

An Interview with
Kathy Conley Jones

at *The* Historical Society of Missouri St. Louis
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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.

Kathy Conley-Jones: Kathy Conley-Jones.

Malaika Horne: All right, so, Kathy, you know me, Malaika Horne, and this is a program or a project that seeks to interview women who are change agents, and you are one of them, and we want to have a conversation with you about your life, your career, anything else you would like to talk about. So, the first question starts with your early years, your youth, which includes elementary and secondary schools you attended. So tell us about your early years.

Kathy Conley-Jones: Well, first of all, I'd like to thank you very much for this, because I think it is an absolutely wonderful program of how women can effect change. But a little bit about myself: I'm a native St. Louisan. I grew up in what was considered to be, I guess not quite the Ville area, but it was around Marcus and St. Louis Avenue. When I was about six years old, my mother moved into what was the West End, which is just off of Kingshighway. So I attended, early on, public schools, St. Louis Public Schools, up until the age of 7th grade, but the interesting thing about attending the public school was when I first went to school in kindergarten—I only spent two days there because they moved me from kindergarten to 1st grade. That was because my brothers, who, one was four years older, the other eight years older, had already taught me to read and write in cursive, but I couldn't print, so that was one of the things that happened. So right away, I was a little behind on the printing. As I moved through school in the St. Louis public schools and moving up, my mother decided, when I was reaching 7th grade, to move me from the St. Louis Public School because at that point in time, I was attending Clark, which is on Union, and Clark had just decided that they should bring children that are in the 7th and 8th grade and move them over to the building that was considered to be Enright Middle and create a middle school. My mother was terrified of me crossing Union Boulevard, so she decided that I should go to Catholic school. So at 7th grade, I entered St. Mark's Catholic School that's located on Academy, just off of Page. That was a very interesting time because none of my brothers had ever attended Catholic school, but I'm the only girl. My mother threw me over there. She thought it was a better choice. I don't think she thought I could cross the street well. So in Catholic school at St. Mark's, 7th and 8th grade, very interesting times that I had. In the 8th grade, the teachers thought I should become a nun, and so they consistently talked to me about being

a nun. They thought that my spirituality led me to be a nun, and I did explain to them there were three reasons I couldn't become a nun. I said, "One, you guys don't dress very well." I said, "The second is because you don't look like you're having a lot of fun," and third, I wanted to be able to control my life, and I didn't think that they did. So that's been part of my whole life. Would you like me to go on about this?

Malaika Horne: Well, I was curious to know, what was the difference between the public school where you went, at Clark, and then going over to the Catholic school?

Kathy Conley-Jones: What was different was the focus that we had in Catholic school. That was different than public school. Public school, all African American children, great teachers who focused on us as African American children, who told us every day that we had to be twice as good to get half as much. And these were wonderful teachers. What changed is when I went to Catholic school, we weren't focused as much on race, but we were focused on being a child of God. And so I didn't have the negative experience with individuals that were white or Caucasian, the nuns and the priests, because all of their focus was on, "You're a child of God. You're a special person. Therefore, you must succeed."

Malaika Horne: In addition to the usual curriculum.

Kathy Conley-Jones: Exactly. 7th and 8th grade, did well after I got them off the idea that I should become a nun. And then I went to high school, and it was just upstairs, and upstairs was St. Mark's all-girls' Catholic school, so I had a real interesting time. I went from public school co-ed to Catholic school co-ed for two years, and then my last four years I spent in an all-girl environment, which I felt was wonderful.

Malaika Horne: Was it much smaller?

Kathy Conley-Jones: It was a small school, total population I think maybe just ebbing at 400, but our freshman class had a total of 75 students.

Malaika Horne: Okay. So your family, your parents, husband, children, their names: talk about them.

Kathy Conley-Jones: Sure. I had a very loving environment growing up. My mother was actually a functional illiterate. If you had talked to her, you would never

have known it, but my mother could not read or write, and it was because of issues that occurred when she was a little girl in Alabama where the Klan went after her father, and there's an interesting story that goes with that, but my mother, having been sent off from Alabama to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania where her father's sister lived, was very interesting. My mother only went to 3rd grade under the care and tutelage of her aunt. She sent her off after she was about eight years old to begin washing clothes and doing chores in the homes of white people so the job would bring in money. So at that point in time, my mother craved education, but she couldn't get it. It didn't embitter her, but it did embolden her so that her children would always have an education.

Malaika Horne: Talk a little bit about the Klan. What happened that your parents had to send her away?

Kathy Conley-Jones: Yeah. My grandfather was actually from the islands. His name was John Young. My grandmother was the local teacher in Alabama. It was a little small town I visited just a couple of years ago for the very first time, right outside of Birmingham. But, be that as it may, my grandfather was a very proud man. He was very dark-skinned, very tall, and my mother was, I think, the third child, and she was little. She was a tiny person, and my grandfather doted on her a lot. So he would take her to town with him, and, as my mother used to tell us—I'm very used to oral history because my mother would constantly tell us the stories—they went to town one day, and my grandfather owned a horse and a farm, and at that point in time, which was 1911, 1915, for a black man in Alabama to own a horse was scandalous because that was way above his grade. However, what they didn't realize is my grandfather was a member of the Masonic order. A situation occurred where my grandfather took my mother to town with him to get some supplies, and he gave my mother a note, sent her down to the post office, and said, "Give this to the person in the post office." Well, my mother, at this point in time, is about four years old. She can't read, and she gets down there, and she's playing around like most children, and there's a woman standing in line, and she gets behind the woman in line. And she got behind a white woman, and the white woman turned around—and you have to remember, this is during the time where you had "colored" and "white," and "colored" was not allowed to come in the building; you had to go outside the building. But my mother can't read, so she got behind the woman. The woman turned around and

