

An Interview with
Marie-Helene Bernard

at *The Historical Society of Missouri* St. Louis
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interviewed by Dr. Blanche M. Touhill
transcribed by Valerie Leri and edited by
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Oral History Program

The State Historical Society of Missouri

Collection S1207 Women as Change Agents DVD 105

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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

19 AUGUST 2016

MARIE-HELENE BERNARD INTERVIEWED BY DR. BLANCHE M. TOUHILL

Blanche Touhill: Would you introduce yourself, please.

Marie-Helene Bernard: My name is Marie-Helene Bernard.

Blanche Touhill: Would you talk about your early life: your family; your parents; your siblings. Did you play with dolls? Did you play with boys? What I'm really interested in is who in your family said to you, you can be what you want to be and encouraged you?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Well, I was born in the late '60s in Canada. My father's Belgian so I'm half Belgian, the last of five, had a very European upbringing. Growing up, especially while I was in elementary school, I very soon realized that my upbringing was slightly different from that of my classmates in very subtle ways, but they were mostly cultural differences: what we had for dinner; what time; what we listened to at home. Being the last of five, I was greatly influenced by my siblings and the age difference is quite significant. My parents were quite liberal, very free spirits, allowed us to do everything. So, I think my first influence is through my family and being the last of five, they did not feel the need to direct or guide. I was pretty much left on my own, perhaps a little too much but that forges character and to this day, I think that there were two...there's an emphasis to use your judgment. So, there was great trust in us as young people, to really trust our own opinion, our own judgment. Forming opinions was really important. We were also surrounded by lots of culture, never pressured but it was at our disposal, so reading, visual arts, we lived in a beautiful home that my father had designed. It was extraordinary, modern, early '70s, very wild material, very wild architecture, bold colors, interesting textures and to this day, I have a fascination with architecture that I think comes from that day. So, in a nutshell, I

think my family unit was truly my greatest influence at a very young age.

Blanche Touhill:

So, it wasn't that anybody said to you-you will go to college; it was understood.

Marie-Helene Bernard:

No. It was not even discussed. My father, being an immigrant and being the first in his family to get a university degree...he was a veterinarian, practicing veterinarian, a self-made man. We were then living in the south of Quebec which is a very Anglophone part of Quebec. I grew up learning French, speaking French. We had to learn to speak English but I remember my father, being a French European, learning to speak English very quickly and having several clients who truly respected him and there was, in those days...because, remember, it's the late '60s, what we call in '68, the Revolution Tranquille where French Canadians truly came into a quiet...not so quiet...revolution against the church establishment, Catholicism and actually Anglicism, the fact that French Canadians were not truly encouraged to go to college, were not truly encouraged to...the concept of making money was a dirty word for Catholics. I think my parents were quite influenced by this, having been born...especially my mother...in 1936. Her family was deeply religious, very Catholic. They have 16 children. My mother was the last of 13 surviving children. My father grew up Catholic and Belgian, who had already had its own divisions among French [inaudible]. So essentially growing up, I was very much aware of these tensions. I was probably aware in some ways of the barriers of both of my parents. My mother was a pretty accomplished pianist and when she asked her father when she was 18...so '36 plus 18, so that takes you to the '50s, "Will you allow me to be a professional musician?" and her father said no. My grandfather said, "You are not allowed. You can be a mother, a wife, a nurse or a teacher," and my mother went to nursing school and she was about to graduate as a nurse when she met my father who was in school to complete his degree as a veterinarian. So, in a way it was kind of unspoken, but it was understood that we would all have a university education. But at the same time, my father being a veterinarian, there were lots of animals on the property: horses and dogs and we were very well

aware of his business. I think there was the sense that there's no limit essentially. You can do anything you want.

Blanche Touhill: Did your mother get her nursing diploma?

Marie-Helene Bernard: She did not. She actually married just before. I think she had a year to go and she was pregnant, so she had my brother.

Blanche Touhill: And I think that was quite common.

Marie-Helene Bernard: Probably.

Blanche Touhill: That women considered the marriage and the children more important in those days than finishing and getting the certificate or the degree or whatever it was.

Marie-Helene Bernard: Probably, and I think knowing my mother, I'm trying to imagine...she was very much in love with my father. She was deeply in love with this man who was very exotic in a way. He was Belgian, he was European, he had class and very handsome and all that and I'm not sure she really thought this out and she had a child very early on. I think they barely knew one another for a year, then she got pregnant and they were quickly married three months after they found out she was expecting. Actually, they married on July 27th, 1957 and my brother was born on January 26th, '58 so you can make the count.

Blanche Touhill: I must tell you, I've been to Canada on numerous occasions, not up north but across the line and I've always thought they were maybe 10 years, 15 years behind the United States in its industrial development.

Marie-Helene Bernard: Probably in some respects.

Blanche Touhill: But I wondered if that's true today.

Marie-Helene Bernard: Hard to tell. I left Canada 20 years ago, exactly 20 years ago this month. So strangely...and we'll go back to this but as a woman, having moved to the U.S. 20 years ago, I have maintained my Canadian citizenship, have become an American citizen.

