

An Interview with  
**Shirley Breeze**

at *The Historical Society of Missouri* St. Louis  
Research Center, St. Louis, Missouri

**17 December 2014**

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 26

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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**

**17 DECEMBER 2014**

**SHIRLEY BREEZE INTERVIEWED BY DR. BLANCHE M. TOUHILL**

Shirley Breeze: ...my education in elementary school in a two-room school. So it's been an interesting ride.

Blanche Touhill: Talk about your early life: your parents, your cousins, your neighbors, your grandparents, how you played. Who in your family really encouraged you to go to school and then talk about your elementary school and your secondary school. Were there teachers that said to you you were a leader and you could do things, what did you want to do, help you sort of think of yourself as a positive leader of the future. So just talk about that.

Shirley Breeze: My father didn't go to college. My mother was a college graduate and there were five of us, five siblings, and we were very close in age. So at one point they had four in college at one time, which was really an interesting concept. My mother particularly wanted us to all be educated. She didn't care what we did. She was equally firm about that with the three girls as with the two boys and I think her vision and her outlook really made me aware of what I could be and I did have a number of strong teachers along the way who encouraged me but I'd have to say that I didn't take advantage of a lot of my education because at the time, I was working and going to school and I didn't have extra time to get into extracurricular activities and all that kind of thing which I think is really important but I just didn't have the time to do it.

Blanche Touhill: Did a teacher say something specific that stuck in your mind?

Shirley Breeze: I went to community college before I went to a four-year school.

Blanche Touhill: Don't get to college yet. I'm talking about elementary/secondary school.

- Shirley Breeze: I don't think we were very much encouraged in the two-room school.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, you went to a two-room school?
- Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm, and I'm not sure that education was really very good but we, with Mother's help and her encouragement and her trips with us to the library and all that, were pretty well educated, I think. But I don't think the elementary school was very helpful on that front.
- Blanche Touhill: So other children were more focused on farming?
- Shirley Breeze: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: But you didn't live on a farm?
- Shirley Breeze: No, we didn't.
- Blanche Touhill: You lived in a city?
- Shirley Breeze: Well, we lived in a small town. When I went to high school, we all went to Centralia, Illinois high school and at that time it was the premier high school of Southern Illinois because it was in the middle of the oil fields and around the '20s and '30s, all the oil fields were developed around Salem and Centralia and the tax revenue from that venture provided lots of money for the community, including the school systems, but we were outside school for our elementary so we had to go to the two-room school. But we had excellent programs at the high school, just excellent.
- Blanche Touhill: Did your mother teach school or anything?
- Shirley Breeze: She did after we all got kind of into school, then she taught.
- Blanche Touhill: In the two-room schoolhouse?
- Shirley Breeze: No, no, she taught in several different grade schools, usually 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades.
- Blanche Touhill: And where did she go to college? Was it, like, a teacher's college?
- Shirley Breeze: She went to SIU when it was a teacher's college.

- Blanche Touhill: Yes, in Carbondale, yes.
- Shirley Breeze: Right, but she didn't graduate. She got married and then she finished her education at McKendree, going part-time and just traveling from Centralia. So it wasn't ideal but she was very devoted and she wanted to show us that it could be done and we could do it too.
- Blanche Touhill: So she started teaching when you were still young?
- Shirley Breeze: Yes, and she loved teaching, just loved it. I gravitated to it by her example.
- Blanche Touhill: How did you play with your friends or did you play with your brothers and sisters?
- Shirley Breeze: Well, mostly our brothers and sisters. My mother was never really approving of some of the neighbors so she didn't like for us to be with them too often. Their language wasn't good and their...
- Blanche Touhill: They didn't have goals that she had?
- Shirley Breeze: No motivation, yes, right.
- Blanche Touhill: For education.
- Shirley Breeze: Right. So it was interesting but we got along fine, you know, in life. Life goes and you get along fine.
- Blanche Touhill: Did you have a structured childhood or was it you were free after school?
- Shirley Breeze: We were pretty free, right, and Mother didn't drive for a while. She learned to drive while we were growing up so she didn't take us to various activities. The boys played sports but we just kind of did our own little thing.
- Blanche Touhill: Did they have the Girl Scouts in your town?
- Shirley Breeze: No, they had 4-H and we were in 4-H.
- Blanche Touhill: And you were members of 4-H?
- Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm. That was an interesting organization.

- Blanche Touhill: Did you learn anything that you remember from it?
- Shirley Breeze: Yes, there were some really good leaders but it was all geared towards girls' things: sewing and cooking and that kind of thing, which I'm sure it isn't now but it was then.
- Blanche Touhill: I think the Girl Scouts have moved toward leadership as their main focus today.
- Shirley Breeze: Right.
- Blanche Touhill: They're trying to turn the organization to accept the notion of educating girls for leadership.
- Shirley Breeze: I think that's a good idea.
- Blanche Touhill: What did you do for your projects for the Girl Scouts? Did you cook?
- Shirley Breeze: We cooked and I did a lot of sewing. I loved to sew and Mother had a really good sewing machine and she liked to sew so, for my major projects, I made dresses.
- Blanche Touhill: For yourself?
- Shirley Breeze: For myself.
- Blanche Touhill: Can you still sew?
- Shirley Breeze: I can still sew.
- Blanche Touhill: Do you have a modern sewing machine?
- Shirley Breeze: Well, I have a Mackie but it's just for repair work now.
- Blanche Touhill: Do you have any friends from those days left over or are you mainly friendly with your brothers and sisters?
- Shirley Breeze: We're a very close family and we were kind of socialized with each other a lot. I have a few friends from that era but not very many. After I moved to St. Louis, it kind of...you know...
- Blanche Touhill: What happened to your brothers and sisters?
- Shirley Breeze: Well, my two brothers are pharmacists.

