

An Interview with
Janet Brown

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

8 August 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 11

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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.

Janet Brown 8-8-2014

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MISSOURI-ST. LOUIS

WOMEN AS CHANGE AGENTS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

AUGUST 8, 2014

JANET BROWN INTERVIEWED BY DR. BLANCHE M. TOUHILL

Blanche Touhill: Would you introduce yourself?

Janet Brown: I'm Janet Brown.

Blanche Touhill: Would you talk about your childhood: your parents, your siblings, the neighborhood, your grandparents, cousins, anybody you want to mention who was a part of your life as a child and who really might have said to you, "You really have ability, Janet, and you ought to do this" or "not do that" or something and include in that any elementary or secondary school experience you had. Were you a leader? So, just talk.

Janet Brown: I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania but my family moved to St. Louis when I was a little girl so I grew up in Des Peres which is a suburb of St. Louis. My parents were both very well educated and valued academic achievement very much and expected that their children would be very bright and get good grades and go to college. When I look back, I think, well, that was a great advantage that I had because I work now with kids, teenagers whose parents didn't go to college and who have no expectation that they will go to college and I think it was good for me to have that push. On the other hand, I think I grew up feeling like I never quite lived up to their standards. I had an older sister and she never got anything but an A, from 1st grade through college. So, that was setting the bar pretty high. I didn't get that high. I had an aunt, my Aunt Molly, who...you don't hear that word, "genius" so much anymore but in those days they said, well, Molly was a genius. She got her medical degree when she was only in her 20's and became a pediatric pathologist and wrote medical textbooks.

Blanche Touhill: What year was that roughly?

Janet Brown: Well, let's see. So I was born in '52 and that would have been when she was kind of at the height of her career and at the same time, was married

to a doctor and had a big family. So, again, she was setting the bar pretty high and I remember when I got my PhD. before I was 30, my parents said, "Well, you know, your Aunt Molly got her MD when she was..." ...I don't know, it was 27 or something. So there was that kind of expectation at our house, that everyone would be very bright. I think it was great that my dad, particularly, who grew up with her...that was his sister...had that expectation that his girls were going to be as smart as he was or smarter, because I don't think that was always the case in the 1950's and the early '60s, that everybody had that expectation. Then I went to a Catholic girls high school, Nerinx Hall and I think that my parents liked that particular high school for me and my older sister because it was college preparatory. They made much of that. There was no home economics class. Everyone learned to type because in college you were going to need to type. I was the first class that wasn't required to take Latin. I thought, thank God, but there was a high academic standard. For example, up until that year, everybody took two years of Latin, I think, my older sister took two years of Latin. So, that all-girl environment, I think, also, when I looked back later and when I worked in public co-ed schools, I saw that whereas in a co-ed school, the boys would be the president of student council; they would be the athletes; they would be the editor of the school newspaper. At an all-girls school, that's just not an option. So I was the editor of the high school paper and my friends were basketball stars or they were in the student council or whatever and I think, again, I don't know, we've lost that a little bit. There aren't so many of those all-girl/all-boy schools anymore but I think, to me, because I was not a natural leader; I was a shy person. My older sister was the bossy one, you know, that organized everything in the neighborhood. I think in a big co-ed school I would never have had the experiences that I had. I was in the school plays and the school newspaper and the school literary magazine and all of those things were great for me because I started to make friends that were girls that had the same interests that I had and I felt like I could do...nothing was inhibiting me from accomplishing whatever I could accomplish. My mother, even though she stopped teaching when she married my dad...that was the way in those days...but no one in our family ever thought of her as any less intelligent or any less capable than my father. That was just, she had made that choice, to raise her children instead.

Blanche Touhill: Did she work up until the time she was pregnant or did she quit when she got married?

Janet Brown: She quit when she got married. So she was the only child...this is sort of an interesting story...her mother...so this is my grandmother, so this is back in the 1920's...her mother married and was unhappily married and had a baby which was my mother and decided to divorce. They were living in her in-laws' house and she was made to scrub floors and she thought of herself as a professional because she had taught school and she didn't like married life. So she decided to divorce. Well, she was Catholic and divorce was forbidden but she also could not go back to school teaching as a married woman.

Blanche Touhill: That's right.

Janet Brown: Married women could not teach. So, she was caught in a double bind and the way that she solved it was she got a papal dispensation to divorce or legally separate on the condition that she would not remarry. That was the church's condition, you see: "Okay, you say you're single in the eyes of the State of Pennsylvania but you can never remarry." So that's harsh. Then she was able to teach school because she was a single woman, you see, so she had to be single to teach...

Blanche Touhill: Yes, so she got herself single, okay.