absolutely back-handed her and called her some very negative words and told her that she shouldn't be there. Well, you can imagine a little four-year-old child. She dropped her note, she ran outside screaming, and my grandfather heard her. My grandfather, as I said, was a very proud man, and he was in the general store, and this general store was owned by a white man named Mr. McWhorter [*spelling uncertain*]. What most people didn't know was Mr. McWhorter was a mason, and my grandfather was a mason, and masons have a brotherhood. It has nothing to do with color. So when my grandfather heard the screams of his youngest child, he ran out [to] find out what happened. My mom is screaming. My grandfather, without thinking about it, went down to the post office. He saw the woman, my mother pointed to her, and he did the unthinkable. He put his hands on a white woman. He turned her around, and that—everything broke loose. Well, from there, one thing happened to another. My grandfather realized, "Uh-oh, probably shouldn't have done that." He took my mother, and he put her in the wagon, put the tarp over her—and my grandfather never went anywhere without his gun. And he pulled his gun. And there's a scene in *The Color Purple* where Oprah, playing Ophelia or whoever she was playing—I don't remember...

Malaika Horne: I think that's who it was.

Kathy Conley-Jones: I had heard this story over and over. When I saw that particular situation where she was, and she said, "Take my children away," that's when I recognized that this was absolutely the same type of situation that my grandfather had. From that, my grandfather rushed home, I guess told my grandmother what happened, and my grandfather had a real interesting way with my grandmother. If you asked my grandfather what was his first name, he said, "Mr." and my grandmother's first name was always "Mrs." and that way you couldn't call them by their first name. [You] only could call them "Mr. Young" or "Mrs. Young." I guess my grandmother was probably horrified. They took my mother, who was a little person, put her in a bag of—like a 10- or 20-pound bag of potatoes—put her down in the bag, put the potatoes on her, and told her, "Be quiet;" gave her some—my mother said—some sorghum and bread to keep her quiet. Told her not to say anything, and my mother tore a little hole and peered out, and that evening she saw men of the Klan come into the house, beat my grandmother, and trying to get her to tell where my grandfather was, and in the midst of all of this, she's

peering out, so she can see this, and all of the sudden, they see a fire up on a hill, and it's my grandfather set fire to draw them away. He draws them away, they go—because they're going to skin him; they're going to kill him; they're going to make example of him—but once that happened, my grandfather's Masonic brother, Mr. McWhorter, and some other masons somehow got to the back of the hill, got my grandfather off the hill, put him in a coffin, and shipped him back to the islands. My grandmother put my mom into a trunk later and sent her, as a little girl at four, to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Malaika Horne: Wow. Now, I want to be sure we know your grandfather and grandmother's name and the island that, I guess, he's from. Was she from the islands, too?

Kathy Conley-Jones: Yeah. He was from—and I'm always a little confused on this one—my mother always said my grandfather spoke Geechee, so it's some islands...

Malaika Horne: It could be off Georgia or South Carolina.

Kathy Conley-Jones: Yeah, yeah, and so that was a part—my mother could remember a few words, but because she wasn't there long enough, she lost that after a couple of years.

Malaika Horne: And their names? Their names? What were their names?

Kathy Conley-Jones: Their names? John Young and Ollie Young [*spelling uncertain*]. Ollie was my grandmother; John Young was my grandfather.

Malaika Horne: And your mother's name?

Kathy Conley-Jones: My mother's name was Myrtle, and she had six other siblings. The ones that came later, they came much later because somewhere I guess they were able to get back together every now and then.

Malaika Horne: And your father?

Kathy Conley-Jones: And my father passed away three months before I was born.

Malaika Horne: His name?

Kathy Conley-Jones: His name was William Cosby, and my mother absolutely adored him, and all I have of memory is through my mom of how he was. So I grew up without a father because he passed away, and my mother refused to

marry. And she always felt that she could select the wrong man who would maybe not be very respectful to her sons, and she wasn't going to have any man put his hands on her daughter.

Malaika Horne: I understand. That was a traditional way of thinking.

Kathy Conley-Jones: Very.

Malaika Horne: Your husband and your children: talk about them briefly, and then we'll move on. Your husband and your children.

Kathy Conley-Jones: My husband and children? My second husband's name is Michael Jones. We don't have any children together. I have a son named Christopher. He's a wonderful kid. He's not a kid; he's a grown man now. So my first husband is not the father of my son, but through life issues, things occurred where I made sure that my son was educated and all the things and did that throughout, after high school and up through college.

Malaika Horne: [0:15:04] Okay. So, Christopher: what's his last name?

Kathy Conley-Jones: Thompson.

Malaika Horne: Thompson. And what does he do now? What does he do now?

Kathy Conley-Jones: Oh, he works for FedEx, yes.

Malaika Horne: So, when you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

Kathy Conley-Jones: Interesting. I only wanted to be one of two things. I either wanted to be a doctor or a teacher. And the reason was because I felt that those were the only two people that controlled their life. Little did I realize. But I thought that's what it was, and so I realized after a while, I'm not real good with blood, so I thought, "Doctor isn't going to be a good profession," and so I went towards the education. And I love teaching. I love educating. I love to see the light come on when someone gets it. So I went to—oh...

Malaika Horne: You went to St. Louis University.