- Blanche Touhill: Did they go to the St. Louis College of Pharmacy?
- Shirley Breeze: One did and one went to the University of Illinois in Chicago, medical school, and my one sister was a secretary but she got three years of college and my other sister is an x-ray technician, two years of training.
- Blanche Touhill: And where do they live?
- Shirley Breeze: One lives here in Chesterfield, one lives near Madison, Wisconsin.
- Blanche Touhill: So they moved out of the farming community?
- Shirley Breeze: Right.
- Blanche Touhill: Okay. So your mother, the expectation was you would go to college?
- Shirley Breeze: Oh, yes.
- Blanche Touhill: And she didn't care what you studied but you were all to go and graduate?
- Shirley Breeze: Right.
- Blanche Touhill: So you decided to go to college. So where did you go?
- Shirley Breeze: Well, we started, all of us...well, the girls all started the Centralia Community College which, at that time, was housed kind of on the campus of the high school. It has since moved off, and got two years there. Then, it was pretty easy to transfer in those days so I transferred to SIU-Carbondale and got my Bachelor's and my Master's there. Then I went to SIU-Edwardsville to work on a doctorate and didn't quite get it all finished by the time I decided to quit. So I've been on both campuses.
- Blanche Touhill: So you were really an education major?
- Shirley Breeze: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: Is your Bachelor's Degree in Elementary or Secondary?
- Shirley Breeze: Actually, my Bachelor's Degree is in Business because at that time, they allowed you to have a business degree and then I got



education courses on the side, which I thought was really good because then I taught business so it was really good background to have.

Blanche Touhill: Did you teach business in the high school?

Shirley Breeze: Yes, I taught at East Alton Wood River, I taught in the Parkway District and a private school and then went to the community college.

Blanche Touhill: And you taught business in the community college?

Shirley Breeze: Right, mostly office management and computers and things like that.

Blanche Touhill: But you didn't think you'd go into business?

Shirley Breeze: No, I didn't. I don't know that I even had a desire to had I had the opportunity. Of course, in those days, girls were just singled out for nursing or secretaries or education.

Blanche Touhill: That's what I was going to say, there weren't many female students in business, were there?

Shirley Breeze: No. I can recall, like, a marketing class I had, I was one of two girls and she didn't come half the time so there I was and I took economics and all those kinds of things.

Blanche Touhill: And so you were good at math?

Shirley Breeze: Well, I don't say I was good but I made it through. It was difficult for girls because I know the teacher didn't expect as much out of us and so we didn't, I'm sure, get all the value but I didn't notice a lot of discrimination. I guess I wasn't aware of it as I am now.

Blanche Touhill: Why do you say that the teacher probably didn't expect as much out of you?

Shirley Breeze: Well, because they were only all male teachers...I don't know that I had a female teacher in those business courses...and they didn't call on us. They kind of just called on Jim and John around the room, not that I was upset about it. I just thought, well, it's easier

for me. I can sit here and listen to the answers. But I don't think that would occur now.

Blanche Touhill: Now, when you went to high school and you took the math courses, how were those teachers?

Shirley Breeze: They were pretty much just like the college ones.

Blanche Touhill: Really?

Shirley Breeze: Uh-huh.

Blanche Touhill: They looked to the boys to be the stars.

Shirley Breeze: Right, right, so I think this new focus on Stem for young women is just very important, very much needed.

Blanche Touhill: Were you ever told that girls weren't good at math?

Shirley Breeze: No, I never was, I never was.

Blanche Touhill: But when you took the math courses, even in high school, I don't imagine there were many girls in a lot of the math courses, were there?

Shirley Breeze: Well, in some there probably were because part of it was a requirement.

Blanche Touhill: Well, algebra was obviously a requirement or general math was a requirement.

Shirley Breeze: General math, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: But once you got into algebra and geometry or calculus...

Shirley Breeze: I don't remember many girls...I didn't take calculus.

Blanche Touhill: How did you like Carbondale?

Shirley Breeze: I did, I really liked it and they've done a lot now to improve it, facility-wise.

Blanche Touhill: Were you there with Delite Morris?

Shirley Breeze: Yes, I was.

- Blanche Touhill: And how was Delite?
- Shirley Breeze: Oh, he was a wonderful administrator, wonderful to students, walked across campus all the time and talked to students, really delightful person, but they still had some old barracks up.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, from World War II?
- Shirley Breeze: That they'd purchased or were given or something so some of the offices and some of the classes were in those barracks. I think they, fortunately, have gotten rid of all those by now, and I worked on campus in the business division so I got to know a lot of those professors. It was kind of fun. I liked it.
- Blanche Touhill: Did you work when you went to the community college?
- Shirley Breeze: Yes, I did.
- Blanche Touhill: Where did you work then?
- Shirley Breeze: Centralia had a dress factory and I worked in the afternoons in the office. At that time, it was piecemeal. They'd get little tickets for each little piece they did and so we had to count the tickets and calculate their pay and deal with the union when there was a mistake or they perceived us making a mistake.
- Blanche Touhill: So you had to be very careful?
- Shirley Breeze: Right. I learned a lot from that job.
- Blanche Touhill: And you had to save everything, though, just in case there was a question.
- Shirley Breeze: Right, and then we had to go dig in the...they had a basement under the building, go dig there, old files when they would complain. It was an interesting job. Actually, I really did like it.
- Blanche Touhill: And did you work, like, four hours a day?
- Shirley Breeze: Yes, something like that, uh-huh.
- Blanche Touhill: You didn't work at night?
- Shirley Breeze: No. They weren't open at night.