Janet Brown: She made an appeal to the Pope and she got herself single, exactly, with some severe restrictions there. In the depth of the Depression, I think they were very poor, she raised my mother on her own and taught school. So, you see how on both sides of my family, there were unusually independent, strong women and lots of teachers, teachers and doctors mostly.

Blanche Touhill: And you knew that story?

Janet Brown: Oh, yes. My mother told that story many times, not so much in a proud way because for her, she had a very hard childhood and I think her mother kind of resented her at times. I don't know. She would have...who knows? I mean, she couldn't remarry but she wouldn't have had to work maybe because she wouldn't have had a child to support.

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

- Janet Brown: So then when she grew up, her mother felt like, "Well, now you should get a job teaching and support me because I supported you all those years," and so there was a big family rift when my mother married and moved away and didn't support her mother. I mean, that was the way, I think, in those times, right? You depended on your child to support you, and especially in this case when there were just the two of them. So she didn't do that. So I think my mother...I guess everyone has some regrets but she had some regrets that she was kind of distant from her mother. She taught school for a few years.
- Blanche Touhill: And then she wanted to raise a family?
- Janet Brown: And then she met my father and fell in love and wanted to raise a family. So she had times when she would say, "Well, I'm living vicariously through you kids."
- Blanche Touhill: Oh!
- Janet Brown: Not to put on any pressure.
- Blanche Touhill: And did you have more than one sister?
- Janet Brown: I had two sisters. I was the middle child so I had that older, high-achieving sister...
- Blanche Touhill: And what about your younger sister?
- Janet Brown: Okay, so the oldest really lived up to all their requirements. Then came me, I lived up to some of them, and then came my younger sister, who really struggled the most, I think, to live up to my parents' high standards, although she has a Master's Degree, she teaches special education, she's married. Any objective observer would say she came out pretty successfully.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes. Well, when you played, did you just play with your sisters or did you play with the neighborhood?
- Janet Brown: There were kids in our neighborhood, on our street that would come down the block or up the block, we were in a nice suburban cul-de-sac so it was pretty safe. We could run around the street, ride our bikes. There was a big old tree we would climb up and also, our basement, our unfinished basement was pretty much turned over to kind of a big

playroom. We played lots of make-believe games. There was a big trunk of old clothes that we would play dress-up, all kinds of games. So my mother taught English and Speech and Drama and so did I and so does my older sister and so did my grandmother.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness, yes.

Janet Brown: So, putting on plays, putting on shows, that was very normal at our house.

Blanche Touhill: And did you write or produce? I guess you acted.

Janet Brown: Well, right. I mean, it was a fine line between just playing and putting on shows. But I do remember...and I think this had a big impact on me...when my little sister was two years old, she got very sick. She got pneumonia and then it developed complications and for a year...for a while, one of her lungs collapsed, all these terrible things. So poor little kid, they didn't keep her in the hospital for a year but she would be there on and off and the rest of the time she had to stay indoors, through the whole winter. They didn't want her out in the cold. So, to help, I think, mostly Liddy, mostly my little sister, my dad started a tradition: Every Sunday evening, he and my sisters and I, we would put on a show for my mother and we were the Sunday Night Players and we would enact fairytales and we would rehearse in the basement. Liddy would, we would try to give her a starring role that didn't have too many lines. She would get to be the princess or something and then my sister and I and my dad would play all the other parts and my mother would come down and be the audience.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, how wonderful!

Janet Brown: It was wonderful. When my sister started to get better and my dad didn't want to do it anymore, we were all so disappointed because we had so much fun.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, absolutely, it does sound wonderful. So your family read a lot?

Janet Brown: Oh, yes. We would go to the library and the joke was...we'd go to the county library, we'd come in every two weeks with this big stack of books and my mother would say, "Well, now you can go back into business

because we're bringing all your books back." So we all started reading at an early age and got read aloud to a lot and we're great readers, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Did you like to read plays?

Janet Brown: I never read a play until I was in high school. That wasn't something you could check out at the library.

Blanche Touhill: When you went to Nerinx, was there a teacher of drama that you thought was good or...

Janet Brown: Yes, there were good teachers of drama. I'll tell you, since you said that this was part of the question, like, was there a teacher that really influenced you...I don't think it was so much the drama teacher but there was a teacher and she was one of the nuns and I think she taught religion. She was not one of my primary teachers but she found me sitting in the hall looking sad as a senior in high school trying to figure out where I should go to college and what I should major in and just feeling kind of overwhelmed by all of those decisions and she said, "What's wrong?" and I sort of told her all this and she said, "Well, I think knowing you, Janet, whatever you do, you will major in magnificence." This had a huge impact on me because you can tell that's not how I saw myself from all my other stories. I saw myself as kind of, if I work really hard, maybe I can pull this off, you know, but I did not see myself as so full of potential.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah, but she saw it in you?

