

An Interview with  
**Joan Burger**

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

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**Oral History Program**

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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.

Joan Burger: My name is Joan Burger.

Blanche Touhill: Would you talk about when you were young: your parents; your siblings; your neighbors; your grandparents; the kids you played with. What was your life like and was there somebody in that inside group that really encouraged you to do what you wanted to do?

Joan Burger: Well, I was born in 1944 and so my childhood was typical of that era where I was one of four children. I was the second girl. I used to tease my parents. I used to say, "Well, I was the unimportant one," because I was the second girl and then came my brother and then came our baby sister. So I think I teased them but I think I really felt that and, with my knowledge now as an adult and taking some psychology classes, I think I was always striving, always striving. My older sister, if I can say, wasn't as smart as I was so when my mother would be going over the spelling words with her, I'd be piping in from the other room answering it and I was three years behind her in school, and, of course, I got reprimanded for that. But we all played together. My brother, that was an era, he had to play baseball and I remember how hard it was for him. I would have loved to have done it but everything was expected of him as the boy and he had to take some speech therapy and he had bronchitis, he wasn't real well all the time and I guess I always felt I could have done it. I had a happy childhood. We grew up middle class...mid middle class, first in the City of Chicago on the west side at 6418 North Newcastle, a park right next door so we were free to run wherever we wanted and I remember my friend, Carlene Dudech, lived in a high apartment building and I'd go down the alley and I'd say, "Oh yay, oh yay, Carlene," and she'd hear me and come out. And we used to have big bon fires in the alleys and roast potatoes in there. I remember at the park at our house it would be flooded with water every winter so we ice skated and I loved ice skating and I remember I was about five years old and I heard the big boys say, "Oh, look at that little kid go," and I was so proud. Another time there was a sandpit in the park and the boys would put bottle caps in there and then use, I guess it was a switchblade or a pocket knife and flip the knife in to hit the bottle cap and I was trying to scoop one out with my finger one day and of course got a knife in it and went racing home and running to the basement and I was bleeding all over. So we were free to do things like that and those boys were probably what we used to call "hoods" in those days. Today you might say they were in a gang but obviously no

worries. I went to St. Teklas grade school. We could walk there, went there through 4<sup>th</sup> grade, had a crush on Michael Turnowski and I look at my grandchildren now, I think they can't be having a boyfriend or liking a boy, but, yeah, 4<sup>th</sup> grade and my friend, Carlene also liked him so I had talked her into liking his older brother, Jim Turnowski. So I raved about Jim for several weeks and "Don't you want him?" so I always kind of just used my will on other people. And so then we moved to Glenview. My father was building houses at that point. My father and mother each just graduated from high school. My dad started out as an office boy, I guess in the '30s and he worked his way up. He was working for a mortgage company, Heitman Mortgage Company and he ended up being a general contractor and building houses for them in the '50s, the late '40s, early '50s and he built this house and we moved to Glenview then, when I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade; also went to a Catholic grade school, Our Lady of Perpetual Help and still have my four very best friends from that 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

Blanche Touhill: Do you still keep up with Carlene?

Joan Burger: No, I did lose touch with Carlene. I'll just never forget her. We were fast friends in those early years. And Glenview was great. Again, we walked to and from school, stopped at the drugstore in 8<sup>th</sup> grade to have French Fries and a cherry Coke.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, cherry Cokes.

Joan Burger: Oh, yes, it was probably a quarter; babysat for fifty cents an hour. It was a good life. Oh, the snow...again, ice skating all the time, tobogganing on the golf courses, out all day long, riding our bikes to my cousin's house and she ended up moving to Glenview also. So that was all very good.

Blanche Touhill: How was grade school and high school? Well, you talked about grade school but how was grade school?

Joan Burger: Well, grade school, academically it was...I did very well. I don't remember whether I was challenged or not but when I hear what my grandchild is learning in 8<sup>th</sup> grade that I took in college, you wonder. The grade school was good. The nuns were fine. I had good teachers.

Blanche Touhill: What was the order of nuns?

Joan Burger: I worked very, very hard. I think it was Sisters of St. Joseph.

Blanche Touhill: Well, there are a lot of varieties of that. This one is Carondelet but they probably weren't Carondelet.

Joan Burger: No.

Blanche Touhill: I think they had a group in Minnesota or something. There are different St. Joseph...

Joan Burger: You know what? Teaching Sisters of St. Francis, I think is what they were called in that area and worked very, very hard, always working very, very hard. In 7<sup>th</sup> grade...I'll never forget...St. Maryanne, oh, she was tough and I did a bulletin board for her with blue velvet and cutting out the...it was a bulletin board of the world so I had to cut out South America, North America and all of it and I was so proud of that and when I got my report card, I got an L in art and an L is like a D and, oh, I worked all day whether I'd have the nerve to get up and talk to her, ask her about it. So I did, I said, "Why did I get an L in this?" and she said, "Well, you didn't do very good work or something," and I said, "Well, what about that bulletin board I did for you. It's out in the hall" and she said, "Oh, that, that was terrible," and so I burst into tears, of course. My nickname in my family was water bags because I cried a lot.

