Berkman: Yes, I have, for the past seven years, chaired *Hunt for a Cure* for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society and that is the largest family aid cut in the State of Missouri and I work with 19 radio stations and two television stations and three area hospitals to raise awareness and funding to find a cure for blood cancer and this year, we host this in Queenie Park. We hide 75,000 eggs with the help of UPS and a lot of other corporate leaders like Enterprise and Center and we're at Queenie Park for a full day with five age-appropriate bunny trails. I have a very important bunny who comes by helicopter onto this beautiful field to greet the kids and then is brought to a stage via horse and carriage and we allow these 7,000 children to hunt for these eggs and then afterwards, I will tell you, almost each and every one of those children, with the help of the chairperson, lifts them onto the lap of this bunny and has their photo taken before they go home. Needless to say, my back, at the end of that special event, is hurting for certain. But I'm very proud of that. There is one other event that I was very involved with and it was called *Radio Broadcasters for Babies* and I worked on that for about five years. I have a nephew that was born three months premature and weighed one pound, ten ounces and thanks for a drug called Surfactant, he was able to breathe in order to gain enough weight to live as a child and I've always worked with the March of Dimes to raise awareness of infant mortality and I did this event for three years. We raised a million dollars and worked with the entire radio community to bring down the infant mortality rate. Missouri had the highest infant mortality rate in the nation and we have now brought that rate down considerably as a result of that project.

Malaika Horne: What a service.

Joan Lee Berkman: It was an honor.

Malaika Horne: Absolutely. When it comes to young or not so young, in terms of their leadership potential, what do you look for?

Joan Lee Berkman: I look for young people that are not afraid to take risks on a project that is the right thing to do and have the integrity and the guts to see it through from start to finish.

Malaika Horne: Driving for results.

Joan Lee Berkman: Driving for results, not afraid to ask questions, and to get help when they need it. So I look for people that want to achieve and that have that dream and to make that dream into a reality.

Malaika Horne: I think that that's probably one of the most difficult tasks for young people in particular, to take on a project from beginning to end. Any advice that you could give us about how to be successful at that?

Joan Lee Berkman: Well, you can't do it by yourself and so even if you're a high achiever at a young age...and I've met a lot of old souls that were at a young age...you need to create a core team that can work with you to bring your project to fruition and you need to have an inter-generational team, people that know where the roadblocks are, people who might have been there before or have an idea of how to get there or may be able to find some leverage to get you to that next level. Can you get lucky? Sure you can but most people work with a core team to bring their dream to successful fruition, and you have to be patient and a lot of young people aren't patient. It can take years and if you aren't willing to put in that hard work, find some other job because it's not going to happen.

Malaika Horne: Because an experienced person may make it look easy and it's not easy.

Joan Lee Berkman: It's never easy. You know how they talk about people in Hollywood, they're an overnight success? That's not true, it's normally 10, 15, sometimes 20 years but all of a sudden they get on the horizon and everybody says, "Oh, that's the new person."

Malaika Horne: Right, or a successful elected official, they think they were an overnight success; they're not.

Joan Lee Berkman: That's right.

Malaika Horne: It's a long path, a long journey.

Joan Lee Berkman: Well, it is a journey. You asked me about, what were some of the leadership positions that you had, even in grade school, middle school, high school. That can set someone's stage later on in life but it's all a campaign.

Malaika Horne: It's all a campaign.

Joan Lee Berkman: And you have to earn people's trust and you can't get anyone's trust in a couple of weeks, a couple of months. You've got to show them again and again, particularly in Missouri. This is the "show me" state and so you've got to work hard to gain that trust and once I have that trust and you come to me with that idea that you really think will be successful, that's when someone's going to join you in your effort.

Malaika Horne: That's true. So, any other advice to others who are trying to make a difference?

Joan Lee Berkman: Well, I think we were talking about people as change agents and, frankly, I don't care if you're a man or a woman, whatever kind of change agent you want to be, I always tell people at any age, "Your voice is amplified by your role...aim high."

Malaika Horne: That's a good one because I think a lot of people don't aim high. I'm not sure why, why I didn't aim higher. What provokes that, stimulates that, promotes that?