Blanche Touhill: But you have dual citizenship?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Yes, but, yet, I'm a foreigner anywhere I go because I left Canada so long ago. Twenty years is a long time. Of course, it's my country, it's my culture. I go back and, yet I don't recognize many things as 20 years is long enough. I have actually not yet lived as long in the U.S. as I have lived in Canada because I left when I was 27 but still, it will always be my culture, and yet, of course I'm an American. I'm proud to be an American and how I'm a St. Louisan and very proud of being one. And yet, I did not grow up in America and sometimes people misunderstand...not misunderstand but underestimate how strong a culture in a country where you did not...I'll give you an example: last week someone in my office showed me a cartoon. I had no idea what it was. She said, "You don't know?" and we're the same age..." You don't know? Come on," and I said, "No," and I had to remind her, I said, "I didn't grow up in the United States"; "You didn't have that in Canada?"; "Well, not that cartoon. I don't remember," so for me there's no cultural reference there and so there's subtleties, very subtle things.

Blanche Touhill: Yes. Well, humor, don't you think in particular...

Marie-Helene Bernard: Very different.

Blanche Touhill: I've been to plays in Britain where the theater is in English and there are things that the British people will laugh at and that I don't quite get the innuendo, I don't quite get the joke. So, I'm sure the reverse is true.

Marie-Helene Bernard: It's absolutely true and sometimes there is...if it happens to me, there's a subtlety in the language or in a joke or cultural references that I don't catch. It happened to me, a text, someone texted me a few days ago, making a reference to something I have no idea and I had to apologize, "I'm sorry, I don't know what you're talking about." So, they had to walk me through and they were a little embarrassed. I said, "That's okay. It happens all the time," even after 20 years. There are some experiences that will not resonate with me. So, imagine going back to childhood. My father experienced that every day of his life but never spoke of it. He was a very proud man and still is and probably as an immigrant, something I lived years later, immigrating to this

country, gained a greater appreciation for the stress this man had experienced, being new in a country, coming from a very underserved, uneducated background, being the first in his family to go to university, getting a degree as a veterinarian and really having a really amazing, successful career, trying to get rid of his European accent. It was very hard. But also, I'm sure there were several barriers that he had to overcome as a man but was never free to talk about it and by age 30, he had five children and was running a very successful veterinary practice. So, imagine having a man today living the same kind of...it would be very, very different.

Blanche Touhill: But I think America is a land of immigrants so I'm sure there are people who experienced that.

Marie-Helene Bernard: Oh, absolutely, still today, regardless of where they come from.

Blanche Touhill: What city do you consider home in Canada?

Marie-Helene Bernard: I lived in Montreal. I was born in Sherbrook which is about an hour south, very close to the Vermont and New Hampshire border so I grew up in a very Anglophone enclave and I remember, as I said earlier, also my father's practice, half of it probably was in the English...what we call eastern township. It's south of Quebec and it's a high concentration of Anglophones because off the U.S. border. When we moved to Montreal, I was 12 and from 12 to 27, I lived in Montreal. Montreal was truly my upbringing and my shaping my adult life. Sherbrook was my childhood which was idyllic. I mean, I would relive that childhood any time.

Blanche Touhill: Did you play with boys and girls?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Both. I was very, very close to my brother, Charles, who's two years and a half older than me. We're still very close to this day. He's a soul mate. He's like a twin, although we have a two-and-a-half-year difference. We talk often. I think he knows so much about my life, myself. We have really grown up together. My older siblings would say later that when we were children, when they saw one running, the other one was not far behind. And strangely, we ended up in a very similar career. He's assistant principal cellist in the Cleveland Orchestra so he's had a life as a

professional musician, highly accomplished and after practicing tax law for several years, came to the field of orchestra management and I actually worked with the Cleveland Orchestra for about six years.

Blanche Touhill: While he was there?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: And how was that?

Marie-Helene Bernard: It was interesting. It was the first that management had a member of a family unit on management and someone else in the orchestra. It went very well. I think it's during that time while not everything was perfect, I think that management at least gained a greater understanding of the dynamic within the orchestra. I think I was able to gain great respect from orchestra musicians because my brother was one of them.

Blanche Touhill: Were you a musician?

Marie-Helene Bernard: I was, growing up. My mother was of course a failed pianist in a way, without putting any pressure on us, she sent the three youngest in the family to a music school, elementary school. So I learned [inaudible 13:28] violin. When we moved to Montreal, a little before, she started me on a [inaudible 13:33] which is a string instrument very similar to the cello. It's an early musical instrument. The repertoire for it runs from 16th century to about the French Revolution, 1789, '90, lots of Italian, French, Spanish, German, British music written for it, solo and for ensemble. It's a beautiful instrument and I was very young. At age 10 I started learning and I was very good on it, very fast and actually performed as a professional musician throughout my teens, so much so that by age 18, I just didn't want to be a professional musician. I wanted to do something else.

Blanche Touhill: Yes. I've always thought symphonies and their conductors and their managers, the administration are very much like universities.

Marie-Helene Bernard: It's very similar.