Kathy Conley-Jones: I went to St. Louis University, right.

Malaika Horne: Some of these things I have...

Kathy Conley-Jones: I went on scholarship. I loved it. One of the greatest people there for me was Dr. Roy Cheatham, because when I got to St. Louis University, it was just after sort of the big protest about allowing African Americans in, even though St. Louis University is one of the first universities to ever have African American students, very small scale. And the undergraduate, it was a very, very big deal, and Dr. Roy Cheatham was our—I'd say he was our navigator. He was the one that kept all of us black children kind of on line, kept us on point, talked to us every day to tell us what we needed to do. It was like going back to being in Clark School where I had those teachers that said every day, "You got to be twice as good to get half as much, and pay attention." So he is a wonderful gentleman.

Malaika Horne: And you majored in?

Kathy Conley-Jones: My major was Interdisciplinary Social Studies, because I wanted to become an urban planner, and so the Interdisciplinary Social Studies involved psychology, sociology, and urban affairs to determine if you're going to create a city, where are you going to put all the services, and—? So I think I've always been very holistic about—really, my mother would say I would be nosy—I want to know where everything should be, how people should access things. So that was a very good piece for me. My minor was education. And so, with my minor, after I graduated and realized I didn't have any money to go to...

Malaika Horne: [Go back to?] school?

Kathy Conley-Jones: ...to get my Master's. I said, "I better get some money," and I taught school in the St. Louis Public Schools.

Malaika Horne: Okay. So when you were in college or anytime in your youth, were you considered a leader? Do you think people would consider you as a...

Kathy Conley-Jones: You know what; that's interesting. I might say no, but if I asked my friends, they'd say yes. They'd say, "Don't you realize you were always the one creating something?" and saying, "This is what we ought to do," and that they would say I'm bossy. Now I'd say I guess that's not bossy; that's just assertive. So, in that, I guess I was a leader. I was the first African American basketball homecoming queen.

Malaika Horne: At St. Louis U.?

Kathy Conley-Jones: At St. Louis University. So that was something, but I think more than anything, from a leadership, there were certain people that always stuck in my mind. And I call them my “sheroes.” One was Harriet Tubman, and Harriet Tubman, the reason—now she’s got to have her dollar face on...

Malaika Horne: Fortuitous, yes, that’s right.

Kathy Conley-Jones: I’m really excited, but I think part for me is Harriet Tubman represented for me someone who came from very little but was willing to give her all for others so that they could have more. So, to me, she was just amazing. But the other part of that is the Underground Railroad and everything that she did, and she kept going back and getting people, but she also didn’t take a lot of foolishness. So, for Harriet, with her gun in her pocket, she said, “You’re either you’re going forward or you’re going down, because you will not, in any way, affect those who want to go forward. So I’m not going to let you go back and create havoc for those who are trying to move forward.” She’s my shero.

Malaika Horne: I can see that.

Kathy Conley-Jones: She really is. Maya Angelou: throughout my—I love poetry. I love to read, and I always loved her voice. I loved not only the auditory sound of her voice, but I loved the poise that, when I would read it, I could just hear her in all of her words, and it was always as though she was speaking to me, because she was always talking about the differences in people, which my mother had helped me to create, that you don’t judge people by the color of their skin. That was before I had ever heard that from Dr. Martin Luther King. That was a part of my life. You judge them by how they treat you, and my mom could, of course, go back to her father, understanding that, yes, there was a group of whites that were absolutely hideous, but then there was also a group that was absolutely heroic. And so for that, I don’t judge people by their skin color.

Malaika Horne: So you may have talked about this already, but were you encouraged inside the home or outside the home regarding what you’ve become, which is a change agent or a leader?

Kathy Conley-Jones: My mom. My mom. My mom...

Malaika Horne: Your mother. How did she do that?

Kathy Conley-Jones: My mom is my third shero, because here's a woman who cannot read or write, but she would sit with the newspaper as though she could, and she would say—I think a lot of it was coming from the radio because she would hear things on the radio, and my mom would sit with a paper and she would have her newspaper like this, and she would act as though she's reading, and then she would say, "Baby..." or "Sister..."—what she called me, depending on how she was feeling that day—"Come read this for Mama. Let's see how well you can read." So, in essence, what she was doing was getting me to read, which strengthened my abilities, but at the same time, I didn't know my mother couldn't read, and not until I was, like, 10 or 11, and my brothers finally said, "You don't know Mama can't read?" Well, they had found out earlier but didn't say anything, but this was a woman who was about strength, about caring. She was the person on the block that took care of the children. My mother was a domestic. She worked in white homes, but she set her own tone. She said, for anyone that she worked for, "I must be home by three o'clock." She would quit a job if they'd said that she couldn't go home. And my mother also was the type from, I would say, she believed in equality, because my mother would bring home food that she had just cooked where a lot of people, a lot of domestics, had that fear. My mother said, "I put it in the bag. I cooked it. Put it in the bag; I'm bringing it home." So my mother was an excellent cook. So she had the strength, but she also had the softness, and it was a wonderful balance, and I learned a lot about that from her. She didn't take a lot of foolishness, but then again, she was the sweetest person you could ever meet, but don't cross her. Don't cross her.

Malaika Horne: I understand.

Kathy Conley-Jones: Yeah, so, and then my mother was very focused on education. It was the one thing she wanted, but she never was able to get. And I call it the generosity of her spirit because there were people on our block that were educated, and they would say, "Well, you know, too bad. I got mine. If they don't get theirs, well..." And my mother would just think, "That's absolutely ridiculous. Don't you want your child to be much better than you?" And so, not realizing when you're sitting at the feet of your parents, what they're really teaching you is what they show you and not so much what they say to you, and that's where you see, and that's why I think where women are able to make the change because it's what

we do. It's not what we talk about. It's what we believe in and how we affect the lives of others.