Blanche Touhill: Now when you went to the community college, you lived at home?

Shirley Breeze: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: But when you went to Carbondale, did you board?

Shirley Breeze: No, I lived in a dorm.

Blanche Touhill: You did?

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Were there many girls in the dorm?

Shirley Breeze: Oh, yes, it was really pretty full. I lived in Woody Hall first and then in Thompson Point. It was really a lot of girls.

Blanche Touhill: Did you display leadership anyplace along the line? Or you were so busy working and going to school?

Shirley Breeze: I was probably always telling people what to do but I'm not sure that...I didn't have any real leadership positions in any organization or anything at that point.

Blanche Touhill: But you were always a manager?

Shirley Breeze: Right.

Blanche Touhill: Did you tell your brothers and sisters what to do?

Shirley Breeze: Yes, I did. I still do.

Blanche Touhill: Are you the oldest?

Shirley Breeze: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: So you were in charge?

Shirley Breeze: Right, I still am always telling them what to do. I think once I got into teaching and I saw the lack of leadership in some of the teachers' organizations and some of the just general operation of the school, I think that's when I really got geared up toward telling people what to do.

Blanche Touhill: Did the teachers have a union in those days?

Shirley Breeze: No. When I went to start teaching in East Alton, Wood River, it was NEA which is a union really and I became active in that.

Blanche Touhill: You did?

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: And you decided to step up? Why did you decide to step up?

Shirley Breeze: Because the leadership was so bad, or at least I perceived it to be bad and I thought, I could do better than that. I was sitting back in the back of the room looking at it, thinking I can do better than that. Literally, that's what I thought and I don't know whether I did or not but that's how I got started.

Blanche Touhill: Did your mother rely on you when she went to work and you were in charge?

Shirley Breeze: She pretty much did, yes. She always seemed to be asking me what I thought and whatever I thought, she'd do, you know, "Should I buy this carpet?" "Should I do this," "Should I do that?" So I think that she liked to be a follower rather than a leader.

Blanche Touhill: But she pointed you all in the right direction?

Shirley Breeze: Yes, she did.

Blanche Touhill: And you all took it?

Shirley Breeze: And we all took it.

Blanche Touhill: So, that's another thing, you can point people in the right direction but if they don't want to take it...

Shirley Breeze: That's right.

Blanche Touhill: Did you rise to leadership in the NEA?

Shirley Breeze: Yes, I was a local chair...president, whatever they called them.

Blanche Touhill: And what do they do? Do you negotiate with the principal or the board or what?

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm. They have lots of lobbying for legislation at the state capitals and they do a lot of other things. People think they fight with the administration but they really do a lot of education. I didn't join them when I got out of the high school arena but they are a leadership building group.

Blanche Touhill: So you learned to lobby as well as being a leader in the school?

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Did the men and women earn the same amount of money?

Shirley Breeze: Yes, they did.

Blanche Touhill: Was that due to NEA or was that just Illinois law, or custom, I guess, maybe? School board by school board, I assume.

Shirley Breeze: They had a standard pay chart and if you came in at this level, whatever your education was, then you moved like this. So that's the way it was. Some people now are complaining about that kind of structure.

Blanche Touhill: You felt it was good?

Shirley Breeze: I felt it was good. I didn't see poor teaching. I haven't seen poor teaching really in very many situations in my educational life, especially at East Alton, Wood River, at Parkway, at Meramac. There were just really good teachers, I thought, so I didn't think that was a bad thing but I guess if you are in a situation where there is a lot of bad teaching, you might think otherwise.

Blanche Touhill: With the NEA system as you've experienced it, could you get rid of a bad teacher?

Shirley Breeze: You can but it is difficult, yes, and I was never in a situation where I had to even propose getting rid of a teacher or sit on a panel to get rid of a teacher or anything so I don't know how that all worked.

Blanche Touhill: Did you convince the board to give a raise or not? Were you involved in salary negotiations?

Shirley Breeze: We had a math teacher at East Alton Wood River who, that was kind of his thing so he prepared all the data and whatever and, frankly, I just sat in the back and supported him. He was very good at that. You know, you always propose more than you're going to get and then they come down and so then you...that's life but we were well paid for a little school because that's right in the oil fields over there too, and they had a wonderful, wonderful school building, the latest equipment and just fabulous programs.

Blanche Touhill: So why did you leave them?

Shirley Breeze: Well, I really wanted to come to the community college at that point and I thought I was doing that and it didn't happen so Parkway had an opening for a job that I really liked and I went there and two years later, then the opening came again at Meramac and I took it.

Blanche Touhill: At Parkway, what was it, Central or East?

Shirley Breeze: Central, it was just Central then because...

Blanche Touhill: Oh, that was the only building they had, wasn't it?

Shirley Breeze: Uh-huh.

Blanche Touhill: That's right, I remember when they put that building up and then later when they developed those other...

Shirley Breeze: ...campuses. West was next, I think, and then North and then South, yeah. It grew like wildfire out there.

Blanche Touhill: How did you like Parkway?