Blanche Touhill: Well, the thing is that you had an expectation that it was glorious.

Joan Burger: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: And she had a different expectation.

Joan Burger: Yes, but to be told that.

Blanche Touhill: And I bet that stopped your artistic fervor?

Joan Burger: Yes, it probably wasn't very good.

Blanche Touhill: No, but I'm just saying, to you, you had worked so hard on it.

Joan Burger: Yes, and even now, do you know...and I'm going to throw it away...in those days, I have scrapbooks and we did a lot of work just in our room at our desk. I have a scrapbook of things I did in kindergarten, the coloring, so yes, I think I had delusions of grandeur because I think they were so good and they were just coloring, or a lot of religious art, a lot of religious pictures and stuff.

Blanche Touhill: I think we did scrapbooks because I have one, I went to sort of a pre-kindergarten because I had older brothers and sisters and I wanted to go to school so I went to this little house where the sisters, two girls, managed a little school and I have a scrapbook from that and I was so proud of my scrapbook.

Joan Burger: Yes, and I have the book I did in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Construction paper was the cover, about Thomas Alva Edison and Marconi, the inventor of the radio and I still have that because I thought it was so good. So last year, my grandson, who was 12 then, was reading a book by Eric Larson who I've read Devil in the White City and Thunderstruck. Well, he wrote a book, Thunderstruck about Marconi and I gave that to my grandson for his birthday and I went in my locker to pull out this paper I did in 5<sup>th</sup> grade to show him this that I was so proud of and I was so embarrassed at the quality and even some of the sentences weren't very well drafted and stuff and I thought, oh, (will never show him this, let him read the book about Marconi and the invention of the radio.

Blanche Touhill: Well, were you a leader in grade school or high school?

Joan Burger: In high school. In grade school there weren't leadership positions. I would say, I was called bossy for most of my life and even at age 5 and my cousin, Mary, who's still a very good friend of mine, she's four months and twenty-two days younger than I am, she always said, which, of course when I could get my license that much earlier, my driving license, it was important...you know, I'm bossy and I pretty much run things, whether it's a game I'm playing as a kid or not. So in high school, yes, I took leadership positions almost in every class and I was president of my class but I also wanted to make a difference as president of my class. It wasn't just an honor. I held class meetings and had recording secretaries in the glee club room, yes, and we tried to have projects. It wasn't just going to be an honor, yes, being president of the class and I don't remember all we did as a class but there were [inaudible 12:21] projects and different things that we would do and I had regular class meetings. I think I was the only one who ever did it. And that brings up another thing which is in my family. I went to Mary Wood High School in Evanston which is now the city hall of Evanston, the building is, yes. It's on Ridge Avenue, one of those big old brick buildings with marble stairs.

Blanche Touhill: I've been up to Northwestern and I...

- Joan Burger: Yes, well, that's the city hall, that's my old high school. But at any rate, when I was elected president of the class, it was in the newspaper, Mary Wood Life, it was called, "S. Biggins and J. Herman," my name was Joan Herman then, "elected presidents." Sarah Biggins was in another class. I laid that open so my father would see it before he went to work the next morning and he came home that night from work, didn't say anything to me and I was quite upset and then finally I had to say, "Well, didn't you see this?"
- Blanche Touhill: And he said yes?
- Joan Burger: Yes, but there was never quite enough praise for me and that's not to say there wasn't any.
- Blanche Touhill: Maybe they just anticipated and expected it of you.
- Joan Burger: Yeah.
- Blanche Touhill: I think parents look at some of the children like that, that they will land on their feet.
- Joan Burger: Right, and so they don't want to dwell on it.
- Blanche Touhill: No, and they put more attention sometimes on the children that need the extra help.
- Joan Burger: Exactly.
- Blanche Touhill: But I think if you would have come in with bad grades, they would have...
- Joan Burger: Right, yes, so they had no...
- Blanche Touhill: But you lived up to their expectations because you were intelligent and you studied and you joined clubs and you were sociable.
- Joan Burger: Well, I was very driven somehow, for some reason. So when you said you were going to ask who was...I didn't need anyone to push me because I was pushing myself all the time and that's not anything I'm bragging about. I'm just saying it was there and it probably caused me more anxiety or stuff. I was always striving.
- Blanche Touhill: What about the teachers, did they say you should go to college and you should study?

Joan Burger: No, no one ever said I should go to college. I graduated from high school in 1962 and there were only 102 girls in the class and it was only girls, women...they were girls then, and 12 of them were going to go into the convent.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes.

Joan Burger: And field day was when everyone announced...

Blanche Touhill: ...what they were going to do?

Joan Burger: Right, whether they were going in and who was going in. Talk about pressure, it was pressure on that, not only from the nuns, but from the priests or the people and I didn't even think about feminism then but I remember telling God that I would consider a vocation if I could be a priest but I wasn't going to be ironing altar cloths and I would be one of the, of course, a Mary Noel missionary. This goes so far back. People who see this are not going to understand the...

Blanche Touhill: Yes, that was the press.

Joan Burger: Well, and it was just such a huge part of our lives.

