

An Interview with

Jill Cooper

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



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.

Blanche Touhill: ...Just talk in general about when you were young.

Jill Cooper: Okay. Well, I grew up in Florissant in North County of St. Louis and my parents were Walter and Betty Weimeyer. My maiden name is Weimeyer. I have one brother, Jay, and he's three years younger than me. We lived in the same house from the time I was five until I was out on my own. So it was a neighborhood just full of children. I was more of a stay-at-home kind of kid rather than adventurous but there were so many children in the neighborhood that it was never an organized play situation. It was whoever knocked on the door and then you'd go out and play or they would come in. During the summertime, we would always hide-and-seek and the lamppost was base and we would congregate there almost every evening. There were some families that had five children, seven children, nine, eleven children in our neighborhood so there was just whoever could play did and when it was time to stop playing, usually it was dark and your parents would come outside and call your name and you knew it was time to go in. The rules were generally, especially for the boys, that you could leave in the morning but you had to be home by dinner and anything that happened in between was just whatever happened in between and there were not a lot of rules for the boys. So I don't feel like I had quite that much flexibility but I stayed more close to the neighborhood.

Blanche Touhill: Did you learn to cook?

Jill Cooper: Yes, I did. It was one of those, I was in Girl Scouts so we had cooking badges and sewing badges. My mom sewed all the time.

Blanche Touhill: Did you sew, do you sew?

Jill Cooper: I did sew. I sewed a lot when I was young. I made clothes and crafts and things like that. My mom made all of her clothes because she was very tall. She was almost six foot tall so it was difficult for her to find clothes that fit her. So she taught me to sew when I was in elementary school and how it's kind of Halloween costumes and curtains but I still like to sew and I've taught my daughter too as well.

Blanche Touhill: The sewing machines have changed.

Jill Cooper: Oh, yes, they have, although my mom always had an electric sewing machine. It wasn't throttle or anything like that so it wasn't all that different than mine.

Blanche Touhill: Well, aren't they much more computer-oriented these days?

Jill Cooper: They are but mine is not quite that fancy. Mine's relatively old. I have some fancy features but I don't use them all so I'm still pretty basic.

Blanche Touhill: Did you learn to embroider or to crochet?

Jill Cooper: I don't sit still very well and my grandma crocheted all the time but she was right-handed and I was left-handed and she tried to teach me to crochet but said it was too hard with me using the wrong hand.

Blanche Touhill: Did you knit?

Jill Cooper: No, I did not.

Blanche Touhill: Did you weave?

Jill Cooper: I did as a kid with some of the little children's looms but not anything very fancy.

Blanche Touhill: So you really cooked and you sewed and you cleaned?

Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: But everybody in the house cleaned, didn't they?

Jill Cooper: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: The men and the boys cleaned as well?

Jill Cooper: True. My brother had chores just like I did and my dad was generally the inspector, more than my mom because my mom was raised in a situation where her mom was very critical of everything they did so she didn't want to be critical but my dad didn't mind.

Blanche Touhill: And who did the shopping?

Jill Cooper: My mom.

Blanche Touhill: Did you have a neighborhood grocery store?

Jill Cooper: We did, it was within walking distance, although we would often run errands to the grocery store on our bikes. We rode our bikes everywhere and my dad was a truck driver. He was a milkman when I was young and my mom was an Avon lady.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, indeed. I just found an Avon store on Grand and Arsenal.

Jill Cooper: Well, I'll be. Yeah, they didn't have any retail stores at the time.

Blanche Touhill: No, but I think it's more or less the headquarters of women who are in that business.

Jill Cooper: Oh, I see.

Blanche Touhill: I went in and they sold Watkins products. I don't know whether you remember Watkins products?

Jill Cooper: I've heard that.

Blanche Touhill: Or the Fuller Brush man?

Jill Cooper: Oh, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Well, they have the Fuller brushes.

Jill Cooper: I'll be darned.

Blanche Touhill: So I thought, that's a look back to the war.

Jill Cooper: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Or that period anyway, the '50s. It was still neighborhoods.