Janet Brown: I guess she did.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, she saw it in you.

Janet Brown: And so that did make a big impact on me. I put that in my pocket and kept it, you know?

Blanche Touhill: Yes, indeed. So where did you go to college?

Janet Brown: I went to Mizzou.

Blanche Touhill: How did you choose Mizzou. It's such a big, big place.

Janet Brown: Yes, and the first year I was just...I nearly gave up and came home. I was so homesick and frightened. My mother, who didn't really want me to move away from home, I think, said, "Well, we can afford for you to go to

the state university if you want to live away from home, or, if you stay here in St. Louis, we can afford for you to go to one of these small, private, all-women's universities.

Blanche Touhill: Really, Webster, Fontbonne, Maryville...

Janet Brown: Exactly, which is where she saw me. She thought I'd be safer there, because that was the other piece of the all-girls school in her mind, keep her girls away from men. And so, she thought that would be perfect and then she'd keep me closer to home but, much as I loved my family, I was dying to get out of that house and be on my own. My older sister was at Mizzou. She was a senior at Mizzou so that made it seem a little less scary and I was thinking of majoring either in education or in journalism and of course Mizzou has a wonderful journalism school.

Blanche Touhill: Well, they have them both but the journalism school is famous.

Janet Brown: Yes, and more unusual, at least back then.

Blanche Touhill: For women especially.

Janet Brown: Yeah. So that's what I picked and, as I said, I think only pride kept me, my freshman year, from saying, I've made a terrible mistake.

Blanche Touhill: Now, did you choose journalism?

Janet Brown: I didn't. You know what I did? I wrote for the school paper, The Man Eater.

Blanche Touhill: Sure.

Janet Brown: They wouldn't allow you to choose your major as a freshman in those days. I don't think I was even able to take a journalism course but I was able to work on the school paper and I enjoyed it. I felt a little frightened of some aspects of it: the notion of covering traffic accidents and tragedies and interviewing people who didn't want to be interviewed. That was a little scary to me because I was a little shy and, after freshman year, I got a summer job as a Girl Scout counselor at a sleep-away Girl Scout camp, Cedar Ledge where I had been a camper. So I got a job there and I really enjoyed it and felt like I could be good at it. And so, that made me lean away from journalism and towards education. Then I had to pick at some point. So I did eventually...this was a while later...get a minor in

journalism...you could take so many courses and you could add that certification.

Blanche Touhill: So you can write?

Janet Brown: I like to write and I, later on, wrote two books that have been published about...academic books, out of print by now.

Blanche Touhill: What were the titles of those books?

Janet Brown: Out of print by now. The first one was based on my dissertation.

Blanche Touhill: What was the title then?

Janet Brown: It was "Feminist Drama: Definition and Analysis" because, you see, back then, that notion of feminist drama was...I had to fight hard to persuade my doctoral committee that this was even a legitimate area of study because it was so new.

Blanche Touhill: And was that the '60s and the '70s...the '70s?

Janet Brown: '70s, so around...

Blanche Touhill: The people on your committee, were there any women?

Janet Brown: Yes, I had to change my...I didn't have to but I did...I had to go to my male adviser in graduate school and say, "I'm going to write about feminist drama and I want to change" and got the one female on the faculty to be my adviser instead. I didn't have any choices. It had to be her, you see, because I knew these men and I knew that they would not support this idea, and I went to her and I told her.

Blanche Touhill: She agreed?

Janet Brown: She agreed. Then I recruited some women, one from the English Department and one from other departments but that had that interest in feminism or in women's studies and so I wound up with a committee that was a combination of some male and some female but not all in the Speech and Drama Department.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, and that was allowed?

Janet Brown: They allowed it, but I'll tell you, it was a struggle every step of the way.

Blanche Touhill: I know but you solved the problem that a lot of people don't cross until they get further on in the program. You solved it from the beginning.

Janet Brown: Well, I solved it at the point that I started on my PhD., yeah.

Blanche Touhill: That's what I'm saying, yes. You didn't wait until you had finished your dissertation?

Janet Brown: And now what will I do, yeah. Maybe everybody that writes a dissertation has this point of being ready to tear your hair out but I think I had more than usual that problem because each person on the committee would have such a different outlook as to what should and shouldn't be included that, oh, I wrote and I rewrote and I rewrote.

Blanche Touhill: But the chair of your committee really can help in that.