- Blanche Touhill: We have faculty and administrators and you have musicians...would you talk about the analogy between an orchestra and the administrators and I consider you the chief administrator.
- Marie-Helene Bernard: You between academia and orchestra?
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, and I think you're training, the fact you were a musician.
- Marie-Helene Bernard: Yes, so in terms of understanding the psychology of a musician and what happens behind the scenes that we, the audience, don't necessarily see because what you see is the final product. So, you don't see the years of training; you don't see the years of practice; the technical difficulties and demands; the physical demands. Being a musician is like being an athlete. Several musicians experience great physical discomfort and they have to be like athletes, highly disciplined, healthy, careful about physically, the output, and yet, you can be very accomplished technically and you still need to be able to, with the music, to say something or to provide an interpretation, a performance that will move others. So, it's a very complex job. It's one that's very frustrating. Not everyone is cut to be sitting in an orchestra among 90 other people and just listening to someone who's facing them and telling them what to do. It takes a certain kind of personality for that. I was never an orchestra musician.
- Blanche Touhill: No, but you knew the terms; you knew the life.
- Marie-Helene Bernard: Yeah, my brother who is very closed to me, grew up in this environment so of course I would talk to him about what it means, why this, why that and so on and so forth. But I think in general as a leader and administrator, is the psychology of people that you develop to understand what drives them, what motivates them. In psychology there in terms of, as an administrator, understanding and also having the knowledge and the love of the music which musicians truly feel and then the trust that you truly understand their world. And it also speaks of the care you will take when it comes to certain times where you say, we're doing too much; it's too taxing, too much music to learn, and recognize that this is happening because it happens

regardless of the best planning and they need to step back. And of course, it has...it's over the years having worked at the New York Phil and Philadelphia Orchestra and Cleveland Orchestra and on the St. Louis Symphony and in Boston, I was running a small ensemble. The dynamics were no different. They might have been slightly better because the group in nature was smaller. As a result, it was a lot more say for musicians, a lot more interaction, a lot more involvement in decision-making from a purely artistic standpoint during rehearsal and concert.

Blanche Touhill: I want to go back to your elementary and secondary school. Was that a very traditional experience as well?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Yes and no. Elementary was untraditional because it was a music school.

Blanche Touhill: I see.

Marie-Helene Bernard: And I don't remember much of it. I think I was very distracted as a young child. I remember the music lessons. I remember theory and [inaudible 18:01]. I remember the stress that I experienced with some of these classes. I remember my piano lessons. I don't remember much. I remember my school friends and I remember that I moved schools quite a bit. My parents separated, it must have been...let's see, Canadian system is a little different, so you have kindergarten, you have elementary 1 through 6 and I think my 5th year, I moved to a school and 6th year, I had two schools throughout the year. So, imagine, in 6th grade, I had two schools. I started in one school and I finished in another because my parents split, and my mother moved back to a small town. And then secondary one, so high school is 1 through 5. We moved to Montreal so my first day, going to high school. I was alone in Montreal with my older sister and I remember to this day what I had for breakfast. I had a green apple and lait au chocolat, but it was cold. It was like a cold hot chocolate. It was awful. I had stomach aches all day and of course I was nervous, and I went to this new public school which was in a middle-class neighborhood, a little rough and after that year, I moved to a private school with the Catholic nuns. It was a good move. That school was in a troubled neighborhood and there was a lot of aggression from

boys towards girls. So, you had to be pretty tough. But elementary was non-traditional because of the music component but otherwise, every other aspect of it, of schooling, I'm pretty sure, I remember teachers vividly. I remember what they wore. I just had a very visual memory of those years, but I don't have much of a memory of certain aspects of schooling or classes.

Blanche Touhill: Well, do you remember any teacher, either good things or bad?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Oh, yes...oh, no, all good. I remember Monique [inaudible 20:14]. Her name was [inaudible 20:14], the first class, first year and she died of cancer a few years ago and I found the obits by accident. I read obituaries. It's one of my life-long fascinations. I was like this as a child. I have always read from the time I could read, I have always read obituaries because I'm fascinated with people's lives. So, I read those a lot and then you find things and you read and you just find things.

Blanche Touhill: You do.

Marie-Helene Bernard: And one day...and she was very gentle. She was a wonderful teacher. I remember her vividly. I remember Ruth...something. She always was wearing those very yellow turtlenecks and I was absolutely fascinated by her yellow...to this day, yellow is not a color I wear, ever. So, in elementary school, that's as far as I can remember.

Blanche Touhill: Were they encouraging?

Marie-Helene Bernard: I was a very, very shy student, mortified and no one truly understood, and it took me years to gain confidence and I think I started gaining confidence when I realized I could be good in school. So, I remember the 1st and 2nd grade elementary, I was struggling. And 3rd probably was okay and I started being...I became a successful student in 4th grade and then it went (whistles), like I had perfect scores in so many disciplines. Don't know how, what happened. My parents were not very involved or supportive. I never remember my parents going to parent-teacher meeting. I don't remember them saying anything. I remember one time having an average score in something and my father saying in passing, "Well, you can do better." It's vague but there's a point

I reached where I started finding school easy and I started really nailing school. I was just strong.

Blanche Touhill: In the Canadian system, do you have clubs and newspapers that the student write for or yearbooks?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Yearbooks in high school but later, 4th, 5th...

Blanche Touhill: So, they don't have a lot of extracurricular activities?