Blanche Touhill: Well, the parish became the center of people's lives.

Joan Burger: Oh, it was, completely.

Blanche Touhill: Did you go to midnight mass?

Joan Burger: Oh, of course. I went to mass in grade school. I sang in the 8:15 mass every morning. We sang in the choir and in high school, it was such a part of my...I'd stop in the chapel just to say, "Oh, God, help me with this test," just a little quick word. It was a complete part of my life. And so when my father said, "You can go away to college within 300 miles," and I said, "Well, I want to go, of course, to a Catholic school and a co-ed Catholic but I want it co-ed." That was a thing that was hard for me. I never really had a boyfriend or went on a date in high school. It was hard for me to find someone for the proms.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, I think that's still true in some of these girls schools and I think the brothers of girls got dates for the girls that didn't have one.

- Joan Burger: Well, some of the girls were dating but, you know, you go to those sock hops, that's what they were called...
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, it was because everybody wore socks.
- Joan Burger: And they were and we'd jitterbug, you know, and you'd stand around hoping someone would ask you to dance. That was a...
- Blanche Touhill: But you could dance with girls too.
- Joan Burger: Oh, yeah, but there was an unhappy part of that high school, to see other people that I didn't think were as deserving as I was going out and dating and stuff. Another part of my...a bad time in my life is we used to have slumber parties all the time and it was with the friends, still, Cathy, Anne, GiGi, Mary and Joan...another Joan and we had so much fun. To this day, having women friends is just so valuable to me. It's just so easy and fun to talk to them. But I had a hard time. Growing up was good, my mother had some problems and I take everything very hard and she was hard on me and I've talked to my sisters, I had an older sister who got married at age 19 and so she was gone out of the house but still, when she was around...she's tougher or something. It just didn't bother her as much so my mother yelled a lot and was pretty abusive.
- Blanche Touhill: You talked about working at Marshall Fields. How was that because I always admired Marshall Fields.
- Joan Burger: Well, yes. When you grow up in that era, you're babysitting for fifty cents an hour and as soon as you got to be 16, you wanted a job where you could earn a dollar-and-a-quarter an hour.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, it was a difference.
- Joan Burger: Yes, and so my first job was actually at O'Connor & Goldberg Shoe Store and I liked that.
- Blanche Touhill: In Evanston?
- Joan Burger: Actually, it was in Old Orchard Shopping Center, and then I got the job at Marshall Fields which I liked very much.
- Blanche Touhill: And did you work on Saturday and after school or something?

- Joan Burger: Right, I worked three nights a week and Saturday going through high school.
- Blanche Touhill: And you kept your grades up?
- Joan Burger: Yes, and I would be up till midnight doing my homework and then I'd be up at 6:00 in the morning to catch the bus to go into high school and I used to think...in fact, I was thinking of this the other day, you'd go to the bathroom and wash your face with cold water to wake yourself up and I used to think, I wonder how wonderful it would be to ever get some sleep. This was in high school so I worked part-time and then full-time in the summer and all the after school activities. You're at school from 8:30 to 5:30 and then go to work and then do your homework. But I guess ultimately I liked that.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes. Well, what I'm wondering is, did they train their employees very carefully, Marshall Fields, or was it an atmosphere so that if you went to work there, the older people...
- Joan Burger: I think it was the atmosphere and it was the other workers there and I liked it, and you got a discount on clothes. You could find things really cheap that had been around and get a few things, although I didn't spend a whole lot of money. I saved my money also.
- Blanche Touhill: In those days were you planning to go to college?
- Joan Burger: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: And did you know you had to take certain subjects in order to go to college?
- Joan Burger: No, I just took everything. I took the most difficult courses.
- Blanche Touhill: So you were really taking an academic...
- Joan Burger: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: Or was it truly just an academic high school?
- Joan Burger: It was a very academic high school. I worked harder in high school than I did in law school.

Joan Burger 12-8-2015

- Blanche Touhill: The incarnate word over here near the campus, I've heard girls say that when they did more homework and worked harder when they were in high school than they did in the university.
- Joan Burger: Yes. So I had four years of math; I had biology, chemistry and physics...
- Blanche Touhill: And did you have the laboratory?
- Joan Burger: Yes, of course.
- Blanche Touhill: And you had how many years of Latin?
- Joan Burger: I took two years of Latin and two years of French and then honors English, history...
- Blanche Touhill: What was your strength, science or the humanities?
- Joan Burger: I loved it all. I couldn't figure out what to major in in college. I loved French...
- Blanche Touhill: Where did you choose to go to college?
- Joan Burger: Well, a co-ed university, Catholic and I looked at...
- Blanche Touhill: Within 300 miles?
- Joan Burger: Right, I looked at Creighton in Omaha, Marquette and St. Louis University and I got in to St. Louis University and I decided to go there and I had my room in Rogers Hall and my mother was diagnosed with cancer that summer and she was given five years to live and so my older sister was gone and my father asked me if I would stay home. So I withdrew from St. Louis U and then went to Loyola University in Chicago.
- Blanche Touhill: And you could commute?
- Joan Burger: Yes, and I commuted.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, you were a good daughter.
- Joan Burger: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: Did she live five years?
- Joan Burger: She lived 12 years actually, but she was very sick. There were a lot of surgeries and my dad really did need me.