Joan Lee Berkman: I guess it's what I was exposed to as a young girl. I was very shy as a young woman and as a young girl but I watched others that I admired and I respected and as I got my sea legs in business...I was a late bloomer, as I said and as I felt more sure of what I was and what I wanted to do, I realized, if I wanted a new client, I didn't go to a first-level manager. I might have known a first-level manager and said, "Tell me about the culture. Tell me what it is that you're looking for," when you ask for the job, you go to the top because they've got the power. It's when I was a little girl, in fact, I had more guts as a little girl. Somehow you can lose that when people try to trip you up and that's why I always say, "Don't let those negative people get into your head."

Malaika Horne: That's right.

Joan Lee Berkman: When you start listening to them and you think that what they've said is meaningful and it wasn't nice about yourself, that just throws up an obstacle and that's when your aim gets lowered, because you think you can't go higher. They won; you lost. But as a young girl I said to myself, I just want to grow up because the power is when you're older. And that's true, you got to get a little older. As a young person, they've got to realize who's in charge and so you've got to work with who's in charge unless you're in charge, you're starting your own business. Even as a start-up,

you still have to work with a number of people to the finish line. Every once in a while someone can get there by themselves. People get sick, people can lose their way, people need sounding boards. So as a young person, surround yourself with other people of a like mind. Try to get an inter-generational team. Ask your parents. Ask a trust professor that you had in college. Ask somebody where you go to church that you have respect for. Do your homework. Develop your idea. Look all the way around the chessboard. Try to think of what are the obstacles before you get there. Know who your friends are. Know who isn't your friend and be nice, be always nice, (very close).

Malaika Horne: One of the things I tell students is that they have to cultivate relationships as well with older people and a lot of times I think because they are so caught up in their own youth activities and friends and culture, (that will lose them for some reason. Any comments on that?

Joan Lee Berkman: Keeping your network up is so important. I have friends that I went to grade school with, middle school, high school, college, even people I meet today and what's wonderful is we all have the internet and so even a simple e-mail to somebody, I think that's very important. But, you know, even as a young girl, I worked for my mother, I was a stage manager for her drama school so I got to know the parents of the kids that were in her school and they taught me just as much as my mother did from time to time and if I had a question that didn't seem quite right, if my gut wasn't feeling right...and we all have a gut and I say to young people, "Keep your network but it's your gut instinct that is most important as a young person, especially as we age. If it doesn't feel right, don't do it." But if your gut is saying don't do something and you've got friends and older friends, call them, ask them what they think. Say, "You know, I'm feeling a little uncomfortable about something. What do you think about that?" But again, you need to know who you can trust, and that's interesting because if you ask three trusted friends or colleagues, what do you think, you should hear about the same thing, and then you trust somebody who might be a competitor or someone who doesn't like you so much and they tell you just the opposite, that just fed it, where you need to go.

Malaika Horne: That's interesting you use the word "competitor" because I use that a lot too but a lot of times you think of companies competing, especially when

you're young. You don't think about individuals as a competitor but you just brought that up.

Joan Lee Berkman: Friends, colleagues, bosses, organizations. It's interesting, we grew up and we loved everybody and I was hugging and kissing on everybody and one day my father...this was the one piece of advice my father did give me...he sat me down and he said, "Joanie, dear, you must learn to be selective. Not everybody's your friend." But here's my deal: I took that in stride, I said, "Thanks, Dad," I will trust anyone until you show me otherwise and I have my ears very open as are my eyes and I think any time you have a new relationship or a new opportunity, you need to listen with those ears, keep your mouth shut, listen to the way people express themselves. Body language is important to me and can make your own decisions. And that's the reason why I tell young people, "Just don't jump. Take your time. Get to know somebody." Have I jumped before and made mistakes? You bet you and I have a written agreement with all of my clients...now that I have my own firm...my father was a lawyer...get it in writing, and sometimes I regretted having a contract with people because you must honor any contract with grace, with dignity and respect. As soon as it's over, it was over. But I have learned the hard way: not everybody tells you the truth. Not everybody gives you good information, but from your experience and that gut of yours, you should know when someone's leading you down that rose path.

Malaika Horne: That's very important. Your intuition...

Joan Lee Berkman: Your intuition, your gut instinct and if you can't trust your intuition or gut instinct, what do we do? We ask someone that we trust.

Malaika Horne: So with that intuition, you do have to pay close attention and be self-observant...

Joan Lee Berkman: And be an active listener.

Malaika Horne: An active listener?