Jill Cooper: Exactly, yeah, because I think the territories for her, her Avon territory was the neighborhood and most of the women were stay-at-home moms and when my mom would call on them, they were generally home and that was most of her social life, I would say, was her friendships and she went every other week to take orders and deliver and it was very home-based.

Blanche Touhill: Does anything like that exist today?

Jill Cooper: I don't think so. I think most of those products are sold online. Now, I think that they do have some home party kind of situations where you'll

have Mary Kay or different types of products that are sold at home parties.

Blanche Touhill: Well, that used to be the Tupperware.

Jill Cooper: Yeah. When we first got married, every friend was having a Tupperware party and you just had to buy it and pretty soon that was really the only thing you had in your kitchen, was Tupperware.

Blanche Touhill: That's true, but it was very good.

Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm, I still have a lot of what I got when I was married, when I first got married.

Blanche Touhill: Who in your family encouraged you to do what you wanted to do?

Jill Cooper: I don't know that...

Blanche Touhill: Or to go to college or study hard?

Jill Cooper: My dad was very adamant about studying hard. Neither of my parents had gone to college but grades were important to my dad, particularly and they were just always really important to me. They weren't as important to my brother and that really wasn't a big deal at home. My opinion that I just always had to make A's, and it was celebrated but I think that was partially inwardly driven rather than it being something that my parents mandated.

Blanche Touhill: But your father wanted you to work hard, whatever you did?

Jill Cooper: Yes, whatever I did.

Blanche Touhill: He wasn't as concerned with the grade as he was with, did you work hard at it?

Jill Cooper: Exactly, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: And was that true of his son as well?

Jill Cooper: Yes. My brother has an extremely hard work ethic. He doesn't have a college education either but he has just always been a very hard worker and that's just been the backbone of his life.

Blanche Touhill: The reason I say that is I had an aunt who taught school for years and she taught at one point in a very German community in Illinois and she said when parents came in for parents' day, they were very German and she said they only wanted to know one question, was the child working as hard as they could. They didn't care what the grade was but they had to be assured that the effort was put in and I always thought that was a pretty good model to have in life.

Jill Cooper: I think so, too. You just have to do your best.

Blanche Touhill: You have to do your best.

Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Did your mother and father encourage you to prepare for college or they just were sort of mute?

Jill Cooper: They were kind of mute. I think they supported the fact that I wanted to go to college. All of my friends that were girls were going to go to college and I felt like I just needed to be on that bandwagon although I didn't know what I wanted to do initially.

Blanche Touhill: Go back to grade school.

Jill Cooper: Oh, okay.

Blanche Touhill: Talk about grade school. How was grade school?

Jill Cooper: It was fun. Again, I worked hard. I enjoyed school. I've always loved learning and was an avid reader but I had friends that were in the neighborhood and then a little bit further away but generally within walking distance. I was moved to three different grade schools, living in the same house, mostly because they kept changing the boundaries.

Blanche Touhill: Well, Florissant was growing in those days.

Jill Cooper: It was. When we first moved into our home and my parents had built it and we backed up to a corn field so then that subdivision behind us developed. It was just exploding so as Florissant grew, the school district grew and they just kept having to change the boundary lines to get the kids in the right schools. There were a lot of parochial schools and many of the kids in my neighborhood went to the Catholic church up the street. They tried to have the kids go to the school that they could walk to. So

they tried not to bus as much. So I guess that I went to four different elementary schools back and forth, all living in the same place because they were just trying to accommodate the census of the elementary schools.

Blanche Touhill: Was it hard to move from school to school?

Jill Cooper: Most of the time, my friends were moving as well so it wasn't that bad.

Blanche Touhill: But the teachers probably weren't.

Jill Cooper: No, but you learned the new teachers when you went to a new grade because I went to one school in kindergarten and then in the second school, 1st through 4th grade and then back to the school where I went to kindergarten for 5th grade and then they put all the 6th graders in the same school. So people who you had gone to school with before ended up reconnecting with when we were all in the 6th grade.