- Blanche Touhill: And he needed you too to take care of the younger children?
- Joan Burger: Yes. My little sister has a story. I don't remember it but I think I was in high school. She was kept after school one day, in grade school...she's eight years younger...and she's told me this, like, a year ago, she said, "I couldn't believe it. You came to pick me up and you yelled at the nun," and she said, "You asked her how many times has she done this in the past and if she hasn't done it in the past, why was she kept after school? Don't you know her mother's sick?" So I came in from college, at the end of the day, and had to go pick up her and was yelling at the nun, says she couldn't believe it.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, did she admire you for doing it?
- Joan Burger: Yes, oh, yes.
- Blanche Touhill: You were her protector?
- Joan Burger: Yes, I always took care of her, even when she was two. I took her with me every place and, yes, I took her every place. Yes, I was her protector so she doesn't have any memories, bad...
- Blanche Touhill: Now, did you cook when you were home with your family?
- Joan Burger: Sure, sure.
- Blanche Touhill: So you learned to cook early?
- Joan Burger: Yes, some cooking. My mom could cook but she was sick a lot.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, if she was sick on a particular day, you could do that for her?
- Joan Burger: We had to do a lot of work around the house. Oh, and earlier, in grade school, my brother would get to cut the grass and go out and work in the yard and I was dusting the dining room table and we cleaned the house every Saturday.
- Blanche Touhill: In the morning or all day?
- Joan Burger: In the morning, washed the floor. I said, "Wait, I want to work out in the yard too" and so we got to share that. I said, "Let Bill come in and do the dusting and the vacuuming."
- Blanche Touhill: Well, actually, that was good for him and that was good for you.

Joan Burger: Exactly.

Blanche Touhill: How did you like Loyola?

Joan Burger: So, Loyola was great. I loved it and I loved the commuting part and I loved learning the City of Chicago.

Blanche Touhill: You came in on the train?

Joan Burger: I drove some of the time but I could take the L between the campuses. I was on the north campus. I was at 6500 North Sheridan and my sorority, I got immediately active in the sorority. It's the National Catholic Sorority, Beta Phi Alpha.

Blanche Touhill: Did it have many sororities?

Joan Burger: No.

Blanche Touhill: Just one?

Joan Burger: It had three, I think, but there were many fraternities but the sorority was my avenue, again, to have my female companionship that I valued so much because my friends from high school all went away to college and I was the only one "staying at home."

Blanche Touhill: Why did you like being a commuter?

Joan Burger: I loved learning the city and I loved feeling so competent being around in the city and getting around and driving around and taking the L. It was so independent and I loved the city. I loved the houses and the...

Blanche Touhill: So, really, when you lived in the suburbs, you sort of stayed in the suburbs?

Joan Burger: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Did you work at Marshall Field's again?

Joan Burger: No. No, wait...Yes, I continued at Marshall Fields through the first couple years of college and then I got a job working at the university.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, that was wonderful.

Joan Burger: Right.

- Blanche Touhill: What did you do at the university?
- Joan Burger: Well, first of all, I did typing for a professor and that was when I had switched to the psychology major. I had been a math major. I was struggling on what I was going to major in and I finally decided I'd major in math and be a math teacher. I felt my options were to be a teacher, period.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes. Well that probably was true at that time.
- Joan Burger: Yes...or a nurse.
- Blanche Touhill: That's right. You were in the right categories.
- Joan Burger: So I weighed that because we ... to cover, so I got a job working at the psycho-metric laboratory and that's where I met my husband, Gary Burger.
- Blanche Touhill: Was he older?
- Joan Burger: He was in graduate school, yes.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, he was in the graduate school.
- Joan Burger: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: He was the older man.
- Joan Burger: Yes. He was older and we were dating different people at that time but eventually we started dating each other and then I got married...
- Blanche Touhill: And he went on to graduate school?
- Joan Burger: He was finished, he was almost finishing. He's five years older than I am and so I got engaged when I was president of my sorority, my senior year and I would say I was pretty well known on campus, with the...I think it was called the "Pan Helenics Society" which was all the Greek Society, et cetera and active in a lot of things. So I was engaged in my senior year and married. I got my Bachelor's Degree in 1966 and Gary got his Ph.D. and he got a position as an assistant professor at St. Louis University...
- Blanche Touhill: I remember that he came to UMSL from St. Louis University.
- Joan Burger: In 1966, four years later, I'm at St. Louis anyway.

Blanche Touhill: Was it hard to leave your sister and your brother?

Joan Burger: Yes, although it was time. It was hard to leave my little sister, actually, but I was excited to live...we had never been west of Chicago. It was exciting to drive down in our Volkswagen with a couple air mattresses and a cart table and four chairs.

Blanche Touhill: Did you have a place to live?