Shirley Breeze: I did. I was cheerleading sponsor which I had never cheerleaded in my life and there were a lot of problems with the cheerleaders and a lot of problems with the Pep Club buses and so I had a little bit more than I think I could handle and really thought I should maybe get back to real education. I had student teachers all along and I'd just have to leave them in the morning and go deal with whatever problem had come up at the game yesterday. So it's really kind of interesting.

Blanche Touhill: So you were in more than the teaching? You had moved into a semi administrative position really?

Shirley Breeze: Right.

Blanche Touhill: Now, did they have the NEA? I don't think they did.

Shirley Breeze: I don't think they did either. I didn't. I wasn't involved in it. I don't think they did, really.

Blanche Touhill: So then you moved to Missouri?

Shirley Breeze: Well, when I taught at East Alton, Wood River, I lived in Missouri, just drove across the river and then I just stayed where I was and taught at Parkway, taught at Meramac.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah. So you went to Meramac. Now, business courses would have a lot of women?

Shirley Breeze: We had a lot of women, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: And what were they preparing to be, secretaries?

Shirley Breeze: Mostly secretaries. Some had aspirations for higher jobs and some got them but mostly secretaries or some kind of office work.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah, managers?

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: And did they get an AA Degree?

Shirley Breeze: Yes, they did.

Blanche Touhill: So they could go on for the Bachelor's if they so chose?

Shirley Breeze: Yes, they could, and we encouraged them to do that.

Blanche Touhill: We had a woman on the St. Louis campus, Edith Young.

Shirley Breeze: Oh, I know her well, I know her well.

Blanche Touhill: And she taught those courses for us in the College of Education but I think when Edith retired, I think they faded them out.

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm. Actually, I taught for her here, on this campus.



Blanche Touhill: Oh, did you?

Shirley Breeze: I taught a couple courses for three or four semesters, yes.

Blanche Touhill: And were there many women faculty at Meramac then?

Shirley Breeze: There were in the School of Business. Most of them were in my department. There were a couple economists, Gerry Welch, you probably know Gerry.

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Shirley Breeze: She was there.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, I know her well, the mayor of Webster.

Shirley Breeze: The mayor of Webster, yes, and Pat Hunter was in accounting but each department had maybe one or two but mostly or predominantly men, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: And were the students in those other departments mainly young men?

Shirley Breeze: In accounting, I think there were a lot of women but in economics, I'm sure there were mostly men, young men.

Blanche Touhill: Marketing...

Shirley Breeze: Marketing...

Blanche Touhill: ...would be male?

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: In those early days, there were very few women in our College of Business.

Shirley Breeze: Right.

Blanche Touhill: And when I went to college, I think there were only...well, I had one friend who was a year younger than I was and she was in the College of Business but I don't think there were many women in the College of Business in my generation or your generation.

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm.

- Blanche Touhill: They were in the teacher business. It was My Girl Friday. They were preparing to be My Girl Fridays.
- Shirley Breeze: Right. Well, we've fortunately moved away from that.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, we did, yeah. So talk about Meramac. Were you a leader at Meramac?
- Shirley Breeze: I was the department chair and that required a lot of skills. I didn't get involved in NEA at that point, principally because I was so busy trying to hire and fire and introduce new curricula. Nothing had been done when I moved into the job, for years and so it needed a lot of upgrading and new equipment and all of that.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, and you moved into computers, I'll bet?
- Shirley Breeze: Yes, started with manual typewriters, then we had the electronics and then computers came and we had to shift gears.
- Blanche Touhill: How did you learn about the computers?
- Shirley Breeze: Well, we started with the automatic typewriters that had the disk, so it was kind of a mini computer. It just was the first phase of it and then when the computers came, of course, we junked all of that and went to computers.
- Blanche Touhill: Did the men and women in the community college make the same money?
- Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm.
- Blanche Touhill: And did they get the same assignments, you know, like 15 hours or whatever it was?
- Shirley Breeze: Well, that's an interesting question because I think that I wasn't aware of any discrimination but now that I look back, there were all these little subtle things, like the best office or the best schedule, no 8:00 o'clocks and these kinds of things. So I think it was very subtle but it was there but the pay is the same.
- Blanche Touhill: When you went, was Ann there already?
- Shirley Breeze: No, I think she came a couple years later.

Blanche Touhill: Were there any women in administration?

Shirley Breeze: No. Ron Little and some of those guys were all in the...VPs.

Blanche Touhill: Dr. Clark?

Shirley Breeze: Dr. Clark was there.

Blanche Touhill: And I can't remember who his Vice President for Academic Affairs was.

Shirley Breeze: Well, Pierce was for a while but when I came there, it was this guy that used to be in Kansas.

Blanche Touhill: A small gentleman...

Shirley Breeze: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: ...with brown hair.

Shirley Breeze: Yes, I can't think of his name.

Blanche Touhill: I can't think of his name either. I knew him and I knew Clark.

Shirley Breeze: Clark was a benevolent kind of manager. He kind of went along with the flow.

Blanche Touhill: I think people liked him.

Shirley Breeze: Yes, they did, they really did like him and I liked him.

Blanche Touhill: And that was when the community colleges were just starting.

Shirley Breeze: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: So you got in on the ground level?

Shirley Breeze: Pretty much, a couple years. Of course, I had been in the Illinois community college, had been going for a long time before Missouri started theirs. So I was pretty familiar with...

Blanche Touhill: I think the community college in St. Louis started...I think they started a year before we did, so I think we started in '63 formally, and I think they started in '62.

Shirley Breeze: That sounds about right.