Marie-Helene Bernard: I don't remember having that many.

Blanche Touhill: But in college you did?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Yeah, college was different, we did but in high school I don't remember but I remember in high school, when I went to study in private schools with the nuns, it was all girls, which I enjoyed because it was just fine. I was very late bloomer, so I loved to read. Of course, I had my brothers and I was very close to them but boys were not of great interest. But reading was of great interest and it's later in life, and later in high school that I really blossomed but the shyness, when I was a young girl, it was paralyzing and sometimes it comes back as an adult. There are situations, even today, when I become extraordinarily shy and I think, oh, if people knew! If people knew how shy I can be...I must be a false extrovert. I think I'm a deep introvert who has an ability to turn on the extrovert. I love people but yet, my idea of a good time could be reading a book alone, listening to great music, but again, I enjoy people tremendously. I don't know, it's a funny mix.

Blanche Touhill: Was there a nun that encouraged you?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Yes, I remember, pretty strict and now she must be deceased. It was so many years ago. I don't remember her name. I had a truly extraordinary master of the French language, written, because I guess I read a lot as a child and I was her favorite student and I remember one year, I let a classmate cheat. I helped a classmate and she saw me. I was mortified, and I remember she did not punish me but she knew I was doing this out of...

Blanche Touhill: ...compassion.

Marie-Helene Bernard: Yeah, out of compassion but I was caught, and it was easy for me. French was easy, so I was letting that friend cheat. But she was really inspiring. So that was in third year of high school probably. There were other teachers, but the one woman was truly an inspiration during those years was my music teacher who was much younger. There's only a 14-year age difference and she was truly a guide and truly an inspiration.

Blanche Touhill: In more than music?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Oh, yes because she taught me certain things about...and now, going back, I realize my mother must have been experiencing some difficult years when I was between...after we moved to Montreal, between the ages of when I was about 11...12 to about 15...16. It must have been really difficult for my mother.

Blanche Touhill: To get a new start.

Marie-Helene Bernard: Yeah, and she had to work and earn a living which she did not have to do until my parents separated and also romantically, my mother is a great romantic and I think she wanted to have a happy life with a man and she was still raising teenagers. But we had a very close family unit and music and theater and art was a connector, meaning that all of us, the last three, were...I was in music, my brother was in music, my sister went to drama school, so we were all connected in some way through a very strong passion for some aspect of music, theater or else. So, there was this kind of very liberal environment. I never remember my mother asking me, "Where are you going?" I got on a bus with my brother at Easter to New York to see our first opera together at the MET and we went to the Cloisters. I must have been 14. My brother was 16. How in the world did my mother let us go on a bus from Montreal to New York? And that became an annual tradition. My brother and I would go to New York on Easter.

Blanche Touhill: Isn't the Cloisters wonderful?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Oh, that's...

Blanche Touhill: And the first time you see it...

- Marie-Helene Bernard: Yeah.
- Blanche Touhill: ...is really special.
- Marie-Helene Bernard: Yeah, and my brother went there in the spring and he texted me a picture of him and his partner at the Cloisters saying, "Remember?" So, we have this memory together and the opera we saw together was Tosca and to this day, I get very emotional when I hear Tosca because I think, well, that's the first opera I saw when I was a young teenager. But same, the love for museums and visual art is very strong. We're not so much of a theater family and I'm not a theater person, that's one aspect that I know the least and not having grown up here, the English playwrights, American, I'm less familiar. I grew up in a French culture so Moliere and Dangenet and all of those, I know very well. But those expeditions that we did, we were completely driven by our passion for music or art. I think of that today and I think, wow, that's extraordinary that my mother let us do that.
- Blanche Touhill: I think she trusted you.
- Marie-Helene Bernard: Oh, probably. I mean, none of us...
- Blanche Touhill: And you had to spend the night?
- Marie-Helene Bernard: Yeah, oh, yeah.
- Blanche Touhill: You had to get a hotel?
- Marie-Helene Bernard: We stayed at the Emerson Hotel which has been refurbished since, but it was a dump, I remember, but it didn't matter because Easter...
- Blanche Touhill: No, and you're not in the hotel room in New York.
- Marie-Helene Bernard: No, and we were kids. At Easter, has always been a very...it's funny because, having been raised in a Catholic religion, in a very Catholic country...I mean, until I moved to U.S., I never imagined that you could live in a society where you have various forms of religion. And religion has always been something that has fascinated me. And while my parents rebelled against the Catholic church and never took us, I was the only one in the family who,

around the age of 9 or 10, I actually started going to church on my own. I had my best friend, we share the same first name, Marie-Helene, she was a summer friend because we had a summer home in Merogon. Lake Merogon and she was a neighbor and she had I had a very, very close friendship for many, many years. Well, we went to church every Sunday, so it was an occasion to dress up, to go to church with her and I learned...and to this day, I think I'm the only one in my family who actually can sit through a Catholic mass and I know what to do when I have to say my prayers. There's a funny story about this is that I developed a faith that's very deep that's very personal and my siblings and my parents noticed that I had this...it's hard to explain but I went to this high school private school which was named after a French-Canadian nun. Her name was Une Lit de Rochet and her nun, Catholic name, was Maire Matterose and she ended up quite famous in her days. I think it was 1838 in French Canada and she was an educator, had a short life, I think died pretty young, probably before the age of 50 but she was the leader of that school that was named after her and she became an inspiration to me. So, I would pray to her, I would ask for her guidance. And then so my family started relying on this to ask me to pray for them or to pray for lost causes and then they started believing that I had some special powers because things would turn around and things would happen. Now that I think about this, it's fascinating. So, I have always had...and of course being educated by nuns who are truly...they were pioneers in French Canada...