Joan Burger: We did. We came down early and we found an apartment and we lived there. I had three babies from age 22 to 25. I had the first baby very soon and then I couldn't wait to have the second one because I was so bored. I didn't have enough to do. You know, one baby, there's so many hours in the day when you're alone. I had no car, no transportation. I couldn't believe the year before I had been president of my sorority and then the union and all kinds of social contacts and fun and stimulation. So it was very hard. So I had my second child 18 months later and then my third child 13 months after that. I loved my babies and I think I was very efficient. I didn't like my job as a housewife.

Blanche Touhill: When did you decide to go back to school then?

Joan Burger: Well, I was getting pretty unhappy and I always hesitate to say that because I love my children. I couldn't believe I had gone through college and worked so hard and excelled in math and chemistry and physics and everything, every subject, and loved it and then I was cleaning bathrooms and doing laundry and I said to myself, since I was 25 when I had my third child, that even if I stayed home and was a good mother, like everyone said I should be, when Gary Jr. was 18, I'd only be 40 years old. So I went through worrying about my life at age 25 because, number one, I was unhappy, and number two, I had three kids already and at age 40, I said to myself, I said to my husband, "What am I going to do from age 40 to 65? That's 25 years." I said, "I'm not going to go to the beauty shop in Friday and play bridge on Monday and be in some sewing club."

Blanche Touhill: So how did you choose law?

Joan Burger: Well, I first looked and I had a Bachelor's of Science and Psychology, can't do anything with it, so there was a correspondence catalogue from someplace, I had no idea where I could take 35 hours and get teaching credits and be able to teach in grade school. So that was the first option

and I looked at that. The kids were one, two and three and I was searching for what I was going to do and I thought, certainly a teacher is good if you're a mother of young kids because you can get the summers off. But 35 hours to teach in grade school? That seemed like a lot so I looked at other things. St. Louis U, you could go to one year of school and become an RN and I thought that would also be good.

Blanche Touhill: If you had a degree?

Joan Burger: If you had a degree, but the year was all day long and this is 1970 and '71. There was no daycare.

Blanche Touhill: No, there wasn't.

Joan Burger: There was no daycare.

Blanche Touhill: And I will tell you the other thing: there was no care for the elderly. Both spectrums were really void. There was a vacuum in both of them.

Joan Burger: Right, and so no daycare and I'm in St. Louis. I don't have a sister, my mother was still ill, very ill at this point and no help, some neighbors but, you know. So I didn't know how I was going to do that nursing. I'd been active in politics.

Blanche Touhill: In Chicago?

Joan Burger: No... Well, actually, in Chicago I campaigned for JFK when I was at high school, of course, "JFK all the way," we put out flyers. And so I campaigned for Gene McCarthy in '68 as much as I could and so I was active in politics, very interested in civil rights and so in February of 1971, I called St. Louis U Law School and they had a night school and I called...and I tell this story whenever I give a speech...Pete Salsik was the assistant dean of Admissions then and I said, "How is law as a profession for a mother?" That was my question and he did not hang up on me and he said, "It's wonderful. You can do all sorts of different things. You can work part-time; you can hang a shingle out of your house if you wanted to."

Blanche Touhill: Well, wasn't that good of him?

Joan Burger: Yes.

- Blanche Touhill: Because '70 and '71, it was just beginning...the Civil Rights Act in '65 protected us in the workplace, or protected us, but '72 was the Reauthorization and he was a little ahead of the Reauthorization.
- Joan Burger: And I was surprised when I found out Betty Friedan's book, "Second Sex" was published in '63. I wasn't a feminist then. I was looking for something...I knew I needed something outside the home but it was certainly not going to explode or damage my family in any way. So I wasn't a rabid feminist. I didn't even think about it in those terms. I just knew I needed it. And I had no support. Well, I took the LSAT on July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1971. We were out playing bridge with our group of friends until 3:00 in the morning. I went into a classroom at St. Louis U at 8:00 o'clock in the morning and this young man comes in with a spiral notebook that says "Preparing for the LSAT," and I thought, oh, great, what an idiot I am. I didn't even know there was any such publication.
- Blanche Touhill: So you took the test?
- Joan Burger: I took the test.
- Blanche Touhill: And you got a good score?
- Joan Burger: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: And when did you enter law school?
- Joan Burger: I entered that August.
- Blanche Touhill: And did you enter at night?
- Joan Burger: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: How long would it take you if you went at night?
- Joan Burger: Five years, except I registered for classes two months later and I wouldn't tell anyone I had taken this LSAT. This was a big secret because people would think I was crazy. The kids were two, three and four-and-a-half years old, and you ask support; no support. As far as my husband, he is tolerant. He is a good man. He certainly didn't say "Go for it," but he tolerated...
- Blanche Touhill: He didn't say stop.