Shirley Breeze 12-17-2014

Blanche Touhill: I came back to St. Louis in '65 and they still had not put up the buildings, any of the buildings yet.

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: They were all around town.

Shirley Breeze: And high school buildings at night.

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Shirley Breeze: That McClure at night, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Where were they with Meramac or you don't remember?

Shirley Breeze: I don't remember.

Blanche Touhill: Probably Kirkwood or something like that.

Shirley Breeze: Yes, probably so.

Blanche Touhill: Because it was so near where they got the property.

Shirley Breeze: Right.

Blanche Touhill: But it was fascinating to me. I met Kosan and I thought, there is a smart man.

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm, had good vision.

Blanche Touhill: A good visionary, oh, my goodness.

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: And I think he hired good people.

Shirley Breeze: Yes, I think he did, too.

Blanche Touhill: What happened to him?

Shirley Breeze: He retired.

Blanche Touhill: But not from the community. Didn't he go someplace else after the St. Louis?

Shirley Breeze: I think he did for a short time.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah, and then he got out.

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: He was a man you couldn't tell how old he was. But it was a remarkable creation just UMSL was.

Shirley Breeze: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: It was the times.

Shirley Breeze: Yes, it was the right thing for the times.

Blanche Touhill: For the times, yeah. Are you proud of working for the community college?

Shirley Breeze: Oh, I was, I really was. I'd put what we did up against any institution.

Blanche Touhill: The quality?

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm. There were so many opportunities for kids to do extracurricular things, to organize this and run this and I still get the newsletter and I just see all this going on. It's just fabulous.

Blanche Touhill: How long did you remain head of the department?

Shirley Breeze: Twenty-nine years.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness, really?

Shirley Breeze: Uh-huh.

Blanche Touhill: Now, was the department elected or were they appointed by the president?

Shirley Breeze: Well, they were appointed.

Blanche Touhill: But you couldn't be appointed if your staff was unhappy?

Shirley Breeze: Right, you'd get out real fast.

Blanche Touhill: Well, 29 years, that's a record, isn't it?

Shirley Breeze: Yeah...I don't know. I enjoyed it. I had such a good staff, such a good staff.

Blanche Touhill: Did you ever have one that you didn't like?

Shirley Breeze: Yes, and I got rid of a couple but the rest of us who are still alive, we have lunch together every other month so we keep up then.

Blanche Touhill: When did you join AAUW (American Association of University Women)?

Shirley Breeze: I joined AAUW in '65, I think.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, right away when you came over?

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Or you were in that area?

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Were there many women in AAUW at that time?

Shirley Breeze: Oh, it was packed. I was in the North County branch, Ferguson Florissant. There were 150 women in that group. I was amazed and they had all kinds of things going.

Blanche Touhill: And who did they do?

Shirley Breeze: Well, they worked on a lot of bond issues. They worked on the community college bond issue. They worked on special school district bond issue. They, of course, had book groups and they had other activities like that.

Blanche Touhill: Social?

Shirley Breeze: Social.

Blanche Touhill: Or intellectual.

Shirley Breeze: Right. They were, and they still are, a really vibrant organization.

Blanche Touhill: But they don't have 150?

Shirley Breeze: No, we don't.

Blanche Touhill: In North County?

Shirley Breeze: In North County which we should, but we don't.

- Blanche Touhill: You're saying the others still do?
- Shirley Breeze: Well, Ballwin/Chesterfield has 265.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness.
- Shirley Breeze: And they're all active and they're doing things right and left. It's just an amazement. We have six branches in the St. Louis area and I don't know if ours is the smallest. We have 31 members, I think, but they're doing some fabulous things.
- Blanche Touhill: Give me an example of what they do today.
- Shirley Breeze: Well, what AAUW really collaborated and initiated was getting a Virginia Minor in the Hall of Fame in Jefferson City capital because there were seven women and thirty-five men or something like that in the Hall of Fame that they have and so we promoted that and Ballwin, Chesterfield people worked really hard on that.
- Blanche Touhill: So they were lobbying again?
- Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm, and then they got a bus, when we had the actual unveiling, they got a bus together and sent a bus out there so we had all of them. They really are a good group but each little group just kind of does their own thing.
- Blanche Touhill: Do they stand up for women if they believe women are being...
- Shirley Breeze: Oh, yes, and we have a national focus on that so if we need help, they'll come help us on that score.
- Blanche Touhill: AAUW...
- Shirley Breeze: American Association of University Women. Right now we're trying to support the positive revitalization of Ferguson.
- Blanche Touhill: Talk about that.
- Shirley Breeze: Well, actually, tomorrow one of our members is going to go around and talk to the women business owners, the ones she can find and see if we can provide some free advertising for them and do some other things and try to get some help for the women business owners. Of course, we're focusing on women and we've

been donating money to the various groups and going to some of the meetings. I've gone to two.

Blanche Touhill: To the commission meetings?

Shirley Breeze: They won't...well, yes, they will let you but before they even had the commission, they had these meetings around the churches and we were going to them, volunteering.

Blanche Touhill: And speaking for AAUW, for the American Association of University Women.

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm, and we registered voters.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, you've done that?

Shirley Breeze: Uh-huh, we do that about every two years.

Blanche Touhill: But you're now putting a focus on Ferguson?

Shirley Breeze: Right, and we did it at the library, several days at the library.

Blanche Touhill: And are people registering?

Shirley Breeze: Yes, not as many as we'd hoped this time, mostly change of address is what we had. They were very positive and very nice to us and helpful and glad we were there. So just things like that, wherever we can do some real work to help that situation. I think it's just awful, the whole thing is awful.