Malaika Horne: I'd like to go back a little earlier because we ask this question of all the interviewees: 50 years earlier—and it could be your grandmother, it could be your mother—if you were born 50 years earlier, what do you think you would be doing?

Kathy Conley-Jones: You know, when I read that question, I thought, "I would probably be one of the women in the Suffragette movement." I would be that one who's out there in everybody else's business, but at the same time making sure that every woman had equality and every child. I have a very strong penchant about those that I feel are the most vulnerable in our society, and those are usually our children and our elders. Anyone that takes advantage of those, I'm kind of like a mama bear: don't do it. So I do take a lot of pride in organizations; usually they're either women-focused, to strengthen women, or they are child-focused to protect them. So I think that's probably where I would be. Either that or I'd probably be in jail because they said I was out doing something I wasn't: marching or doing something they would've thrown me in jail or something. But it would not have been for anything other—not for myself. I think it would've always been on the behalf of those who need to see the change, because I do believe that you have to be the change for others to see. And if...

Malaika Horne: Because you have a very non-traditional career, even today.

Kathy Conley-Jones: Exactly.

Malaika Horne: Talk about that for a minute.

Kathy Conley-Jones: My traditional upbringing?

Malaika Horne: Your non-traditional career. You have your own company.

Kathy Conley-Jones: Oh, oh, that. That all came about because I didn't want to change. I was in the public school system. I was doing well; show you what happens. I decided at about the third year in the St. Louis Public School system, a lot of children were falling behind, and I asked if I could stay. I'd come in a half hour early, stay a half hour later and offered my classroom to any child who felt they needed extra work. And so I started—children started coming in, and that helped and they noticed that—"they" being the

administration down at 911 Locust at that point—noticed that my grades for my children were going up. And so they called me in and asked me what was I doing. I said, “Teaching,” and part of that issue was that sometimes I would come out of my classroom, and I would look to one side or the other, and there were teachers who weren’t fully giving their all. And when I realized that there were people who got paid more than I do for doing less than I did, that bothered me. So I thought, I got to do better than this. Going from that particular point, I had an associate who left teaching, and she was an excellent teacher, but she left, she said, because she was just so bogged down with all the bureaucracy and all the things you had to do before you could teach the kids. You couldn’t do anything, and she went into the insurance industry. She came back a year later—and this was purely mercenary on my part because she told me that she won a trip to Hawaii and I could not imagine, at that point, couldn’t imagine going to Hawaii, but she said, “I think you’d be good at it.” So I went in, found out different things, and ended up working with Lincoln National Life because it gave me freedom; it gave me the ability to make my own time so I could take care of my son; make sure I could get to programs and things with him. So all those things that I’ve always wanted—if you go back and I told you I wanted to be able to control my life, being a doctor or a teacher—actually that’s what insurance gave me. It gave me that platform to do that as well as make a very good living. So, in looking at that, I worked for Lincoln National. Then they started to have a down time, and I started to look at the people around me, and I happened to go into an office where there was a gentleman—I’ll use that term very lightly—a gentleman who was the head of his office, and this gentleman, if you opened up Webster’s Dictionary and you were looking for “racist,” “misogynistic,” “sexist”: his picture would have been there.

Malaika Horne: All of them. *[laughter]*

Kathy Conley-Jones: His picture would have been there. But I realized one thing: in order to learn, you have to put yourself in a place where the people who know are, and sometimes you have to just suck up, not say anything, and you got to take it. And there were times that I would go back to my shero, Harriet Tubman, and I would say, “I wonder what Harriet would do.” Would she just get mad and say, ‘The heck with this. I’m gone?’” I said, “No,” she stayed the course and she did whatever was required so that she could learn, and that’s exactly what I did. So, I learned about a lot of

different things that, in the insurance industry, was not being offered to people of color. They only gave us certain areas to work, and this gentleman was with General American Life, which was the big company here in St. Louis, and they had a wonderful relationship with McDonnell Douglas, and I started to go in, and I realized that a lot of times you get a lot more with sugar than you can with vinegar. And I would stand next to the guy and say, "Hey, how did you do that?" and he wanted to tell me about it. So people always love to talk about themselves. So he would tell me, "Oh, yeah, this is how I did this." "How did you do that?" "Well, insurance is allowed. You can do this or that. It has a tax base. It has a contractual base." And so I started to learn, and from that, I started to go back to school, which is insurance school, the American College, and I took more and more classes so that I could take what I did every day and pair it with the knowledge that I was gaining, and from there, I grew, and I learned, and I moved into areas that a lot of times you don't see people of color ever getting into because either they're not allowed or they have not taken the initiative to find those places that they can go to find out.

Malaika Horne: [0:30:40] So tell me the year you joined Lincoln. That was the first insurance company, right?

Kathy Conley-Jones: Mm-hmm.

Malaika Horne: What year was that?

Kathy Conley-Jones: What year?

Malaika Horne: Yes.

Kathy Conley-Jones: Oh. *[laughter]* All right, so then I was 7...Okay, no. I started with Lincoln National in 1982.

Malaika Horne: 1982. Did you ever win the trip to Hawaii?

Kathy Conley-Jones: Yes, I did go to Hawaii. I went to Hawaii; I went to the Virgin Islands; I went to Austria; I went to a number—yes, all the things I wanted I actually received.