- Joan Burger: Exactly. He never, ever would have done that. But I felt the pull, I felt the concern.
- Blanche Touhill: How many women were in the class?
- Joan Burger: About 20 out of a couple hundred.
- Blanche Touhill: Were they older women like you? By "older," I mean 25.
- Joan Burger: Some had a Master's Degree. I was 28 by that time. Most of them might have been in their early 20's.
- Blanche Touhill: Did it take you five years?
- Joan Burger: No, it took me three-and-a-half years.
- Blanche Touhill: So you took some in the day?
- Joan Burger: Yes. Well, what happened was, Gary found out, my husband, that there was no tuition remission for wives.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, I would assume there was something.
- Joan Burger: No, so he called me that afternoon. I had been down to the law school and I was going to be gone four nights a week taking two classes, and again, he wasn't real happy; that would have been really hard on everyone but I was determined.
- Blanche Touhill: Yeah, he was willing to do it.
- Joan Burger: He was willing to do it but I was determined. I had to do it. But I was thinking I was just going to try it and see how I liked it but if it was going to cost me \$500 to take those two classes...this is '71...we only had \$1000 in the bank. So I withdrew and that January, St. Louis U closed their night school. So I said, well, I won't be able to do it now and I called Professor Salsik again and he said, "Joan, you'll have to apply with the rest of them," and I said, "I'm never going to get in with all that flood of young sharp students," but I did and then St. Louis U, at the last minute, gave me permission to go part-time, day. St. Louis U Law School was extremely encouraging to women.
- Blanche Touhill: Who was the dean in those days?
- Joan Burger: Childress.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness, Richard Childress.

Joan Burger: Richard Childress.

Blanche Touhill: And his wife was in philosophy and then they had a child, didn't they?

Joan Burger: Yeah, I think so, but he died when I was going through the law school. He died early, yes. I'm not sure why. The faculty was all good. They were hard. Anyway, so I took part-time classes but then I found out part-time the second semester was three classes because they dropped some of the hours on your contracts, and then the next semester, my "second year" or third semester, I was taking four courses but it was only 10 hours. I said, well, if I can take four courses, then I can go full-time.

Blanche Touhill: Sure.

Joan Burger: And I did, I finished in three-and-a-half years.

Blanche Touhill: So, really, the man who helped you into law school, he was supportive of you?

Joan Burger: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Was anybody else supportive of you in those days?

Joan Burger: No.

Blanche Touhill: But he did.

Joan Burger: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: And he didn't care if you were 28 or you were 22 or what?

Joan Burger: No, it was the whole atmosphere at the school and I went to law school, I didn't have much camaraderie because I'd go to class...

Blanche Touhill: You didn't have time.

Joan Burger: I'd go to class and go home. I had a babysitter, the grandmother moved in with the family next door at the time I started law school and there were seven kids in that family and she was unhappy. She was the paternal grandmother so it's harder for her to live with her daughter-in-law. They were all fine but...so she'd come over and babysit for me. So if I had classes Monday, Wednesday and Friday, I just would go in the

mornings and still was a den mother and did all the things that I was supposed to do, still did all of the household work and caring for the children and laundry and participated in the children's lives.

Blanche Touhill: So you got out of law school and what did you do?

Joan Burger: Well, I finished in December of '75 and I sent out letters and applications to every law firm, every corporation, everything in St. Louis and I thought they are going to knock down the door to hire me because I graduated in mid year, I graduated cum laude and I already have my children and it's '75 and I thought, I am going to be such an attractive candidate.

Blanche Touhill: Well, what happened?

Joan Burger: No offers.

Blanche Touhill: So what did you do?

Joan Burger: Well, I then did get three interviews, all of which were discriminatory, all of which I filed complaints about. One was with the federal government, the NLRB, one was with the circuit court that I ended up sitting on...

Blanche Touhill: Yes, that gave great satisfaction.

Joan Burger: Yes...and one was with a law firm who said, "Eeny, meeny, minee, any moe?" but there was a judge on the circuit court that saw my...I knew I was the most qualified academically. It was a lawyer for the judges to do research for them. That was the position and I knew the other two applications, I knew I was better academically. And so there was a judge, Judge Harry James, who was sitting out at juvenile who called for my application. I had that interview in February. In March he called for my application and I got a call from the juvenile division of that court to interview for a job as a legal officer. That's a prosecutor in the juvenile system and I went down and was hired and I started April 12<sup>th</sup> and Judge James died two weeks before I could start it. And so he is another one. He recognized it.

Blanche Touhill: Well, you would be perfect for the juvenile courts.

Joan Burger: Yes. So the judge that came after him was terrible. He was a horrible judge. He was horrible to me but it was a good awakening. I was in court every day.

- Blanche Touhill: Yes, you learned how to do it.
- Joan Burger: Oh, yes, and I found out...because when I decided to go to law school, the only reason I went is they said 90% of the lawyers don't go to court. So, although I strove and I was driven, I didn't have much confidence.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, actually, in my family, I think that was the key to their success because my husband eventually became a judge and my brother became a judge and both had gone to court when they first came out of law school and I had no idea that to be a judge you really had to have some experience in the court. They don't like to appoint people who have been in corporations for years and never crossed the courthouse door. I have another relative in my family who's a judge and she never went to court. She's now married and has children and she's staying home for a couple years but I always would look at her and say, "Go get that court experience while you're young."
- Joan Burger: Well, and then even juvenile, I realized that was a very restricted environment and no one was going to know me.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, that's true too.
- Joan Burger: And so I went down to the circuit attorney's office and interviewed with the circuit attorney then.
- Blanche Touhill: Who was that?
- Joan Burger: George Peach.
- Blanche Touhill: But he was probably all right to work with.
- Joan Burger: He was all right then and he wanted me. Then there were only two women out of 45 prosecutors in the prosecuting attorney's office in 1978 and I went down there and I told him, I said, "George, I'll come down but, number one, I don't want to do misdemeanors because that's where you have to start. I've already been in court and I don't want to have a woman's docket. I want to do burglaries and robberies and murders," and he said okay, but after about a year there, I discovered that there was a rape victim that called and complained about how they had been handled and by that time we had two young women lawyers in there so there were now four of us and I went to Peach, the boss, and I said, "We want to form a rape task force," and there was something going on in