Janet Brown: And she was great because she had gotten through this academic process at an earlier time...Carla...and Carla shared with me what she knew. Just to make the proposal, you had to have a bibliography. Well, what was my bibliography going to do? Hardly anyone had written about this, which is why it was interesting to me. So I went to Carla, I said, "What am I going to do?" She said, "Well, any other field where anybody's written about women...and maybe it's not drama; maybe it's literature; maybe it's history; maybe it's...whatever it is, you need to go and put that in your...read that, put that in this bibliography." She said, "Your bibliography needs to be twice as long as anybody else's," and what she was saying to me was actually a general rule: if you just do twice as much work as one of the guys doing the predictable thing, then you can still succeed. It was such good advice: just bear down and work really hard at it and then what could they say? Most people had eight books in their bibliography and I had twenty. And the same thing as I went along the road.

Blanche Touhill: Well, it was such a new field.

Janet Brown: It was.

Blanche Touhill: There were very few women studies courses in those days.

Janet Brown: That's right.

Blanche Touhill: Did you take any? You probably took a couple.

Janet Brown: I took everything that there was at Mizzou at that time. I took one in Art History and I took...you know, because you could derive from that some principles.

Blanche Touhill: Of course you could.

Janet Brown: But, yes.

Blanche Touhill: You had to really put the curriculum together yourself.

Janet Brown: Yeah, but it was so interesting, so much more interesting, I think.

Blanche Touhill: Go back to your undergraduate. Did you work on the school newspaper? I know you said the first year but did you continue?

Janet Brown: The first year I did and then I decided that I was going to be an educator...well, education major and I got all involved in the Theater Department, even though I wasn't a Theater major. I wasn't quite brave enough. I felt, my mother had always said to me, you know, "Get a teaching degree. You can always get a job," and of course, especially in those days, that was good advice for a woman. There weren't very many fields that you could depend on, plus, as I say, I enjoyed teaching. So I didn't switch over to a Theater major because that seemed very risky as far as being able to support yourself and that was a big thing in our family, all we girls. I don't think every family was told this. We were all told, "It's great if you can get married and your husband can support you. That's great. But don't depend on that. You need to be able to support yourself." Anyway, I discovered that you didn't have to be a theater major to try out for the plays. I didn't always get in. It was a big department but they always needed people in the small roles and they needed people to paint scenery. So, pretty much my friends became the Theater Department and they were like a big family.

Blanche Touhill: So then, as they progressed, they'd want you in the plays?

Janet Brown: The professors cast the plays. I don't think my talent was really acting and so I did not ever get the leads or anything.

Blanche Touhill: No, but I'm saying, you always had a position of some kind?

Janet Brown: I had a place there, yes. I would go in the costume shop and I was good at sewing and I would help out wherever I could. I really enjoyed it so I was willing to take my chances. Then, when I was a graduate student...

Blanche Touhill: Stop for just a minute. When you took journalism courses, did you enjoy that?

Janet Brown: Mm-hmm, I did, and later on in my life, I did work for a year for a newspaper but I continued to feel like it was kind of a confining...there was something about it, the story must be so many words long; you must go whether this is of interest to you or not; whether you even think it's right or not, go and interview people who are suffering and may not want to talk to you and the type of writing, it's quite formulaic.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, who, what, why and where or something like that?

Janet Brown: Exactly, yeah, and later on when I worked on a newspaper, that was true. I got very good at it but it's not very interesting after a while.

Blanche Touhill: How many women were at Mizzou in the undergraduate school, in proportion to the men?

Janet Brown: It didn't seem overweighted towards men or women but I've never seen any statistics. I don't know.

Blanche Touhill: Was there a difference in your freshman and sophomore classes from your junior/senior?

Janet Brown: You mean as to how many girls and how many guys?

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Janet Brown: I don't think so but by the time I got to graduate school, definitely there were more men...

Blanche Touhill: ...than there were women?

Janet Brown: Yup.

Blanche Touhill: Did you have trouble getting into graduate school?

Janet Brown: No. In fact, there was some sort of program where, it was called the five-year Master's and if you were an honors student and something, something, you could just go right into the Master's and it would only

add one year. So that's when I switched over to speech and drama as a major and I already had a few courses.

Blanche Touhill: But you had your education courses so you could teach?

Janet Brown: Yup. I had my certification in English and Speech and Drama and Journalism.

Blanche Touhill: So you switched over and you got your degree really in the English/Drama/Theater kind of program?

Janet Brown: Yeah, right, so it wasn't a big switch.

Blanche Touhill: But then you got your teaching certificate in addition?

Janet Brown: Mm-hmm, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: So you really had a full load as you went through?

Janet Brown: Yeah, but you know, the further I got...like, freshman year, I really struggled academically and sophomore year somewhat too because I had all those general education courses. I was terrible at math, science, all those required courses. Oh, what a struggle.

Blanche Touhill: But when you got to your junior year...