Joan Lee Berkman: That means when someone's talking with you...first of all, as a leader, you must not only be an active listener, you need to be compassionate and try to guide people because sometimes when you listen, you hear things: maybe someone didn't quite mean that and so as an active listener you must question: "Did you mean to say that? Did I misinterpret?" Not

everybody expresses themselves the way they're really thinking and that's sometimes a problem with the internet and so I may be going back and forth on the computer which has sometimes messed up our communications. Sometimes you hit the CAP key people think you're yelling at them, not so. And so sometimes going back and forth...pick up the phone, face-to-face to me...when I'm getting to know somebody... people try to hire me on the internet without meeting me...absolutely not. Meeting somebody, breaking bread with them or having a cup of coffee because, all things being equal, we must have chemistry with people that we're going to work with. I need to trust you. I need to understand your rhythm and how we communicate. Can we communicate?

Malaika Horne: I think you have strong...if I may say...interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence and that's very important, I believe, as we attempt to be successful in whatever we want to be.

Joan Lee Berkman: I also write a business column. I'm known as the "Velvet Hammer" and I do a...

Malaika Horne: Say that again.

Joan Lee Berkman: "The Velvet Hammer," I write a business column for a local magazine in St. Louis, it's called "The Velvet Hammer" and it's no-nonsense, common sense business advice, a lot of what I learned working at the phone company and having my own public relations and marketing firm, and I just did a piece on the difference between your IQ and your EQ. Our IQ, of course, is our intelligence quotient and that's really all done through testing how smart we are. It doesn't necessarily mean you have good common sense and I personally think...although everyone, you can be the judge of what is more important, your IQ or your EQ, which is your emotional quotient, of being understanding and compassionate of others, it's seeing the gray of that black-and-white of any conversation and being able to get along with other people to bring them to their goal or to their objective. And so for me, that extra emotional piece, I think is very important when you want to seal the deal because people want to do business with people, not only who they trust but whom they like.

Malaika Horne: There's a quote by Maya Angelou I'm trying to remember but I know the last line is "the most important is how you make people feel."

Joan Lee Berkman: Maya Angelou is one of my all-time heroes and I had a chance to meet her. I hired her when I was working at the phone company to be the keynote speaker for an event at the National Conference of Christians and Jews. Our president at the time was Priscilla Hill Ordon and do you remember that event...and Mia Angelo came to be our guest speaker, and of course, a phenomenal women, is one of my favorite poets but the one thing that Maya Angelou said and I agree with you, is you may forget what someone said to you, but you'll never forget the way they made you feel. That's the EQ and that emotional quotient of how do you make people feel is why they want to work with you or for you.

Malaika Horne: That's so profound, so wise.

Joan Lee Berkman: I think so.

Malaika Horne: Any awards or recognitions you'd like to divulge?

Joan Lee Berkman: I've been recognized mostly for my journalism, for achievement...I've been recognized for my contributions in journalism, Women of Achievement, the Missouri Professional Communicators, St. Louis Press Club, the Outstanding Women's League, but as I mentioned earlier, probably one of the awards that I feel most personally satisfied by was an Outstanding Leadership Award for raising awareness and a million dollars to combat infant mortality for the March of Dimes because it was so personal.

Malaika Horne: Absolutely. I met you through this university. Were you involved in any projects or activities here at the university?

Joan Lee Berkman: Several. When Marguerite Ross Barnett was the chancellor, she and Dudley Grove, a dear friend of mine, started the Friends of the University and I handled public relations for the first Friends group at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and absolutely loved that. Then, when I was working at the phone company, I managed a group of CORO fellows and we decided one of the best contributions that Southwestern Bell, which of course is now AT&T but at the time, we were still Southwestern Bell, we were looking for a project that would benefit the community and the CORO fellows did an unbelievable amount of research and interviews to say what could the phone company do that would truly make a difference for the State of Missouri and that was to create a series of community technology centers and I became a project manager to build a community

technology center along with Kathy Osborn here at the university on campus and we built that and that was back in...I think it was 1992 and that was very exciting and I worked with the university down in Columbia and worked through your politics here at the university and our politics and we worked very quickly to make that a reality in almost six months, from start to finish.

Malaika Horne: So, as we wind down, these are some fun questions: What do you usually read?

Joan Lee Berkman: I'm mostly interested in biographies, essays, non-fiction, but every once in a while, I like a good spy thriller.

Malaika Horne: Now, why the biographies and the non-fiction?