Blanche Touhill: Well, Ferguson did have an eruption of the police department versus the community in a way.

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Is it still going on?

Shirley Breeze: Well, what I'm seeing now, which is really unfortunate, is people are taking sides. This is this side and this is this side. In fact, in our little group, there are two sides and that's not going to help the situation, if we don't solve that, so we're working on that, see if we can't coalesce and get some real communication going. But it's going to be a long road, I'm afraid.



- Blanche Touhill: Do the teachers from the Ferguson schools belong to AAUW?
- Shirley Breeze: There are some but we have a lot of other people who aren't teachers.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, that's right, it's any woman who has a degree, isn't it?
- Shirley Breeze: Right. We have a chemist; we have a couple government workers, former government workers.
- Blanche Touhill: Are other chapters of AAUW offering their assistance?
- Shirley Breeze: Yes. In fact, they helped us do some voter registration but we haven't gotten them in on this last bit until we know what we're doing first. We're very interrelated, you know. We have an inter branch council that meets.
- Blanche Touhill: Have you been on that?
- Shirley Breeze: Yes, and, in fact, when we call another branch and ask them, "Can you give us this?" they just readily help us so we aren't competitive at all. So it's been a good organization.
- Blanche Touhill: Have you been an officer on the St. Louis AAUW central council?
- Shirley Breeze: Yes, and I've been state president and I've been on the national board and I'm currently on two national committees, a vice chair of one and so I've been up and down the leadership bit on that. They're big on leadership building. They have wonderful materials and they have seminars. They send speakers out on various leadership issues. They're really big on that.
- Blanche Touhill: Do part of your dues go to the national?
- Shirley Breeze: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: So they have some funds in order to redistribute for programs you want to do centrally?
- Shirley Breeze: Right, right.
- Blanche Touhill: Are they interested in Ferguson?

Shirley Breeze: Yes, they are. They keep asking us, are we okay, but then we say, "Well, we're fine. When we need help, we'll ask you if we can figure out what we're wanting to do." I'm...I don't know...dismayed.

Blanche Touhill: How do you account for your leadership, just you're a manager?

Shirley Breeze: I think that part of it is because I'm its oldest child, you know, and I just felt like I had to do something, coral these kids and do whatever it takes.

Blanche Touhill: And that had led to you going into AAUW?

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm, and the values that AAUW has, I just...

Blanche Touhill: What are the values?

Shirley Breeze: They support all equity issues: equal pay; all of that. We have a LAF fund that...

Blanche Touhill: What's an LAF?

Shirley Breeze: Legal Advocacy Fund.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, so you can go to the courts?

Shirley Breeze: Right, and we do. We hire lawyers and go support a pay and equity, whatever, or discrimination issues. We've had a case here in St. Louis and we went down and sat in the courtroom and helped this gal and they supplied the money. They supplier her with ten or twelve thousand dollars.

Blanche Touhill: The lawyer fees?

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Did she win?

Shirley Breeze: Well, they kind of settled, like, half and half.

Blanche Touhill: I mean, did she get what she wanted?

Shirley Breeze: She got something out of it, yeah, pretty much.

Blanche Touhill: Not what she wanted but she got...

- Shirley Breeze: She got something.
- Blanche Touhill: And she got recognition, and then the company knew that AAUW would surface again?
- Shirley Breeze: Well, we hope. They do a lot of things like that and they're very supportive of the local and the state groups. If you need something, they're very supportive of it and they're really very financially stable at the national level because they've been so well managed over the years that we're not like some of those organizations that are barely making it and some aren't. We're financially stable.
- Blanche Touhill: Does it give you satisfaction?
- Shirley Breeze: Yes, it does, and we support education, support healthcare issues, all of those kinds of things that we think are important for women...work life balance, childcare, Equal Rights Amendment, on and on and on.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, what do you say is the basis of your success? I know you say to me, well, your mother trusted you and obviously your siblings trusted you to give advice and to guide them but why do you think you succeeded so in the AAUW as well?
- Shirley Breeze: Well, I would like to say it was competence but it really probably wasn't. It was probably a lack of leadership and I jumped in.
- Blanche Touhill: Again?
- Shirley Breeze: Again. At the time that I first became a leader, I just was a member for a while and then they were looking for a local treasurer and I, of course, had...
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, you understood that.
- Shirley Breeze: I had accounting background and all that and you fill out a little card that tells what your expertise is and so they flipped through the cards and they didn't know me and I didn't know them but they called and said, "We need a treasurer" and so I said, oh, well, I guess I can do that. It can't be very difficult. And from there it

just moved up to next level, next level and then local president and then state president.

Blanche Touhill: But you were willing to step forward?

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm, because I really do like organizational work, I really do like it. I think it provides a lot of service to the community and to other women and it helps me, it gives me a good feeling, so I like it.

Blanche Touhill: Well, now that you've retired, what do you do with your time?

Shirley Breeze: Well, I've got a commitment every day this week, it's a typical week. I'm a registered lobbyist with the State of Missouri so when the session starts in January through May, I go down once a week, every Tuesday and lobby and that kind of takes up a lot.

Blanche Touhill: And what are you lobbying for this term?

Shirley Breeze: Well, whatever the proposals are. They tell me there's going to be a new pay equity proposal so we'll be lobbying for that. We try to lobby for the ERA, of course, it doesn't go anywhere every year.

Blanche Touhill: Well, that was Sue Shearer. She was the big...