Janet Brown: But when I was allowed to take the courses in my major areas, English courses, Drama courses, those seemed easy to me. So it's the opposite of what you would think. I've told that sometimes to students, that "if you just hang on, they'll let you take courses in what you're interested in and it will get a lot easier."

Blanche Touhill: Now, were you getting a Master's in Theater? Was that your plan?

Janet Brown: Yes, and I did that.

Blanche Touhill: And you were still in the plays in some way or another?

Janet Brown: Mm-hmm, yes, and more so, the further I got into graduate school, I began to direct some small-scale students and I loved that and then the professors, I don't think they liked me very much but they would allow a graduate student to direct the main stage production and twice they chose me to do that.

Blanche Touhill: What did you direct?

Janet Brown: The first one they had chosen and I think they were, for some reason, it was on the season and nobody to direct it. I don't know what the deal was but it's a Readers Theater, *John Brown's Body*. That was the first main stage production I directed and then a year later, I directed a musical, *Company*, Stephen Sondheim musical. It was a lot of fun.

Blanche Touhill: Do you sing?

Janet Brown: Badly.

Blanche Touhill: Do you dance?

Janet Brown: Well, you know, when you're in theater...I mean, I took a few dance classes. I can pick out a tune on the piano but it's one of the things that I enjoyed about theater really, is that you try your hand at so many things. You don't have to be an expert at any of them. You have to get a little bit involved in the visual arts, you have to be a little bit involved in music and dance.

Blanche Touhill: Did you ever think of writing a play?

Janet Brown: I have written a couple of plays, yeah, a few plays. Later on, when I was teaching, I wrote plays for the kids to perform and one of them has been published in a book of children's plays and I wrote a couple of plays for adults. One of them got production and an award from a community theater, the Market House Theater in Kentucky. So, yes, I have done a little bit of play writing.

Blanche Touhill: When you got your Master's, did you stay for your doctorate or did you break and go to work for a while?

Janet Brown: About the same time that I got my Master's was when I got married, kind of insert Paul into this story at this point.

Blanche Touhill: Now, was Paul a theater major?

Janet Brown: He was a music major and when I directed that musical, he was my music director and we had a great time collaborating. In fact...oh, here's something else I wrote...the way that I really got to know Paul was he was working on his Master's Degree in music composition and he wanted to write a one-act opera and he had asked a friend to write the words, the

libretto and then the friend moved away and I told him I was taking a playwriting class and he asked me if I would write the libretto for his opera and I, having never even attended an opera, felt perfectly confident that I...you know, I look back at myself and I think, whew, you were braver then. He already had an idea what he wanted it to be about and so I wrote this and he would tell me, "Not so many words." An opera libretto is very short as words on the page because the music extends the time and then we recruited all of our music and theater friends to perform in it and one of our friends, as a wedding present, gave us the lighting design. He was a lighting designer. All of our friends were graduate students, like that, and so we put it on in the little theater at Stephens College. That was his Master's thesis. I finished my Master's about the same time, a few months before that and then our wedding was a much smaller production because we had poured all of our attention into this opera.

Blanche Touhill: Were you married in Columbia?

Janet Brown: Mm-hmm, yep, at the Newman Center at the Catholic Student Center where Paul was the music director at that time. So then we had to decide, did we want to stay in Columbia. I got a job teaching high school in Fayette. It was a disaster, not a good school or a good school district and I was inexperienced and it was a big failure.

Blanche Touhill: Where is Fayette?

Janet Brown: Fayette is about a half hour drive from Columbia.

Blanche Touhill: Okay. It's just, I don't know it, but go on.

Janet Brown: Yeah, it's a little town and it was the 1970's where we were but it was like the 1950's in Fayette: big racial issues and all kinds of trouble. Anyway, so then, now what? So I thought, well, maybe go back to graduate school because I really enjoyed that and meanwhile, Paul had a job. He was happy to stay. So I went back to my people I knew in the Theater Department and they offered me a teaching assistantship.

Blanche Touhill: Wonderful.