Blanche Touhill: Did you have school picnics?

Jill Cooper: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Where did you have them?

Jill Cooper: A lot of times we would have them at Holiday Hill which was, I think, out of Natural Bridge area someplace and sometimes they would just be on the school grounds where they would bring in rides.

Blanche Touhill: Was that an amusement park, Holiday Hill?

Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm, it was, mm-hmm. I remember just riding the roller coasters, is what I remember the most about that.

Blanche Touhill: Did they get a bus for you to take you?

Jill Cooper: No, your parents had to take you and usually they would have a parade and we would decorate our car. My dad always drove a convertible. We always had a convertible so he would always decorate it and we would ride in the parade before the school picnic. I had forgotten about that.

Blanche Touhill: Did you all carry flags, little flags?

Jill Cooper: No, not really. I don't remember doing that.

Blanche Touhill: I lived across from a public school and they always had a parade to the streetcar, to get on the streetcar to go to the Forest Park Highlands and everybody carried a flag. A couple of years, I had friends and they asked the teacher if I could come along and they gave me a flag and I walked along with them. It was wonderful.

Jill Cooper: Oh, that's fun, yeah. That's just not something I remember doing.

Blanche Touhill: What was the name of the Catholic church down the street?

Jill Cooper: Saint Sabina.

Blanche Touhill: Was Mayor Eagan the mayor?

Jill Cooper: He was mayor forever, wasn't he?

Blanche Touhill: He was. He was like Holly Salase. He was the governor forever but he grew up about four blocks from me when he was a kid.

Jill Cooper: Oh.

Blanche Touhill: I didn't know him. He was older than I was but I remember the Eagan gang.

Jill Cooper: James Eagan, yes.

Blanche Touhill: And he must have been mayor for...

Jill Cooper: ...I think the entire time I was growing up. It seems like he was mayor when I was born.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah, I think he was too, yes, I think he was. He had sort of shocking white hair, as I remember him. He was a great big man.

Jill Cooper: Yes, and I think probably early on he didn't have that white hair.

Blanche Touhill: No, I'm sure he dark hair then.

Jill Cooper: Because I remember him as a kid but I just always remember hearing the name always. I don't think that there were any terms. I mean, I don't know what made him finally stop.

Blanche Touhill: I don't think there were either. Actually, when I became an adult and started teaching, he was still mayor of Florissant so he was mayor of Florissant forever.

Jill Cooper: I think if someone asked me today who the mayor of Florissant would be, I would say, "Well, isn't that Eagan?" I'm sure it's not but I have no idea who it is now.

Blanche Touhill: That's right. So, did Florissant in those days have shopping centers? I forget.

Jill Cooper: There were a few shopping centers. There was Grandview Plaza and it had a big Penny's in it and there was Village Square which was at where Lindbergh and 270 are now and it was a big shopping center. We didn't have any malls and that was before the time of Jamestown Mall. I think the closest mall type of thing was either Northwest Plaza or the one at River Roads and Jennings.

Blanche Touhill: That's right.

Jill Cooper: My grandma lived right by that.

Blanche Touhill: I remember River Roads.

Jill Cooper: My grandma lived right by River Roads and so we would be able to walk to River Roads from when we would stay at her house and we would generally stay at my grandma's for a week during the summer. That was our vacation. But my grandma always tended the graves of her parents and so we would go...when I'd stay with her, we would go and we would bring flowers or she would tend the living flowers that were there. My brother lost interest in that pretty quickly so as soon as he was allowed, he stopped spending the week with my grandma. But I always just loved that.

Blanche Touhill: Actually, people used to do that all the time.

Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm. Well, my grandparents chose to be in a mausoleum so that no one would have to tend their graves.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, interesting.

Jill Cooper: They're in drawers which I didn't realize it at the time, when they passed away, I couldn't figure out why they would do that because I felt like it was an act of love when she would go tend the grave of her parents but I think that it was a chore that she wanted to save anyone else from having to do.

Blanche Touhill: Yes. Well, I know they have perpetual help now too.

Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: So somebody's supposed to come but I remember in my youth that families would go out and tend to the graves, plant ivy or plant flowers. I'm sure they don't let you do that anymore.

Jill Cooper: No.

Blanche Touhill: Because they bring in the mowers and just cut.

Jill Cooper: They do and if you bring flowers to the grave, you have to have it right up against the headstone.

Blanche Touhill: I bet that's right.

Jill Cooper: I generally will take a grave blanket to my parents' grave at Christmastime but that's allowed because they aren't mowing at that time of year.

Blanche Touhill: Yes. What gravesite are they in?

Jill Cooper: They are....oh, gracious, I should know this. They've been there 25 years. It will come to me. I'm sorry.

Blanche Touhill: Well, it's sort of interesting, but they're buried in North County?

Jill Cooper: Yes, they are, at Chambers and (Bell Fountain?) Road is the intersection there.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I don't have to have the name of it. I was just trying to get the location.

Jill Cooper: Yes, so they're in North County.

Blanche Touhill: So were your family originally from North County or did they move from...

Jill Cooper: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: They were originally?

Jill Cooper: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Whenever anybody came, they went to North County?

Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm, that's right, and they grew up in the Baden area.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, I haven't been to Baden in years. Baden was a German town.

Jill Cooper: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: It was a German little suburb but it's in the City of St. Louis, isn't it?

Jill Cooper: It is, yes.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, I remember German. The buildings are right next to the sidewalk.

Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm, yeah, and we didn't really visit in Baden. By the time I was born, my grandparents had moved to Jennings and my parents started out in Riverview but moved to Florissant so they bought a three-bedroom house there.

Blanche Touhill: Well, those were all new houses.

Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: When you say that your family built it, you could build them.

Jill Cooper: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: And you could make a little change in the designs and everything, yes.

Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Did you have a back yard?

Jill Cooper: We did. It wasn't a huge back yard but it was big enough and my mom just loved flowers so we had lots of flower beds. That was one of her passions. So she would love to just have a really pretty yard. My dad would build the flower beds and they're still standing, some of the flower beds.

Blanche Touhill: Isn't that wonderful?

Jill Cooper: Yeah. So I drive by there. I just drove by there a couple weeks ago.

Blanche Touhill: And the flower beds are still there?

Jill Cooper: And the flower beds are still there, yeah.

- Blanche Touhill: Wasn't that a wonderful gift she left for the residents of the house?
- Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm, yes. I look at that and I think, it looks just as nice now and it's so nice to see it being well maintained because it's hard when you drive past places where you used to live and they're shabby.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes. Well, how was high school?
- Jill Cooper: High school was good. I went to Hazelwood and that was during the time when...
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, they were growing.
- Jill Cooper: ...they were growing. We were on split shifts at the time that I was in Hazelwood. I graduated in 1975, which was the last year that Hazelwood, East, West and Central were all housed in the same building. So we had a shift that went from 6:00 in the morning until noon and a shift that went from 12:30 to 6:30 in the evening where Central went one of the times and East and West were in the other. So the following year, the East and West buildings were finished and they were no longer on that campus. But it was so crowded. It was really strange, having such odd hours for going to school and I had both shifts during the time I was in high school because they flip-flopped it.
- Blanche Touhill: Which did you like best?
- Jill Cooper: I preferred the morning shift, getting up early and being done by 12:30. I'm more of a morning person.
- Blanche Touhill: So what time did you get up?
- Jill Cooper: We would have to get up at 5:00 or quarter to 5:00 so that you would be waiting for the bus at 5:30 to start school at 6:00.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness. And they had teacher shifts that came in in the morning or the afternoon and custodians and of all double personnel.
- Jill Cooper: It was hard for the athletic teams because...I'm not exactly sure how they practiced because during the time where, if you were a morning shift group, you would have to be at school in the afternoon to practice your football or baseball or whatever and have your games and if you were an afternoon shift, it would be hard because those athletes, if you had a

game right after school, those athletes would miss classes. So it was certainly not an ideal situation.

Blanche Touhill: How did they handle other clubs, or did they have many clubs?