Shirley Breeze: I know. Bless her heart.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, it lost in Missouri by one vote, I think.

Shirley Breeze: Uh-huh, something like that. And then, we think they should increase healthcare and they should do all those kinds of things so if there's some good legislation on that, we work on that or if there's some bad, we try to...

Blanche Touhill: And do you speak for AAUW?

Shirley Breeze: Sometimes, and sometimes we speak as individuals. We have a state coalition of which AAUW is a big member, the Missouri Women's Network, and often we speak for that group. The league is in that and caucus and all of those people.

Blanche Touhill: So you go testify?

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm.

- Blanche Touhill: And where do you get your data?
- Shirley Breeze: Most of it comes from AAUW, actually. Now, NEA provides us with a lot of its education-related but we get it from organizations or sometimes we do some research but usually we get it from an organization.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, you need data in order to testify...
- Shirley Breeze: Right.
- Blanche Touhill: So it's not just all anecdotal.
- Shirley Breeze: Right, but, like pay equity, it's easy to come by. There are 50 websites that have good information on them.
- Blanche Touhill: Do you think pay equity is going to get better?
- Shirley Breeze: Not in the foreseeable future, I don't think, not in Missouri. We are working for raising the minimum wage.
- Blanche Touhill: Do you think that's going to change?
- Shirley Breeze: No. Well, the legislature is very conservative right now in Missouri, of course, and so it's very difficult to get some of these issues any visibility at all actually.
- Blanche Touhill: Do you have trouble getting into the offices of the representatives and the senators?
- Shirley Breeze: Well, sometimes, but frequently they'll talk to us and just tell us that they're not going to vote for it. If they're around, they usually talk to us. We've had a couple who wouldn't but they have their own agenda.
- Blanche Touhill: Do the women legislators help you?
- Shirley Breeze: Some of them do.
- Blanche Touhill: And some of them don't?
- Shirley Breeze: And some of them don't. That's right. Like, Margo McNeil up from North County, she's a wonderful source for us. Sharon Pace, a lot of those women, but then we have lots who aren't. Actually, the

most forward thinking legislators that are women are from St. Louis. They're the best. Jill Chupe, she is just the greatest. So we have some good ones here.

Blanche Touhill: Now, Jill is in the senate?

Shirley Breeze: She just got elected to the senate.

Blanche Touhill: Had she been in the House?

Shirley Breeze: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: And so she was term limited out?

Shirley Breeze: No.

Blanche Touhill: No, she just moved. There was an opening and she moved into it.

Shirley Breeze: There was an opening and she...mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: And she won rather well, didn't she?

Shirley Breeze: Well, not real well.

Blanche Touhill: But she won.

Shirley Breeze: But she won, yes.

Blanche Touhill: And that's a district that can go either way.

Shirley Breeze: Right, yes.

Blanche Touhill: So her reputation helped?

Shirley Breeze: Yes. She works so hard.

Blanche Touhill: Did you work on that campaign?

Shirley Breeze: I did.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, you did?

Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm. Deb Lavender in Kirkwood won hers. That's another district that goes either way. I helped her and I, of course, always help Margo as she and I have been friends for 30 years.

Blanche Touhill: But you never ran for office yourself?

- Shirley Breeze: I never did. I've been asked but it's too late and I'm, I think, better positioned to help these women.
- Blanche Touhill: Let me ask you two other questions: Is there some award that you've received that you're really very proud of...or awards?
- Shirley Breeze: I've been fortunate to receive so many wonderful awards but really, the one that I really value the most, I think, is the Women Legislators Award. They used to, every year, give an award to a woman, citizen of Missouri who really exemplified what the legislative women were trying to do and I got that, oh, it's been about six or eight years ago, and that, I think, was really...
- Blanche Touhill: Had you worked some special project?
- Shirley Breeze: Well, they just had seen me work down at Jeff City every Tuesday.
- Blanche Touhill: So it was the body of your work?
- Shirley Breeze: Right, every Tuesday down there tramping around, trying to...and we ask them what they want us to work on and so then we work on that, if it's viable, if we think it's viable.
- Blanche Touhill: How many AAUW women go down with you on Tuesdays, or do they go down on different days?
- Shirley Breeze: Well, normally we try to have a little group of three or four that meet. Mary Mosley from Fulton, and I are the two leaders and then we just say, "Is there anyone who can come down," and then we take them to their legislators.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, I see, yes.
- Shirley Breeze: Try to work with them and if you have more than that, you kind of get lost in the shuffle. But then we have one day where we have just a big legislative day.
- Blanche Touhill: And they all come from all over the state, yeah.
- Shirley Breeze: Right, and then they're kind of on their own. We tell them how to do it and where to go and a lot of them are very astute women so they really know those issues, which is good.

- Blanche Touhill: Yes, you have to know what you're talking about.
- Shirley Breeze: Right.
- Blanche Touhill: Is there another award or was that the main one?
- Shirley Breeze: Well, I got a couple of AAUW awards and an AAUW endowment named after me.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, that's nice.
- Shirley Breeze: And it's been funded, fully funded now. I hear from a little lady every year, new lady gets my money.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, one person gets your money, for a scholarship or what?
- Shirley Breeze: Uh-huh, for a project or for further education. This year it's a little gal from Iowa who's working on some kind of scientific something or other and she's getting my money. It's kind of interesting, to have somebody write you and say they're using your money.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, and it's with an institution so it's going to go on and on even after you are not around.
- Shirley Breeze: Mm-hmm.
- Blanche Touhill: And if you had been born 50 years earlier, what would your life be like?
- Shirley Breeze: Well, I suspect that I would not have gotten a college education because women were really, really not promoted 50 years ago. I can think of one of my grandmothers who was the smartest person I've ever met and I don't even think she finished elementary school. So the opportunities would have not been there; the encouragement would not have been there; probably I wouldn't have even thought of it either.
- Blanche Touhill: Would you have been in organizations, women's organizations?
- Shirley Breeze: Well, I wouldn't have been in AAUW.
- Blanche Touhill: No, you wouldn't have been in AAUW, that's right.