- Janet Brown: So I didn't have to pay any tuition and I made some money, made a stipend teaching public speaking, many, many sections of public speaking because every student had to take public speaking.
- Blanche Touhill: Actually, I think that's a wonderful requirement.
- Janet Brown: I do, too. I used to tell them, "You may ask yourself, 'Will I ever use Algebra again?' and you may not but you will use public speaking."
- Blanche Touhill: I was required to take public speaking as well when I went to college. I didn't really take it very seriously but when I look back on it, the guidelines that they gave in order to make a speech were right on and I use them still today.
- Janet Brown: I'm sure you do because you do a lot of public speaking.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, and so it was a very worthwhile requirement. Okay, so you finally got your PhD.
- Janet Brown: Mm-hmm.
- Blanche Touhill: And you and Paul decided to do what?
- Janet Brown: Well, I went to the American Theater Association conference and went around, they had 17-minute interviews with colleges that were looking for teachers and I got offered a second interview at the University of Hartford in Connecticut and I flew out there and I interviewed and I got the job.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, that's an urban university.
- Janet Brown: It's in Hartford, Connecticut, mm-hmm.
- Blanche Touhill: And it serves the population, doesn't it?
- Janet Brown: Well, a combination. There were a lot of students from, like, Long Island, the New York area as well, but, yeah. And Paul thought, "Let's move to the East Coast, how exciting!" So, although people looks askance at the idea that we were moving for my job and they would say to me, "What will Paul do?" I got so tired of it, I'd said, "Well, he'll just come along and be my gigolo," and in the interviews, nowadays, I suppose this would be less likely to happen but the people who did those first interviews would say to me, "Well, does your husband know you're here?" I knew I forgot

something! Really? But anyway, I was lucky because one university offered me a job. So we took off, we moved to Hartford. Paul took some graduate music courses but didn't enjoy it and meanwhile, worked for the public radio station and worked as an unpaid intern at the Hartford Symphony and loved that and began to work for them, paid, part-time and then paid, full-time and over the next many years, worked his way up to become the executive director of the Hartford Symphony.

Blanche Touhill: How interesting! You know, that's a perfect kind of job.

Janet Brown: It was the perfect job for him because he's a musician but he also has the management skills and the business sense.

Blanche Touhill: So meanwhile, you were at the university?

Janet Brown: So, meanwhile, I was at the University of Hartford. I got very involved in...I was in the Theatre Department which was tiny, which was fun in a way because I was...

Blanche Touhill: Were you the only woman?

Janet Brown: I was, mm-hmm. At first we were part of the Communication Arts Department, which had one woman and several men, and then they decided for their own reasons to break off so then we were a tiny Theater Department of myself and two men.

Blanche Touhill: Was your salary the same as theirs?

Janet Brown: Don't know. I don't know. So I built up the Theater Department very much: the number of students involved in the plays and the number of people attending the plays and Paul was my music director. We did a musical every year and there was a lot of enthusiasm for that. I did some academic writing but when I came up for tenure, the university had decided that I was part of the College of Arts & Sciences and the Hartt School of Music, another branch of the university, that they should take all of those performing arts courses and move them over and make it the Hartt School of Performing Arts and so one thing that they really didn't need was a tenured faculty member in her 20's who was part of the College of Arts & Sciences. So it is my belief that that's the reason that I didn't get tenure. Of course, you never know, and it was very painful at the time and I will also say that out of all the people who came up for

tenure that year, all the men but one got tenure and none of the women but one got tenure. So we all talked about, should we file a class action suit but nobody could see what the advantage of that would be, really. I mean, you wouldn't get another academic job after that because you'd look like such a troublemaker and did you really want to fight to get back to this university that had kicked you out? So while I was struggling with this, before I knew that I didn't get tenure, I read an article in the newspaper about a project to start a magnet high school of the performing arts and I thought, that is so cool. It just was a very exciting idea to me. And I didn't get tenure and I called up this organization and I said, "Have you hired someone to be the director of this new school?" because it said in this article that they would need to hire someone and then the woman on the phone said, "Can you hold for a minute?" She put me on hold and she transferred me, I found out later, to the head guy of this Capital Region Education Council that was in charge of this project and he talked to me on the phone for about 10 minutes and he said, "I think I want you to come in and interview." It just almost fell in my lap. So anyway, they hired me, a very difficult job.

Blanche Touhill: Let me pause for a minute. Did your doctorate help you get that job?

Janet Brown: I think it did, yes.

Blanche Touhill: And the fact you had taught before.

Janet Brown: I had done a lot of teaching including high school teaching but in the arts, in the performing arts, which they wanted and I had been the head of my tiny department so I had some educational administration experience and later on, that man, John Allison who became kind of a mentor to me...I loved John...later on, he said to me, "We didn't really know what we were going to do and you came in and you sounded like you did so we hired you."

Blanche Touhill: And you had had experience in putting on plays.

Janet Brown: Yes, absolutely.

Blanche Touhill: And they needed that. They needed the theory and the practice.

Janet Brown: You're absolutely right and I often thought about my experience directing plays because it's like 95% organizational, and then 5% the artistic piece.

But if you can't get everybody to sufficient numbers of rehearsals and the sets built and the lights hung and the audience in their seats, then forget it. So I don't think I was a very organized child or teenager; I'm sure I wasn't, but I became a very organized adult and that did help.