Blanche Touhill:

Yes, they were.

Marie-Helene Bernard:

...these women were the first business women, anyway, in Canada there were. They educated generations of women. They were not easy and yet, they ran a truly prestigious, amazing institution and allowed for girls and young women to get an education. But to make a long story short, this considered for years and years and years and years and to this day...I mean, unless the faith is something that's harder to explain later in life, but I have always had and will always have a profound respect for the Catholic church, what it means. I went to a service at the Cathedral recently and I thought, oh, they're just so stiff, but at the same

time, it's not unusual. I mean, I've grown up in this environment so I'm not terribly active in terms of...because I don't need that to have the faith, but it has colored an interest for other things and it has actually helped me understand certain aspects of certain works of literature and music that have a sacred...so it has been also a conduit to better understanding certain things. And to this day...that came out of a music production where there were 100 statues of Virgin Marys on stage and these were stored for years and years later, I was managing this organization and opened the storage space because we were paying a fortune, and no one knew it wasn't a storage room, so I opened the...and there were 100+ Virgin Marys and I kept a small one that has traveled with me wherever I go, and I love the idea of the symbol of that. So anyway, it's the whole Catholic...but again, it's very unusual because neither parent or siblings had any interest, exposure, wasn't part of our education.

Blanche Touhill: Where did you go to college then?

Marie-Helene Bernard: I went to a Jesuit college, Jean le [inaudible 33:17] of Montreal. So, after five years of high school, we do two years of college and then we go to university.

Blanche Touhill: I see...

Marie-Helene Bernard: So, after my five years...so first year of high school was in a public school, year two through five was in that private school led by nuns and it was sold right after I left and then the nuns left and then, what we call lake, so non-Catholic faculty ran the school. And years later, the entire school was closed, and they turned the building into condos, sadly, so the building still exists but the school is gone. And in college I went to the Jesuits, so it was, again, a private college, really hard to get in, the most bourgeois, affluent French Canadian so Pierre Trudeau Canada went there and probably Justine Trudeau, the current prime minister, was a little younger than me, went there for school and I had a two-year degree in media and communications so my focus was media production, literature, writing. I wanted to be the next Christian Anampour and I had a fascination for the Middle East, so I guess I went from capitalism to...I just jumped around, I don't know, you

know how that happens, but I had a great interest for foreign policy, the world and I read a lot about the Middle East and thought I would be a journalist. So I did that degree and then I went to university in political science.

Blanche Touhill: And what university did you go to?

Marie-Helene Bernard: In Montreal.

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Marie-Helene Bernard: So in Canada, you don't...especially if you're French Canadian...now it could be different but at the time...and we're talking about the mid to late '80s, you did not, like in the U.S., you leave your home town and you go to college somewhere else and it's part of the experience. In Canada that doesn't exist that way.

Blanche Touhill: You live at home?

Marie-Helene Bernard: No, we didn't live at home.

Blanche Touhill: Well, you live in an apartment?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Yes, so Quebec, because it's a French-Canadian environment, unless you want to pursue something else where you speak English, you go to university in another state but it did not happen very much. I did one year in political science which I felt was a waste of time. I was struggling because I was not challenged enough. The teachers, half of them, were extreme left communists who had an axe to grind with something and I was sitting there thinking, my gosh, teach me something. So, in the course of that year, I consulted with my older brothers, who were truly father figures to me, and I sought their guidance: "What do I do? I'm confused. I'm lost" and my second brother is an attorney and was already working in a law firm and he advised to go to law school. He said, "Go to law school. You'll get a really good degree and it's a good education and you're not going to waste your time. It's going to be challenging and then after you can decide what you want to do." So, I switched to law school.

Blanche Touhill: And you were satisfied with law?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Yeah, the first year was very, very difficult because probably I had lost a sense of discipline in that year in political science and suddenly I was immersed back into an environment that was highly demanding. And you know how it is, you find yourself with a group of students who are all exceptional students.

Blanche Touhill: Now, the French law is different than the American?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Yes, but the Quebec law, it's a mix...

Blanche Touhill: ...of the case law and the...

Marie-Helene Bernard: Yeah, so it's a mix and it depends what type of law but a lot of it is inspired by the French, Napoleonic code, but Quebec has its own code, both for procedure and civil law and there are other aspects of law that are a different competence that's closer to common law. But when you go to law school, you have a choice: you could go to McGill University and get your common law in which case the degree is four years. The degree I did was the regular French law degree of three years. But you touch on everything. First year was difficult and after that it was much easier. Again, same, I got great confidence...