Malaika Horne: And that was because of your work in the insurance industry?

Kathy Conley-Jones: Sure. In the insurance industry, what happens is, based upon your production, how much work you do, that kind of goes back to I want to

get paid for the work I do. If you produce a certain amount of business, you're invited to go on the conferences. And the conference, they will pay for you and one additional person to go. You have meetings, things that you can learn more and more about, and you have a good time. So, I was able to do that as well.

Malaika Horne: Interesting. So, the name of your company?

Kathy Conley-Jones: My company's name is KC Conley & Associates, doing business as The Conley Financial Group.

Malaika Horne: Okay. And you're based here in St. Louis?

Kathy Conley-Jones: I'm based in St. Louis. I have an office in Chicago.

Malaika Horne: Okay. So I want to talk about your career and your life. In the women's discipline, they call it "work-life balance." How do you balance work and family?

Kathy Conley-Jones: That's an interesting question. The one thing I realize is you can't have it all, despite what a lot of times we hear these wonderful epithets that go through. You can't have it all. Men don't have it all. If you see a lot of very successful men, they've missed out of a lot of their children's lives. And so the first thing you have to do is prioritize: what's most important. And if you think about your children, they're only children for 18 years or 21 years, and if you can find the most important pieces of their life—and it's usually those things that are the smallest—that's where you have to learn to balance. You also have to balance—for me, I think it's your family; I think it's your faith. My faith is very strong. I have to practice it because it's like anything: if you don't practice, you lose it. You don't get strong in it. So I think you have to have faith, especially if you are in business. I don't care what business. If you are a business owner or if you happen to work in a corporate entity, you've got to understand who you are first, and that's a balance. You can't become "the company," so I hear a lot of women say, "Oh, 'we' this," or "'we' that," and they're talking about the company. They're not talking about them. So I have always been one, despite what company I work for, I'm always The Conley Financial Group because that's my brand. And then, when you're a brand, you have to protect it. You have to ensure, from a balance standpoint, you don't do anything that in any way could make that a negative to someone. So, when you're looking at family and balancing it, for women, we take care

of everybody normally: parents, grandparents, husbands, spouses, whatever, but you got to learn also to take care of yourself. So when I do financial advising seminars for women, which I do, I tell them that it's important they do what I call the "airline method" of financial planning and advising, and that is, when you get on that airplane, your attendant tells you the first thing to do is buckle up, and then they tell you where the exits are, how to get out of this. You got to think about how to get out of this. I know you just got on a plane, but know where the exits are, and then, in the event of turbulence, you got to have something that's going to drop down that's going to give you an ability to continue on, and part of that is, if you're with others, the most important thing for you to do is when this drops, put it on you first, so then you can turn and help others. So, what women have done, in my estimation, and that we have to really get to understand, is you got to take care of you. You've got to take care of your faith; you've got to take care of your family, but the most important, you've got to take care of you. So if you're not taking care of you, how do you take care of those that you say you love the most? If you're drained because you're spread in so many different directions—and we have to learn that one very important word: "no." We don't know how to say no to children, to spouses, to partners, to business. You've got to learn to say no, so it's a balance on that.

Malaika Horne: So and did you convert to Catholicism? Because I believe you go to a Catholic church. Is that correct?

Kathy Conley-Jones: Say it again.

Malaika Horne: You converted to Catholicism.

Kathy Conley-Jones: Yes. That's interesting. My father was Baptist. My mother was Catholic, which, of course, then, that was a mixed marriage. [*inaudible* 0:36:28] But my father's relatives lived in St. Louis, so my mother, being from Alabama and kind of traveled around, met my father when he was in the Army, came to St. Louis, and had a desire to ensure that there was a family connection, because, remember, she had lost her family connection. So she always wanted that for her children. So for me, for Catholicism, it gave me—my mother would take us to church twice every Sunday. She didn't send us; she took us. So we went to Catholic Mass, and then we went down to what was Pleasant Green Baptist Church every Sunday.

Malaika Horne: Wow. You went to two churches?

Kathy Conley-Jones: Yeah, yeah, [*inaudible* 0:37:08]. And there I heard the music; I heard the words, but at the Catholic church, I heard the purpose. I heard structure. So I'm a person of structure. It's much more important that I know what I'm trying to get done and why I'm doing it so that I can do it versus just saying, "Let's do it." So, when we all reached the age of 12, my mother—remember, she can't read, but she knows the story of Jesus, and she knows that at 12 he was in the temple, right, and he said, "I'm going about my father's business,"—and my mother said, "You can select. You can either go to the Catholic church or you can go [to] the Baptist church." My brothers selected the Baptist. They said they were more fun than the Catholics. I liked Catholic because it was very structured. So I have both, but the one thing about it for me is Christianity. But I married my first husband. He converted from Catholicism to Islam. So I went to temple. But I went to church. I went to my Mass. So I got a chance to see how everyone sees God from their perspective, and in that I've learned to respect people for their belief. I don't think that there's only one way, and I think that it's important that we all are more cognizant of other people, that the fundamentalism, no matter where it is, is a very scary kind of thing.

Malaika Horne: This is very interesting. There's so many questions that I want to ask you, but I do want you to briefly talk about your husband, Mike Jones. What does he do?

Kathy Conley-Jones: Well, Mike Jones has had an interesting history in St. Louis, and if you're talking about him or how he interacts with me...Both, okay. You want to take brief on him and then a lot on me.

Malaika Horne: Yes.