Blanche Touhill: Yes. Don't you think, when you did the plays with your father and your sisters, you had to put it together every Sunday night which is not easy.

Janet Brown: Well, you're right.

Blanche Touhill: You had to choose the fairytale; you had to get the costume...

Janet Brown: Right, you're right.

Blanche Touhill: ...and everybody practiced...

Janet Brown: Yes, and put it on.

Blanche Touhill: And put it on.

Janet Brown: So in miniature, it was the same.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, in miniature, it was the same.

Janet Brown: But what I did learn doing this particular job was the importance of just asking people for help, which I was not raised to do but in this situation, literally no one knew exactly how to put together a school of the performing arts.

Blanche Touhill: But people believed in your ideas or they wouldn't have supported you.

Janet Brown: It was like directing a play in the sense that you start out, you have a concept in your mind. Nothing really exists. You say, we're going to put on the musical, *Company*, and it's just sheerly the force of your own belief at first that gets everybody to come.

Blanche Touhill: Then you had to prove that you could do it?

Janet Brown: Exactly. So it's the same. I said, "Okay, we're going to have a high school of the performing arts. Here we go."

Blanche Touhill: Now, how many students did you have when you left?

Janet Brown: It was very successful and I'm proud to say that it exists to this day. The first class had 80 kids. A big part of the job was that every suburban and

rural school district had to pitch in some money for their student or students. So a lot of it was going around persuading each school district. Then they had to come and audition and my faculty had to say...

Blanche Touhill: Oh, you didn't let everybody in?

Janet Brown: Our funding was "gifted" and "talented" so we had to establish that they were talented, not necessarily trained but talented. So we had to create that process.

Blanche Touhill: And you had to pick the faculty?

Janet Brown: Yeah, before I could do anything else, really. I mean, we had a building, it wasn't getting renovated on time but we had a building and then we had nothing else. So we didn't have a curriculum so I thought, well, I can't write a curriculum in all these subjects so we hired people in music, dance and drama, three people. I said, "You're the department heads. Now you tell me what classes we're going to offer." At that time, it was a half day program so the kids did their other academic subjects at their own school and then they were bused to us. We had a renovated funeral home in the City of Hartford. The kids kind of loved that fact. There were the shower rooms that had been the mortuary and it still had the drains and the floor and everything.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, I've been in those building.

Janet Brown: Yeah, you can imagine.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, I can.

Janet Brown: Kind of creepy. Yeah, so I found my department heads and we had lots of meetings and we figured out...

Blanche Touhill: And you had the support of your board.

Janet Brown: We had a wonderful board of advisers from these different school districts and this Capital Region Education Council.

Blanche Touhill: But now you ended up in St. Louis?

Janet Brown: Right.

Blanche Touhill: Not right away?

Janet Brown: So, I was at that school, the Greater Hartford Academy of the Performing Arts. First I was the Director of Planning and then we got the first class of 80 kids. It was over 100 in three years and now it's over 500 and they have a great building, Trinity College in Hartford got behind them. Anyway, they're very successful now.

Blanche Touhill: So they have a partnership?

Janet Brown: They do, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Did you build that partnership?

Janet Brown: We worked with Trinity a little bit.

Blanche Touhill: So you started it?

Janet Brown: But most of that happened after I left, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: And meanwhile, Paul is the executive director...

Janet Brown: And meanwhile, Paul was the executive director of the Hartford Symphony and then we had wanted eventually to start a family and we weren't able to for reasons the doctors never discovered so we adopted a baby and the Academy said I could have a one-year unpaid leave to stay home with my baby, which was very generous of them.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, it was.

Janet Brown: And so, part-way through the year, I had to admit that I really didn't...because that job at the Academy, that was a baby.

Blanche Touhill: Well, especially theater and dance, the arts. It takes morning, noon and night.

Janet Brown: It was very demanding and because it was such a small operation, there was not much backup. Whatever the problem was, it came back to me.

Blanche Touhill: So you stayed home?

Janet Brown: So I let it go and I was home with my baby but I got restless pretty quickly and so I got this job, I applied for a part-time job but it turned immediately into a full-time job working for this weekly newspaper, the West Hartford News, so I used my journalism background there to some extent and it had a lot of flexibility which was great. She was a toddler

and she was in Montessori school but I could come and go if I got my stories written, they didn't care what hours I kept. And I did a lot of photography and I loved the photography. That was more creative to me actually than the writing. So I enjoyed that for a while. It was exhausting to do that and take care of Molly. I did some teaching of teachers. They had some money at that time from the State of Connecticut to do summer professional development classes in how to use drama in the classroom. So I did some of that. I worked for the Hartford Stage some so I was doing some part-time stuff but not very full-time. The recession hit Hartford very hard so Paul's job at the Hartford Symphony...