Blanche Touhill: Now, in the courts, is the court based on French law or English law? Are they separate or are they an amalgamation?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Hm, how to answer this? It's a different system for sure from the U.S. because judges are not elected. They are appointed and you have Superior Court which is (first instance?), the Appeal Court which is, of course, second, and then...so the Appeal Court in Quebec is the highest degree of jurisdiction. If you want to appeal from the Court of Appeal, then it's the Supreme Court in Canada and only in Ottawa and they only take a handful of cases. So below the Superior Court you have Municipal Court and other small claims courts and all that. And the system is probably closer to British law than the French law. So, your judges no longer wear the whole thing. There's no jury, only in criminal cases are there juries and I don't think there's...the concept of the grand jury that you have in the U.S., of whether or not someone is going to be trialed, I don't think that exists.

Blanche Touhill: Well, the Napoleonic code was more principles, wasn't it?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: And the English system was more case law, what has happened before.

Marie-Helene Bernard: Before both?

Blanche Touhill: No, what has happened in a particular kind of case.

Marie-Helene Bernard: Right. Oh...

Blanche Touhill: I mean, you build on the previous.

Marie-Helene Bernard: Yes, so basically the jurisprudence is still a concept that's very much applied meaning that in Quebec, if you're going to take a class action or any lawsuit or whatever it is, you do use previous cases to establish, and of course the higher the court, the more important, so as the Supreme Court has said intellectual property infringement, xyz principle, then you use this to remind the judge that the Supreme Court has...

Blanche Touhill: ...has ruled.

Marie-Helene Bernard: Exactly, so it's the same concept. That way, that's why I'm thinking that it's closer to the British law system. And you're having me be thinking about this because it's been a while since I've practiced and after school...there was a recession in Canada. I graduated in '91. Then you go to pass the bar and we spend a whole year in law school for that and we pass the bar. And after that, let's say there were about 400 students graduating that year from University of Montreal. I was one of a handful who actually got a job, got a job and was kept after the year of training because you pass your bar, then you have a year of training and it was very clear that I did not want to be an litigator, unlike my older brother. My older brother is a very established, well-known litigator. He's highly specialized. He's one of the authorities on construction law in Quebec and he takes on extraordinarily large cases. So, for example, Hydro Quebec, it's his client and he's going to have lawsuits, \$70 million, a subcontractor and these go on for years and years and years. So that's what he does. It was clear to

me that I had no attraction for litigation. I guess the introvert in me didn't feel very comfortable with that. And when I was hired by this law firm that was a medium-sized law firm, lots of younger attorneys, wanting to break away from the traditional law firm, started this practice and the senior tax attorney was very young, he was barely 35 and was very scary. No one wanted to work with him and when I started, he asked me, "Would you like to work with me on tax law?" and I said, "Sure," and I worked with him and I did all of his research and prepared cases and did corporate law and he liked me a lot and kept me on and he had a great future for me and it was a very busy practice. So, what I remember is that we worked all the time. It was non-stop. We would come in at 8:00...I can't remember...and we would go on pretty late in the evening every day of the week and it was a very demanding law practice, but my specialty was tax law.

Blanche Touhill:

Why did you decide to leave the law?

Marie-Helene Bernard:

Because I started missing music. It was six years. It came slowly: do I want to do this all my life? And I knew I was reaching a point because the partners were quietly suggesting that if I wanted to continue...and they were right...to get a Master's in tax law would be the natural next step because it's hard to practice tax law without a Master's Degree. So, I was thinking about it and they were thinking about sending me overseas, of going to London and doing a dual degree, common mixed tax law, so there were some conversations about that and I really started asking myself, what do I want to do with my life and I started slowly missing music. So, I stopped playing [inaudible 43:07] when I was in law school and I stopped giving concerts because I had, up to that point, engagements to play professionally, probably not many times a year but a few times a year and each concert required weeks of rehearsals with a group and preparation and the last concert I played was...it didn't go well. I think I got lost during the concert and I felt underprepared and I thought it was a disservice to my musicians, colleagues to continue if I was not able to invest the time and I was probably in a place where law was capturing all of my attention and passions and music less so. But six years later, I started missing music and thinking about ways to combine my

legal business and music background and just started meeting people and doing some research and that led me to do a Master's in Arts Administration at Concordia University which is in Montreal and it was a new program.

Blanche Touhill:

Did you take a year off or did you go part-time?

Marie-Helene Bernard:

No, I practiced full-time tax law. It was a two-year degree and the first year I didn't say anything to the partners. I just enrolled, had my classes at night and struggled. It was such a struggle because it was a lot of work and to be quiet about it and to pray that there would not be calls on the day of an exam. So, I wanted to see if I liked it, if I liked management, organizational behavior and all the classes and after a year, I really liked it and that's when I told the partners I will probably leave to move to the U.S. to work in non-profit arts management and they were completely floored. It came completely as a surprise to them. And then my brother being with the Cleveland Orchestra at the time, had connections with administrators in the field and connected me with the American Symphony Orchestra League which is now the League of American Orchestras and they had a training program and I was the first Canadian ever selected to enter the program and I did it so it was a one-year residency and I was lucky that I had really great assignments: New York Phil Orchestra. So, when I left in August of '96, I did that program full year, working with major orchestras, getting to know people in the field. So, you have to imagine, I'm a 27-year-old tax attorney. I'd been practicing for, like, six years because I started so young so for them, it's like I'm a miracle, this, "My gosh, we have to keep this woman because she's..." ...I was a lot more mature than most in the program who were either recent college grads or musicians but with very, very little management experience. And the only advantage I had, having practiced law, other than the discipline that the legal practice brings, which is quite impressive, working with clients, working with accountants, auditors, looking at balance sheets and financial statements, the whole financial aspect of the legal work I was doing in terms of drafting, writing, organizing cases. There's so many, many things developed and that become second nature. So, I was an asset and one thing led to another and my first job

was with the Philadelphia Orchestra, chief of staff, and I did that for three years.