Kansas City that women were getting energized to properly prosecute these cases and so we did form a rape task force but I still did other cases. We (stopped?) rape kits to bring out to the hospitals at the police department. That was another where I felt I was on the forefront of some change in the criminal area and an advocate for rape victims.

Blanche Touhill: And how long were you there?

Joan Burger: Two years.

Blanche Touhill: And then what did you do?

Joan Burger: Then I went into private practice.

Blanche Touhill: And did you specialize?

Joan Burger: No.

Blanche Touhill: And were you with other people?

Joan Burger: Yes, just informally, where you have a lot of lawyers in a building and you all office together. So first I went with a lawyer, head of primarily a criminal practice and so he had me doing everything else. So I did domestic relations; I did juvenile; I did bankruptcy; I did Social Security disability; I did PI cases or auto accidents or workers comp and it was great because I had done a little bit of all of that and that really helped then. So I was in private practice for 15 years after four years as a prosecutor at the juvenile and circuit levels and then I applied to become a judge in the circuit court.

Blanche Touhill: Did you go up more than once to get the judgeship?

Joan Burger: Twice.

Blanche Touhill: And you got it the second time?

Joan Burger: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: And that was a thrill, wasn't it?

Joan Burger: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: You were one of the early judges, female?

Joan Burger: Yes, but not that early but I did (rush?) over another leadership area that was very important for women and that is in 1976 a group of us started the Women Lawyers Association and I was the president of that, very active in it and president of it in 1982, '83 and there were no women judges. There were no women judges when I became a lawyer in 1976.

Blanche Touhill: There were no women judges in the circuit court?

Joan Burger: No women judges anywhere in the state. I take that back, there were two, one was in Columbia, she was a probate judge which was not considered a circuit, and one in North. No women judges at the federal or state level at all in the St. Louis area or any of the metropolitan areas, no women judge had ever been appointed in the non-partisan court plan. So we started and as my friend, Anna Forder, said, who is the first woman circuit judge...

Blanche Touhill: What year did she go in?

Joan Burger: 1979, so she said, "We knew from what we had done in the past, we had to organize" so we started the Women Lawyers Association for the advancement of women in the profession and I'm working on our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner and I am happy to say that it's now 350 women rather than 25. The young women are coming out of law school in droves but after a few years they find out there are still problems. So they're still looking to us older women lawyers for guidance or as mentors or encouragement. So that's been a major...

Blanche Touhill: What is the way up for a judgeship? I know there's a political aspect to it but is it best to be widely trained or is it best to be...what is the credential?

Joan Burger: I think being in court is important, having been in court, although I will have to say that sometimes minority candidates and women candidates are told that they just don't have this experience or that experience.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, and it's not...

Joan Burger: I know a wonderful judge who has been very successful and she was told, "Well, you don't have criminal" so then she goes and works in the US Attorney's Office. "Well, you don't have enough civil," so then she works

in the city counselor's office.... "Well, you don't have..." So for some people, it doesn't matter.

Blanche Touhill:

No, that's right.

Joan Burger:

And for others it does but generally you have to be well known and you've got to be well liked.

Blanche Touhill:

And you have to be honorable. People have to trust you.

Joan Burger:

Yes, and by that time, after 19 years, I was well known.

Blanche Touhill:

How many years were you a judge?

Joan Burger:

Thirteen years, and then I retired. I probably retired too early. There were a number of reasons why I did.

Blanche Touhill:

Do you still practice?

Joan Burger:

Yeah, I do mediations and arbitrations and then I'm chairman of the election board in the city.

Blanche Touhill:

Oh, how nice.

Joan Burger:

Yeah, and Governor Nixon appointed me to that four-and-a-half years ago so he called and I said yes. It's an interesting area of law that I knew nothing about, basically nothing. So it's another chance for leadership in the community and to be sure everything is...

Blanche Touhill:

What is the essence of this law that's going to the Supreme Court, whether it's one man/one vote or whether it's distributed by some other reason?

Joan Burger:

I don't think it's a challenge to the electoral college. I'm not sure.

Blanche Touhill:

Oh, no. It's a Texas case that's going to the Supreme Court and they said that after World War II they did the one man/one vote and they demanded that the gerrymandering benefitting the rural areas had to end and it began to bring in the populations from the urban metropolitan areas in larger numbers into the state legislature and now they're saying, "Well, maybe that isn't the best way to do it."