Kathy Conley-Jones: As a matter of fact, he's a...

Malaika Horne: Brief on him, because we've got a lot of other questions to ask you.

Kathy Conley-Jones: I want to make sure that I don't take up too much time doing things I shouldn't do. He is a graduate of University of Missouri-St. Louis, UMSL, and he also—I think his major was in Asian History, which is really interesting, but Michael has been very blessed because he's a very, very smart guy. He's one of the few people—I've only met maybe two or three

people in my life who can take a very complex subject, and when he speaks it back to you, it's very clear. So he's very good at that, just bringing that all together. He has worked in politics, of course. He was— let's take it back: he was an alderman in the St. Louis City. He then moved from alderman under Vince Schoemehl, who also was a...

Malaika Horne: UMSL grad.

Kathy Conley-Jones: ...UMSL graduate, and here, what he did under that administration, he moved into the St. Louis Housing Authority. He was executive director. He moved from there to something with the Boys Club. I can't keep up with everything. He wasn't married to me in all this time but I just knew him, okay, because we actually lived across the street from each other when we were both married to other people. But in that, what he's been able to do is to always find a way to fight for the underdog, that person who doesn't have a voice, and he always speaks out on behalf of those who don't have a voice, and I always found that to be very enlightening for me and very attractive. Individuals who are all about money: that does nothing for me.

Malaika Horne: And wasn't he an executive at Anheuser-Busch for a while?

Kathy Conley-Jones: Yes. He was executive with Anheuser-Busch, and it's interesting: he was having a difficult time because, even though he was successful—he moved to Detroit—but even though he was successful with that, he was, I would say, he was conflicted because what alcohol does in the African American community, and he had a problem with that. Now, he's not a teetotaler or anything like that, but just the idea that he was sort of speaking for the King of Beers, and he had an issue with that. But what got him out of that was Clarence Harmon called him and asked him, would he consider being deputy mayor for him.

Malaika Horne: And Clarence Harmon was Mayor of St. Louis.

Kathy Conley-Jones: When Clarence Harmon became the second black mayor of St. Louis, and so Michael was able to do that, and in that, he became the deputy director, or something like that, of development.

Malaika Horne: With Charlie Dooley. Oh, you mean when he was still in Harmon.

Kathy Conley-Jones: Yeah, when he was with Clarence Harmon. So he's had a very interesting time. He retired from the St. Louis County under Charlie Dooley, under County Executive Charlie Dooley after 10 years, and he's pretty much said, "I'm done with politics," but what he still has a penchant for are the young, are those who are trying to find their ways, and he's trying to help them in any way that he can.

Malaika Horne: I just wanted to get that in because this is the other half and both are very successful, very powerful. What are some of your leadership lessons that you could convey?

Kathy Conley-Jones: I'm so glad you asked that. One of my leadership lessons is one that I actually got from, I would say, one of my greatest mentors, and his name was S. Lee Kling.

Malaika Horne: Oh, yes. I remember him.

Kathy Conley-Jones: Lee Kling: amazing man. And actually, I kind of wrote it down. He had a very broad political, economic, and professional base. He was the chairman of Landmark Banks, which became, I think, Mid Term Banks or something—I don't remember—but he had banking, insurance. He was under President Jimmy Carter. He controlled for the Air Force and Army, the base closings, so he was all in charge of that. So, he became just like a great father figure, and one of the things he told me is, "Kathy, the harder you work, the luckier you get."

Malaika Horne: *[laughter]* I like that.

Kathy Conley-Jones: And he even wrote a book to that, and that's a great leadership lesson. The other leadership lesson I learned is: lead from the rear. And what that really means is leaders aren't the ones that jump out front and want everybody to see them. Leaders are the ones who empower those to move forward. That's how you lead, especially for women. It's important that we empower each other and not try to find ways to tear each other down or think that we're in a competition because that's very important. We need to teach our next generation of how to lead, and I guess what other leadership lessons, I have a cup that's in my kitchen, and it says that "Just when the caterpillar thought the world was all over, she became a butterfly." So it tells you that what happens in that cocoon where you're all tied up and very tight, and you've got to fight your way out. If you open up a cocoon you'll kill the butterfly, but that caterpillar

that went in there that didn't look all that great—takes time for that caterpillar to twist and turn and do all the things that it's required, and then, in order to get out of that cocoon, it's got to keep, with its wings, it's got to beat its wings so fast that it starts to tear open that.

Malaika Horne: [0:45:42] This might be a good segue into another part of this caterpillar/butterfly analogy. What has impeded your progress, or has anything impeded your progress in terms of flap-your-wings-and-become-a-butterfly?

Kathy Conley-Jones: The reason I go back to the butterfly is because—I know you've probably seen a—actually, I think I brought it—there's an edict that says, "Everyone wants to be successful until they see what it actually takes."

Malaika Horne: I've seen that, mm-hmm.

Kathy Conley-Jones: So, when you look at it...

Malaika Horne: And that's a ballet dancer showing her...

Kathy Conley-Jones: A ballet dancer. Her feet are just in terrible shape.

Malaika Horne: [*unintelligible* 0:46:25]

Kathy Conley-Jones: One is all covered with a beautiful satin...

Malaika Horne: Ballet slipper, mm-hmm.

Kathy Conley-Jones: But if you saw that, and what we always need to understand is there's no such thing as an overnight sensation, an overnight success. It's because you have not seen them in the wee hours of the morning, reading and doing whatever is required, or you haven't seen them taking on some terrible situations and having to work through it. That's you beating your wings. That's you getting stronger, because if you don't get stronger, you won't survive.