Joan Lee Berkman: I'm interested in history because I really do believe history repeats itself over and over again and I look way back and I go, my gosh, why are we still doing that? And I try to bring that forward to clients and friends and colleagues and say, "You know, you sound like..."...this, that or the other. But I particularly like biographies of people that I have admired through history: strong women; strong men, because it helps me be a better person.

Malaika Horne: Any historical figure in particular?

Joan Lee Berkman: I'm a big fan of Margaret Thatcher, love Winston Churchill, Abe Lincoln.

Malaika Horne: What attributes of Margaret Thatcher that you admire?

Joan Lee Berkman: She was the Iron Lady but with the velvet glove and so, again, like my mother, she was gentle but firm. Sometimes people won't listen. You know, I always say, let's all be nice. Let's do it in a nice, gracious way and if that doesn't work, then I have to get tough. I'm still going to say it nicely but in a no-nonsense kind of "This is what we're going to..."...I don't want to tell somebody, I want to ask somebody. I want to bring us to consensus because that's the kind of leadership style that I most admire. I think we all have a right to weigh in and then somebody needs to say, "Okay, I've heard what you said, what you said. I think this is what we need to do as a group," and then when you have someone go rogue, you have to pull them back in.

Malaika Horne: Winston Churchill, what attributes do you admire about him?

Joan Lee Berkman: Winnie was tough. I like people that can speak their mind and not afraid to do so. I'm a big Ronald Reagan fan. One of the things that Ronald Reagan said, "We can't help everybody but everybody can help somebody." I admire that and I loved how he loved his wife and his country.

Malaika Horne: Abe Lincoln?

Joan Lee Berkman: I think there's no reason to share that. That's a no-brainer. Abe Lincoln was...he was what the United States should be. He understood what the founding fathers wanted this country to be. If I had been at the theater, I would have taken the shot for him.

Malaika Horne: He was the unifier.

Joan Lee Berkman: He was. Now, Gore Vidal wrote quite a story on Lincoln. If you haven't read it, read it. There are a lots of theories out there, but that's not something I want on the air but anyone who's been assassinated...this is not something I want discussed but...

Malaika Horne: Yeah, there was something earlier when you were talking about gut instinct, I wanted to bring up so bad and talk about it a little that's not appropriate for this but...

Joan Lee Berkman: Yeah, I know where you're going but we're living in some really strange times right now.

Malaika Horne: But I think the attribute that ran through each one of the people you named was perseverance.

Joan Lee Berkman: Yeah.

Malaika Horne: You have to persevere.

Joan Lee Berkman: Yeah. I think any of these people that I have mentioned, perseverance, persistence, never, ever, ever give up.

Malaika Horne: Winston Churchill.

Joan Lee Berkman: Winston Churchill. You know, sometimes when you put somebody on the spot and you go, "Tell me why you like them," it's like, you blank out a little bit and then we talk a little bit further. So that's why you get to edit.

Malaika Horne: No, this is going very well. So any hobbies?

Joan Lee Berkman: My love of my life, Louis; my four kitties.

Malaika Horne: You mentioned Louis two or three times now. Tell me about Louis.

Joan Lee Berkman: My mother always said I would meet someone late in my life because my work was so demanding, it was very difficult to have a successful relationship and I was very fortunate, 13 years ago, I was sitting in a fundraiser and this very charming man walked around the table and introduced himself to me and that was that. My parents met in a very similar way and so it was really very fortuitous and a little scary but he is the most supportive, kind man...he's a workaholic just like me. He gives me my space but he gives me unconditional support to do whatever I want and vice versa. We love animals; we love to travel; we both love to read, and we don't have to say a word and we feel we've been talking all day.

Malaika Horne: His last name?

Joan Lee Berkman: Berkman, Louis Berkman.

Malaika Horne: And what does he do?

Joan Lee Berkman: He is an oil/gas broker for Raymond James and also works in the biotech field.

Malaika Horne: Okay. And your four kitties.

Joan Lee Berkman: We used to have six kitties. They came with the man. He is a staunch Republican so their names are: W, Laura, Condalisa, Colin, and the other two, Lord Greystoke and Smokey. Lord Greystoke is 35 pounds and he is a gentle giant so we had to give me a very regal name.

Malaika Horne: I see. I know we've hit upon this point a couple of times already but what message would you like to leave about women as change agents?

Joan Lee Berkman: I'm going to leave a message to not only women, but men, for anyone who wants to be a change agent: Your voice is only amplified by your role: aim high.

Malaika Horne: Thank you very much.

Joan Lee Berkman: Thank you.