Joan Burger:

It's on how the districts are drawn.

- Blanche Touhill: Yeah.
- Joan Burger: You know, gerrymandering is a common term but it's how the congressional districts see it. They're drawn by the state legislators and it's extremely political, political Democrat/Republican and becoming a judge is political with a small case.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, I think everybody understands that. What would you say were some of the cases that really have deep meaning for you?
- Joan Burger: The cases that I have handled? I would say this isn't one case; I was asked to run the drug court for two years in the city and I didn't realize what it was. That was in 1997 and, again, I said, "Sure, I'll do it" and that was extremely interesting. I went to conferences with Dora Shiro.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, I know Dora, ran the prisons in Missouri.
- Joan Burger: Oh, yes.
- Blanche Touhill: And then went on to New York and ran the prisons in New York.
- Joan Burger: She is the only female who has run three city jail systems in three states. In Arizona, she was head of the Department of Corrections in Arizona at the time they had the hostage crisis there. She has a Ph.D. She is soft spoken...
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, I know her.
- Joan Burger: ...extremely intellectual, philosophical prison warden basically. She and I went to conferences on restorative justice, learning a whole new way to deal with crime and victims and to bring a sense of restoring the community after a crime has occurred. And so that's part of it but drug court is part of that idea. You have a team of five people. You have the prosecutor, defense lawyer, a drug treatment person, the judge and the probation department and we would staff every case and those people reported to me and you could do instant punishment or reward and at the end of a year, if they finished the program, their case was dismissed. They had an arrest record but they had no conviction.
- Blanche Touhill: Does it work?
- Joan Burger: Yes. We have 47. Judge Ray Price, who was on the Supreme Court, was a major influence in getting the legislature and the courts to fund these

and we have 47. That's probably an old number of drug courts in the State of Missouri.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness.

Joan Burger: Because if you send an 18-year-old who is just street smart to prison, he comes out, what? He comes out a criminal. So, I would say drug court.

Blanche Touhill: Okay. Talk about anything you really want to talk about in the remaining time that we have.

Joan Burger: Well, I would say that the social norms of when I grew up were such that women weren't going outside the home and my dear husband...we're going to be married 50 years in March...he knew no women that ever worked and his mother never worked and so me going out and doing this was something that discombobulated him and what he thought our life as a family was going to be. But he never discouraged me and I did what I wanted and he wanted me to be happy. But after I was out working for a few years and bringing in a paycheck, he said that he felt such stress being the sole bread-winner. Remember, we had those three little kids and he was out working at a university and trying to get a summer job, that he felt so stressed doing that that me working and having a career has saved his life and extended his life and that was a real gratifying thing to know.

Blanche Touhill: That's wonderful, and actually, I think it's true.

Joan Burger: It is, I think it is true because he did take his role so strongly as "the bread-winner" because that's how we were raised. But my children are wonderful. My youngest son, I took him to watch a robbery trial I had when he was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. He wore his little confirmation suit and sat in the first pew. He is now a very successful lawyer. I took my other two children with me...at that time I wasn't in the prosecutor's office but I was arguing cases at the Courts of Appeals because I wanted them each to see what I was doing and my daughter did not...she'd be a great lawyer; she's a very strong woman, but she has her MBA and is head of human resources for a major corporation. And our youngest son, Eric, is very successful, living in Denver and working in the cell phone industry as a director. So they're all happy. We see them as much as we can.

Blanche Touhill: Did your father ever say he was proud of you?

Joan Burger: You know, yes, he did, although at the same time that I went to law school, my brother, my younger brother went to law school up in Loyola in Chicago and it turned out my brother and I both took the LSAT, the Law School Admissions Test on that same day in 1971 and we got the same score. So I think my dad, per his background, was very proud of my brother but I think he was very proud of me. But my parents were always hesitant, why I was doing this and what was going to happen with the children and stuff.

Blanche Touhill: Did he come to your graduation?

Joan Burger: He did, my dad came down and we went to Jefferson City when I was sworn in as a lawyer and it was thrilling and my three children, my husband and my dad, when I signed that book as an official lawyer, admitted to the Bar, Number 24764.

Blanche Touhill: It was a big day.

Joan Burger: Yes. My mother was deceased at that point so she never did get to see me. I wish she had and when I look back, I think she was a very unhappy woman. She was one of five kids, the only girl. I think she felt she was smart and I think she was...

Blanche Touhill: She was frustrated.

Joan Burger: Yes, I think she was. I would love to have talked to her as a successful woman, as a woman-to-woman.

Blanche Touhill: And a mother-to-mother?

Joan Burger: Yes, woman-to-woman because in those years when I was having the children and just started law school, she was very ill.

Blanche Touhill: And that added another stress too?

Joan Burger: Sure. So she would have been very proud of me; I know she would have been.

Blanche Touhill: Well, thank you very much for coming by and I think it's wonderful to go down Memory Lane, to leave this record for future scholars who will wonder what happened to us all during the period between 1945 and today. It was a huge change in the life of women. You just forget how restricted it was. Well, thank you very much.

Joan Burger:           You're welcome, my pleasure.