Malaika Horne: So how did you beat your wings? Can you give us an example of how that helped you to succeed?

Kathy Conley-Jones: Well, I would say that, first of all, being in this business, you learn. It's holistic: taxes, it's all the things that I've talked about before, but it's also about understanding where you fit. You've got to have a strategy about what you do. So, you always are going to have ups and downs, and I tell

people, “If you don’t have ups and downs, you’re dead,” because if you look at a heart monitor, you want to see this: [*gestures a periodic rhythm*]. What you don’t want to see is this: [*gestures a straight line*].

Malaika Horne: That’s right.

Kathy Conley-Jones: That’s flatlined. So for me, I’ve had higher highs, lower lows, but the thing that keeps you going is that you keep going. When you understand that everything about success—success is just around the corner. You’ve got to go through it before you can get to it. It just doesn’t happen any other way. And those who give up too soon, they’re usually this far away [*gestures with thumb and forefinger*] from being successful. They gave up. So it’s always about that. So, in my life, in my business, that’s very important, and right now I’m about to experience something that I’m just really excited about. I have, for the past 15 years, always wanted to grow an agency where I could bring in younger people, help them to grow, understand the business; you lead with integrity. Most important: what [*sic*] your word is your bond, that you lead with knowledge, and you lead with humor. It’s funny. Our life is funny, but you have to understand that it’s important you do that, and in doing so—I’ve always wanted to do that, so now I have a young man that I’ve brought on. I call him my “succession leadership.” It looks like I’m going to bring another individual on, and just yesterday, I was at a meeting where—you’ll probably hear it shortly—where the Department of Labor has developed a program, and they’ve asked me to be a part of it...

Malaika Horne: Congratulations. Congratulations.

Kathy Conley-Jones: ...and I’m very excited about this, very excited, so [it will?]...

Malaika Horne: Could you tell us a little bit more about that program with the Department of Labor?

Kathy Conley-Jones: Yeah. The program, yeah. It will be coming out shortly. Like I said, it just happened yesterday. The Department of Labor now recognizes insurance as a specific industry or apprenticeship program. That’s what I’ve always wanted to do, and it just culminated. I almost was in tears. But it something I had been wanting to do for a long time, and it’s coming to fruition. So you will be seeing that, and it’s headed up by Michael Holmes of SLATE, and St. Louis will be the launching pad. This will be where we will start the apprenticeship program because I’m a member of an

organization called NAAIA, which is the National African American Insurance Association. It's a national entity. Their focus is bringing more people of color into the insurance industry, and we will be able to launch the first apprenticeship program, because you don't have to go to college. I know we're sitting in a college, but we don't have to go to college to come into this industry and do well and have something of worth. So I'm very excited about that.

Malaika Horne: No, this is really falling into place really well. My question is sort of related to what you're getting ready to embark on, and that's: When you're looking at someone with potential as a leader, as an effective person in your industry, what do you look for?

Kathy Conley-Jones: I look for integrity, I look for intelligence, and I look for someone who doesn't basically take themselves seriously, that they are focused on whatever they're doing seriously, but don't take yourself so seriously. I look at people who can actually set a goal and actually attain the goal, set little goals and make them, and you find people who are not goal setters. You'll find people who don't usually do well because they don't have any way to adjust and determine what it is they're trying to do. And I look for someone who never gives up. If you never give up, you're my kind of girl or guy. Don't ever give up. Keep that going. That's really important to me.

Malaika Horne: So what advice would you give to anybody, but particularly young professionals, in any profession, but what advice would you give them as they try to become more successful?

Kathy Conley-Jones: What I try to say is, first of all, know thyself: know who you are before you start going out trying to tell everybody who you are. You don't know who you are, so, first of all, know yourself. Know what you're trying to get done. You've got to know where you're going. It's like having a lesson plan, right? If you don't know where you're going, you'll get there. So that's very important. I would say also, listen. Listen. You've got to learn. My generation, we learn at the foot of the elders. Sometimes the elders weren't talking to us, but the issue is, were you interested enough to listen, to find a way? And I think the one thing that—this is my pet peeve—and that is, you can't ask someone to be your mentor. A mentor seeks you out. S. Lee Kling, I didn't ask him to mentor me. He sought me out. He told me something to do; I did it, and then he said, "When you do it, here's my card. Call me." I called him. He said, "I knew you'd call." So a

lot of times, you've got to understand that there's a test inside of a request. You've got to understand, if you don't do it, don't say, "Well, they didn't call me back." Well, did you call them back? They're not looking for it. You are. So you've got to seek, you've got to really dig deep to find what you're trying to do.

Malaika Horne: And how did you meet Kling? I mean, that's...

Kathy Conley-Jones: How did I meet him?

Malaika Horne: Yeah, that's something really important that I tell students.

Kathy Conley-Jones: Okay. This is...

Malaika Horne: It's important: be in the room. How did you meet him?

Kathy Conley-Jones: I met him because I went somewhere that I should have been. There was an event at Colonel Gates's home on Lindell.

Malaika Horne: Oh, I remember Colonel Gates.

Kathy Conley-Jones: It was a political event. Now, I could've said, "I'm too tired. I don't want to go."

Malaika Horne: Or you could have been intimidated.

Kathy Conley-Jones: But you've got to show up.

Malaika Horne: Right, right. Right.

Kathy Conley-Jones: You've got to show up, and so many times, I have had opportunities to work with young people. They don't show up.

Malaika Horne: They sure don't.