- Shirley Breeze: I don't know what I would have been in but I probably would have done something.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, I think your strength is your management and leadership so I think it would have gone somewhere but I don't know where it would have gone.
- Shirley Breeze: I don't know either.
- Blanche Touhill: Would you have stayed on a farm? Do you think you would have married a farmer?
- Shirley Breeze: May have. That's what most of them did in those days.
- Blanche Touhill: Did your friends from the two-room schoolhouse basically stay on the farms?
- Shirley Breeze: Well, about half and half probably. When they got to high school and saw all the value in...because that was such a good high school that they kind of increased the vision of a lot of those young women, I think. But I was fortunate then.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, but your mother was the...
- Shirley Breeze: Yes, she was the leader.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, she was the leader.
- Shirley Breeze: Quiet leader.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes. Well, you're a quiet leader.
- Shirley Breeze: Well, I guess I am, go under the radar.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, you go under the radar but they follow you.
- Shirley Breeze: Yes, they do.
- Blanche Touhill: Is there any other organization that you belong to like the AAUW or any charitable group that you work with?
- Shirley Breeze: I work with a lot of charities. I just gave a fundraiser for Mary Grove.
- Blanche Touhill: What's Mary Grove?

- Shirley Breeze: Well, it's this...kind of like a halfway house for young children; like, the police are bringing these kids out of these desperate situations in the middle of the night. It has a beautiful big campus.
- Blanche Touhill: So it takes the mother and the children or it just takes the children?
- Shirley Breeze: Well, it just takes the children.
- Blanche Touhill: Because the mother could be the perpetrator?
- Shirley Breeze: Right.
- Blanche Touhill: Or sticks with the father to be the perpetrator.
- Shirley Breeze: Right.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, I do know of those instances. I used to be on the Presbyterian Family Children's or something and I do know the police do go in and take children out and then put them in various places before it's decided what's going to happen to them or the courts decide they can't go back to the families. So what does Mary Grove do? They take them in in the middle of the night...
- Shirley Breeze: Right, and they house them as long as necessary. They have big dorms. It's a huge campus on the river.
- Blanche Touhill: I don't know where it is.
- Shirley Breeze: Well, it's off of Shackelford.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, okay. It's North County?
- Shirley Breeze: Uh-huh.
- Blanche Touhill: And it's run by?
- Shirley Breeze: Well, it's run by the Catholic Archdiocese but it's not really Catholic.
- Blanche Touhill: But it's one of their charities.
- Shirley Breeze: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: It's part of Catholic Charities probably.

- Shirley Breeze: Right, but it's really non-sectarian, and they have, as I said, these dormitories and house mother and house fathers. They have 250 children on that campus.
- Blanche Touhill: Boys and girls?
- Shirley Breeze: Boys and girls.
- Blanche Touhill: At what age do they leave?
- Shirley Breeze: They leave at 18 but they're working on a beyond that and they've isolated a part of the campus to handle...so these people can get some skills. It's just a wonderful place.
- Blanche Touhill: So Mary Grove has segregated some of these older children in order to teach them a trade or some way they can come out of Mary Grove and make a living.
- Shirley Breeze: Right. So that's one thing that we're very appreciative of, their community.
- Blanche Touhill: I think there are other places like that that are beginning to think it's not enough to release them at the age of 18 into the world because they have no skills.
- Shirley Breeze: Right.
- Blanche Touhill: And that they're trying to figure out ways to handle that.
- Shirley Breeze: That's right.
- Blanche Touhill: And if they go out in the world and they're not succeeding, they can come back in safety. Is there anything else you want to talk about, the war on women or...I mean, that's in everybody's conversation these days.
- Shirley Breeze: Yes, and it's such a subtle, terrible thing that's occurring. People are saying to me, "Oh, you know, women are getting good jobs; they're having good educations. You should just be very satisfied" but we are not because the legislation that is being proposed, it's like Chinese water torture, I always say, a little bit of this is picking away at every little piece of good legislation we have, especially the choice issues and pay equity obviously and any of the others.

So it's kind of a real subtle war on women that is, again, going under the radar. People don't recognize it and they think we're crazy for being upset but it's really working terribly on women's rights and women's ability to be a full contributing member of society.

Blanche Touhill: How do you turn that around?

Shirley Breeze: Well, we're trying with stopping legislation but it's hard to stop, I'm telling you, and you just have to get people to recognize that what they're seeing proposed as new legislation that is so special is really not special. It's really detrimental to women. Anything proposed by ALEC which is that national legislative council, is usually against women. It's just unfortunate.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I know that AAUW will continue to be aware of that and to alert women to that potential danger but I want to thank you for the interview. It is always delightful to talk to you and I know you've been a leader of AAUW, I think, all of my professional life.

Shirley Breeze: Probably.

Blanche Touhill: You were known to me as the leader of the North County AAUW so it was a pleasure to meet with you today.

Shirley Breeze: Well, thank you very much for giving me this opportunity.