Blanche Touhill:

Was that the '80s?

Janet Brown:

Yup, because Molly was born in '87 so, no, we're up to the early '90s, like, '91, '92, that recession. Okay, so the main industries in Hartford are military/industrial and insurance and those were both very hard hit by the recession. So Paul was finding working for the Hartford Symphony much harder than it had been.

Blanche Touhill:

Because he had to raise money.

Janet Brown:

Well, you always have to raise money but the job of raising money was getting much harder.

Blanche Touhill:

Yes, I can understand that, and the audiences weren't necessarily coming as frequently as they did.

Janet Brown:

Exactly, so that was becoming harder and less fun and I didn't really have any career commitments at that time and we were 1,000 miles away from all of our relatives and I was the one who happened to see an advertisement...

Blanche Touhill:

For the Sheldon?

Janet Brown:

For the Sheldon Concert Hall and so I showed it to Paul and I said, "You know, you never go off on interviews and you're not that happy in this job anymore. We're going to go to St. Louis anyway to visit our folks. You should just contact this person, Lee Jordean, just contact this Lee Jordean and ask him if he would be interested in meeting you while you're in St. Louis. So then when moving got hard, it was all my fault so I couldn't complain.

Blanche Touhill: He came and he got the job?

Janet Brown: He came. He didn't think he was going to be interested but he was.

Blanche Touhill: I met Paul with, I think it was Lee Jordean. They were both going in the Sheldon and I guess I was with Marguerite Ross-Barnett I think because she was looking at moving the University of Missouri-St. Louis into that Grand Center area and I remember being introduced to your husband and they said, "This is the man who's going to take over the Sheldon."

Janet Brown: Wow, so way back at the beginning, before he even started.

Blanche Touhill: It was the very beginning. He was going in the side door with Lee Jordean and I was with some really well known St. Louis person and Marguerite and they knew Lee...I knew Lee sort of but they knew Lee and Lee kept saying, "Paul is going to really make this place the jewel that it is," and I will say, I think your husband did that.

Janet Brown: I think so, too. He is a lucky man because he found the perfect job.

Blanche Touhill: So really, he's been here...

Janet Brown: ...20 years, we've been here 20 years.

Blanche Touhill: And he came at the beginning.

Janet Brown: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: And they to do renovations, didn't they, and built the program?

Janet Brown: Oh, many, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Get people down to Grand Center. It was a big, big job.

Janet Brown: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: So you came back.

Janet Brown: So here we were, back in St. Louis.

Blanche Touhill: And then, how did you get with Dance St. Louis?

Janet Brown: So, we came back 20 years ago. The first job I got was teaching English at Nerinx Hall.

- Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes. Isn't that fascinating?
- Janet Brown: Yeah. I think part of that is the kind of town St. Louis is. Where was there a job for me? Well, where did you go to high school? So, I enjoyed that but I had a hope when I took the job that it would lead also into theater because, when I was a student and still today, they do a lot in theater but it did not. So I began to look around and somebody recommended me for the job that I took at COCA so I was the director.
- Blanche Touhill: What did you do at COCA?
- Janet Brown: I was almost their first director of education. When COCA was very small and just beginning its huge growth in how many students it had...
- Blanche Touhill: Absolutely.
- Janet Brown: So it was a little bit like that Academy job in the sense that they had to have, like, one ballet teacher and one theater teacher. Now, all of a sudden, one person couldn't teach all these classes so you had to kind of create more of a standardized curriculum and you had to figure out a lot more rules and structure because it was growing and growing and having more and more students every semester and we had to figure out how to register all these people and get software.
- Blanche Touhill: You were really back in management.
- Janet Brown: So I was really back in management again and at a time when it was growing very fast and I was there for five years and I think maybe the organization at that point in time had to stop and maybe regroup and I began to be less satisfied with what I was doing.
- Blanche Touhill: Okay. How long have you been with Dance St. Louis?
- Janet Brown: I've been there eight years now.
- Blanche Touhill: Let me just ask two quick questions because we only have two minutes: If you had been born 50 years earlier, what would your life be like?
- Janet Brown: Well, I think it would be hard for me to have had a family and also have the career that I've had. So it would have been maybe more like my grandmother. Yes, you can do it but a lot more hardship.

Blanche Touhill: And secondly: Is there some award that you've received that you really treasure...or awards?

Janet Brown: I received an award from the Capital Region Education Council for founding the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts and I value that very much.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I just want to say thank you for this information. It certainly went by quickly and I know you and your husband both, but you do wonderful work in the arts and I want to thank you on behalf of the State Historical Society for bringing the arts to St. Louis. Thank you very much.

Janet Brown: You're welcome. Thank you.