Kathy Conley-Jones: And I'm thinking, "If I showed up, don't you think you ought to show?" Because you never know who you'll meet when you show up. So, you've got to show up. You've got to be prepared when you're there. Don't be standing around kind of with your finger in your ear. And you have to be willing to go outside your comfort zone. I see so many young people—if you're a young professional, I beg you to go someplace and find somebody new to talk to. Don't just find your friends. You already know them. What are you talking to them about? Nothing. Go find people who are different and have something to talk about: "Hey, those are some

good looking shoes you got on.” “Oh, I love that dress.” “Hey, have you read...” “Why are you here? I don’t know why I’m here. Why are you here?” Start a conversation and don’t always be looking for something for yourself. Give something first.

Malaika Horne: Interesting. Any hobbies?

Kathy Conley-Jones: Well, I think I’ve probably talked way too long, but what I can say...

Malaika Horne: We’ve got five minutes, so any hobbies?

Kathy Conley-Jones: What I can say is: women, we are change agents. Everything about us. In order to give birth, your body has to change. In order to give more knowledge, your brain has to change. Everything about us has to change, and we are usually the ones who are much more flexible, that we can change. You can’t become so rigid, because if you become rigid, you’ll break. When you have to bend, you’ll break. So it’s important that you gather up as much knowledge as you possibly can and that go to other women; seek them out, but don’t expect them to feel as though they owe you something. I don’t owe you anything until you’ve given something. And so that was how I would leave it.

Malaika Horne: So, but tell me this: What do you do for fun? Because we have five minutes.

Kathy Conley-Jones: I travel. I love traveling. I love to go different places. I listen to music, and something you probably don’t know—but you know—that I’m deaf. Most people don’t know that. Without my hearing aids, I can’t hear. Now, you could use that as a crutch, or you could use that as an oar to take you places. So I use mine as an oar. So I tell people that I can’t hear, and it’s amazing how gracious people will be to you once they understand.

Malaika Horne: Any awards or recognitions?

Kathy Conley-Jones: Oh, my goodness, yes. I have awards from my industry, in the Million Dollar Round Table. I’ve been a Court of the Table. It’s all the things that you’ve done production-wise to move up in your field. I have awards from the St. Louis American which I honor more than anything. I have awards from the City of St. Louis. I’ve been on the Investment Trust board for the State of Missouri. I’ve been on a number of different events. I love the Community Women Against Hardship, which is one of

my favorite charities. They've given me Ambassador Awards. So those awards are recognition, but I'm not really proud of that. What I'm proud...

Malaika Horne: And you were head of the Professional Organization of Women. P.O.W.

Kathy Conley-Jones: Oh, and the Professional Organization of Women. How could I ever miss that? That's a heart for me because that's where you teach young African American women how to lead, how to learn, and how to succeed.

Malaika Horne: That's right. Is there anything we missed?

Kathy Conley-Jones: I don't believe so, other than I am so happy that you even considered me for this.

Malaika Horne: Well, thank you so much. It was very enjoyable.

Kathy Conley-Jones: Thank you. I appreciate it. [Hazel] Kohring was a little Jewish woman who was in the insurance industry, and I met her at General American when I first came. And Hazel Kohring was a powerhouse. There were no women in the insurance industry, and she came in one day and said, "Honey, who are you?" and I told her who I was, and she said, "I'm going to teach you three things right now. First of all: women make the decisions in this country on insurance." Said, "The husbands might go to work, but women make the decisions." She said, "Number two: don't try to...", she said, "You can always understand that the boys are playing, but you don't have to play with them. Create your own area to play in," and she said, "There you'll succeed." And she said, "Three: always know that this is fun, but everything that you do is about helping someone else." So Hazel Kohring took me under her wing for about three or four months. She would just come in and see me, and, like I said, we looked like the odd couple. There's this older, white Jewish woman and this younger, black woman, but we had the same thing in common. It was women helping to change what was going to happen.

Malaika Horne: And what was her position?

Kathy Conley-Jones: She was a broker. She was an insurance broker with General American Life.

Malaika Horne: Okay. I have to ask this question. I think we've got some minutes. Do you think there's a difference between men and women's leadership style?

Kathy Conley-Jones: Oh, absolutely.

Malaika Horne: What's the difference to you?

Kathy Conley-Jones: Women are more consultative. We want to know more. We're not out to just be what I call transactional. We're not looking for, "Okay, this is this. Give me that; that's it." Women want to know, "If you take this, what are you going to do with it? How are you going to use it? Let me tell you some of the ways that you can use it to improve what you're doing." So I think that's one of them. So from a leadership standpoint, women actually will draw in other women, but they will push out those that aren't serious. If you're a leader, you don't have time for a lot of foolishness because you're trying to lead, but, like I said, you lead from behind, and the easiest thing is if I can find someone that I think that looks like a winner, I don't have to push you a lot. I can nudge you, and you'll go further. But somebody's got to at least tap you on the shoulder; tell you if you're going right or going wrong. Men sometimes are in competition with each other versus being in a consultative role, and it's very important. But women have to be careful not to get into a place where you're becoming a social worker—and nothing against a social worker; I'm talking about [another?] business.

Malaika Horne: [1:00:46] *[laughter]* I agree.

Kathy Conley-Jones: You can't be a social worker.

Malaika Horne: I agree.

Kathy Conley-Jones: Got to have a purpose; got to have a goal. You've got to have your eye on what you're trying to get done, but you don't have to act like the guy to do it.

Malaika Horne: Well said. Thank you.