Blanche Touhill: I date the women's breakthrough in 1965 in this country with the passage of the Civil Rights Act, where we were part of the protected class. When did Canada begin to change and be more open to women?

Marie-Helene Bernard: I would guess about the same time, because '68 is the [inaudible 47:07] where women burned their bras out in a public place and said, "Enough already," and marriage went down in terms of the number of people married and Quebec was the most forward-looking province in terms of recognizing what they call "union de fait," common law marriages, meaning that people who were together a long time and had children in the civil law, the rights of spouses, partners and children were the same whether you were married or not.

Blanche Touhill: You know, in this country we had that up until right before World War I, that we recognized common law after so many years, just what you're saying and it's interesting to know that Quebec had that same attitude.

Marie-Helene Bernard: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: What about owning property and voting and things of that nature?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Voting, I don't...I would have to look it up.

Blanche Touhill: Well, we're the early '20s.

Marie-Helene Bernard: Right. We were probably pretty close after that. The problem in Quebec was not so much the right of vote. I mean, the church had such a control over, is the fact that people were uneducated and uninformed because the church...priests would go from door-to-door reminding women of their duties and reminding...my mother will say, "Your grandmother, at some point, turned over" and she told my grandfather, "Okay, that's it. I'm done. I've had 16," and my mother always says that joking, and my mother is not old. She's 79 and she had five children by the age of 32. She was

slightly older than my father. My father was 30 and she said in the days...it's the last generation to have so many children. After that...I was the last one, '69, so after me, early '70s, the birth rate goes way down. But she would tell me, "You have to be pretty..."...you didn't think about it and you didn't think about the consequences of having so many children and my mother had help at home and we were fairly easy bunch, I guess, but five is a large number of children. I mean, you don't necessarily see that very often nowadays, and later in life, both my parents had significant others for a long time. My father has been with the same woman for 38 years and they never married [inaudible 49:46]. I know she would love for him to ask her to marry him and he's not going to marry her, but they've been together for 38 years and had a child. I have a little half-brother who's 20 and my mother had a partner for 30 years. He, sadly, passed away last year but they were never married but they were together for a really long time. So that's something, especially my generation, lots of my friends in their 40's have never married and have been together for 20 years and have children and never married. So, it's pretty strong. I imagine that younger generations...history repeats itself...that probably younger generations must have gone through phases where they would marry. I don't know so much now but...

Blanche Touhill:

I'm going to change the subject a bit: Have you gotten any award, was there some award that you particularly are pleased with, or more than one?

Marie-Helene Bernard:

Oh, I remember as a child...I would say I was eight or nine because I was still in Sherbrook and I just entered this contest. We had to design something, and it was for a global organization. It was either for UNICEF or something big and I entered the contest. I was very gifted. I was drawing, I was good, art types of things and I made something that was pretty clever and I can't remember exactly but it's something I cut and then you opened it and anyway, I won and I was so astonished because I had never won anything and it was very prestigious and I was so shy. Then I remember winning this and they did a little ceremony and I was very proud of that because it was something that had

international significance. Later, my gosh, what did I win? I don't really remember. Other awards? I remember...

Blanche Touhill: What about in your life?

Marie-Helene Bernard: That's what I'm thinking, later in life, did I win...

Blanche Touhill: Well, maybe you didn't win something but was there some recognition that you received? I suppose the internship.

Marie-Helene Bernard: Well, that was a great achievement.

Blanche Touhill: Because it not only singled you out, it also gave you contacts and helped you make the decision whether to stay in this or not.

Marie-Helene Bernard: If I had not been invited to do this residency program...I was the first Canadian, which they had never thought about it because when I applied, the rules were not so clear about whether you had to be an American or Canadian citizen. Being an attorney, when they called me to say, "We'd like to give it to you. This is the first time we're recruiting a non-American," I said, "Oh, no problem, I'll take care of my own visa" and I did so I secured an (HB3) to enter the U.S. I did that all on my own, so they thought it was fabulous. A year or two later, they recruited another Canadian who was not so well equipped in a legal department and after that they changed the rule and they made this a residency only for Americans because apparently it did not go as well....

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

Marie-Helene Bernard: You know, assuming the same parents with the spirit of openness and being so liberal, I would have probably have had a career, probably, of some sort. Who knows what type of career. I've always wondered because growing up I always thought I would get married and have a family, have children and that never happened, probably by lack of planning or lack of being intentional about it and probably maybe I would be a mother and married but yet, I would still think I would have a career because my mother is not surprised, having watched me over the years, that learning and having more aspirations, not so much from a

power standpoint or because of my ambition, but because I'm curious. That would drive me. Sometimes I think that if I had gone back, I would love to be probably in academia and I would maybe have pursued something related to history or the world, like something about foreign policy because that's always been fascinating.

Blanche Touhill: Do you have a theme in your life?

Marie-Helene Bernard: A theme in my life...? I think it's a very interesting question. I realized, in recent years, that I'm high adaptable, that I could live pretty much anywhere and with anyone and I have had this kind of ability to mingle but I guess the learning, the constant thirst to understand and learn or the inspiration that comes from it, so my only challenge is there's not enough hours in the day, I guess.

Blanche Touhill: Are you happy as a CEO?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Very, very happy. It's a wonderful profession.

Blanche Touhill: Talk about your life as the CEO of symphonies.

Marie-Helene Bernard: The life of an executive in the symphony world is really about nurturing. If I think of everything I do every day, I nurture artists to reach their best. I nurture musicians to give their best. I nurture teams to be the most creative. I nurture donors, audiences to come and enjoy and make St. Louis Symphony their own. I nurture relationships with partners, educators, so I realize that the theme in my profession is definitely the nurturing and the development and constantly seeking new opportunities and it's work that's tremendously...that then allows me to combine the creativity but the business skills and constantly thinking of, what could be so unique about our organization? What's so different? What is it about the people of St. Louis that makes this organization so special? What about that music that we...what's the next level that you can reach and how can you have people really connect with things, whether it's in their heart or how they feel that they have not experienced, who never thought that they would experience it through music. So, the love of sharing, the passion of the music itself and I always see my job as you never stop learning. It's truly the case and you constantly learn more and

more about the human race and how you motivate them, their psychology. So, it's very enriching. Sometimes it's challenging. You don't do a job like this to be loved, obviously and as a leader yourself, you know that there are times where your best intentions are not recognized. But the wonderful thing is, once you have this organization working all in alignment, I think that achieving great beauty through music and reaching out to more people is truly satisfactory. I mean, it's what drives me every day.

Blanche Touhill: Are you planning to stay in this?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Oh, absolutely. To stay in this profession, probably. It's really hard to say because sometimes I'm thinking that with all the baggage of experience, at some point I would love to have people who can support others to figure out how to do this, meaning that whether it's advising people, foundations, family or private foundations, so probably later, once I'm done with running orchestras, that I would love to be on that, to explore that possibility of helping people with means help others and figure out what it is that...what is their passion, what drives them and how can they financially make it possible for others.

Blanche Touhill: In arts or in music?

Marie-Helene Bernard: It could be in anything, probably more in arts education because that's my expertise. I'm not an environment expert; I'm not a global...so probably it would be in arts education and education is what I consider part of my expertise because of everything we do.

Blanche Touhill: And you do have the law background which is another aspect or layer of your knowledge.

Marie-Helene Bernard: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Do you want to comment on the IWF, the International Women's Forum?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Oh, it's a wonderful organization. I love the whole spirit with which women come together. I think the opportunities we have to get to know extraordinary women that otherwise that I would not meet in my work and the fact that it's...the purpose of it

which is to spend time and learn but never with any pressure. It's truly wonderful. That's why, with my little exposure in the last few months, I have really enjoyed it.

Blanche Touhill: One last question: Have you had trouble being the first woman here and the first women there?

Marie-Helene Bernard: No, probably because I don't really think about it. I've had situations where after I will really think about what someone's said to me and I would say, hmm, I wonder if I would be criticized the same way if I were a man? Sometimes I take it as a compliment. I'm thinking...and always also, looking at a generation, although sometimes surprisingly, some young men are more...are making comments that are more surprising than men of older generations. But I have never really truly processed this as an offense or an attack. I always turn it around and make it an asset, saying, well...but I have no felt that it prevented me from doing things, quite the opposite but I don't really think about it, so I probably do things in my professional career that would shock people, saying, "Well, she's pretty bold" because I don't think about it and it's been the case all my life. There are still very few women...I think there's four or five of us running organizations of a certain size so 30 million and more, I can count four right now, including myself. So, I know that the field and all of us female leaders want to see more women, and it's true of other sectors and I have made sure to reach out to also other colleagues...

Blanche Touhill: Is there a pipeline of women coming along?

Marie-Helene Bernard: Absolutely, I think there is and also, in the orchestra world and the orchestra itself, as you know, in St. Louis, reached first orchestra in America to have more females within its ranks and we still do auditions behind curtains, so it says something about the talent, unsurprisingly. It could also say something about the choices that women make that are truly driven by their talents and passion rather than economic necessity and what I mean by that is being a musician is a really tough job. There's very, very few musicians who can really make a living in a major orchestra. There's very few positions open and otherwise you're left out, chasing one job after another and it's probable that a lot of men

also abandon the idea and just go into other fields that pay better.
So, it's a possibility.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I think women are really coming along remarkably.

Marie-Helene Bernard: Oh, absolutely, yes, I agree.

Blanche Touhill: Well, thank you very much.

Marie-Helene Bernard: Thank you, a pleasure.

Blanche Touhill: And I enjoyed it and I hope you enjoyed it too.

Marie-Helene Bernard: I did, thank you.