Jill Cooper: Well, I wasn't involved in that many clubs. They didn't have much of that because I think that it was just...

Blanche Touhill: There was no space.

Jill Cooper: There was no space to do that.

Blanche Touhill: How many were in your class?

Jill Cooper: Probably close to 600.

Blanche Touhill: For a whole year or first semester? Did they do the semesters in those days or did they do the whole year?

Jill Cooper: They did the whole year and we probably had 600 in the Central class and then 300 or more in East and 300 in West so that the school was accommodating 1200 students, in each grade level.

Blanche Touhill: Now, that's the beginning, too, of the Northeast and Northwest Hospitals.

Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Hazelwood High School was across from Northeast? I can't think which...right across 67th. Is it 67th?

Jill Cooper: That's East. That's Hazelwood East.

Blanche Touhill: Somebody told me their corridors could be a mile long. Is that possible? No, it couldn't be.

Jill Cooper: That doesn't seem right.

Blanche Touhill: I guess all the corridors.

Jill Cooper: Maybe all in total.

Blanche Touhill: If you put them...that's right. That's impossible.

Jill Cooper: Yeah, I can't imagine it would be a mile.

Blanche Touhill: But it was a huge school.

Jill Cooper: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: And the administrators or somebody on the faculty used to wear red coats.

Jill Cooper: Huh!

Blanche Touhill: That wasn't in your era?

Jill Cooper: No, because that building wasn't open yet.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, it wasn't open.

Jill Cooper: It opened the following year after I graduated, because Central is on Halsthery...

Blanche Touhill: Oh, that's right.

Jill Cooper: And that was the only Hazelwood until the year after I graduated.

Blanche Touhill: It just boomed, that North County at the end of World War II, those people moved in with those FHA loans, or a lot of people moved in with the FHA loans or the GI Bill loans. Was your father in the war?

Jill Cooper: He was in World War II so he was quite a bit older. He was eight years older than my mom so he'd be 95 now. So he was in that World War II era.

Blanche Touhill: Was he overseas?

Jill Cooper: He was in New Guinea.

Blanche Touhill: Did he ever talk about it?

Jill Cooper: He didn't and, you know, that was one of the things that made me consider this particular interview type of thing because I really wish that I had taken the opportunity to ask my dad more about his life experiences because he did not share an awful lot.

Blanche Touhill: And he was a young boy?

Jill Cooper: He was. He went into the Army, I guess, when he was 20, but then he and my mom didn't get married until he was 33. So he was kind of a

confirmed bachelor but he never talked about his World War II experiences except having a lot of animosity for the war. And, you know, I guess a lot of people who experience war don't share their experiences.

Blanche Touhill: Well, to be a 20-year-old boy, that's tough.

Jill Cooper: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Go to a place like New Guinea, which is so different.

Jill Cooper: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Well, it's all tough.

Jill Cooper: Yes. I certainly believe that it was and I wish I had asked.

Blanche Touhill: Did your brother get caught in the wars?

Jill Cooper: No, he was younger than me and I think that my husband, being my age, I'm 58, his three brothers were all in the Vietnam War but the draft stopped right about the time that...my husband still had to register but they had stopped drafting and my brother is three years younger than me so he never had to.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, it's funny how you can miss a conflict just by a year or something.

Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm, yes, and two of my husband's brothers were in Vietnam and the third one didn't have to go. He was still in the Air Force. And it's amazing to me how little we even know about that whole conflict. It wasn't taught, I don't think.

Blanche Touhill: No, it wasn't taught because historians didn't believe you should teach something until you had, like, 25 years' experience. But there was a man at UM-St. Louis when it started in 1963, Gene Burns, and he had been in those conflicts and I guess maybe in Korea and maybe in Vietnam, I don't know, and he taught it and there was a lot of controversy in the History Department here, whether or not he should be teaching a subject that was going on and it was fresh in everybody's mind. But he was determined so he did and his courses were very popular.

Jill Cooper: I bet they were because probably a lot of the students had siblings, had brothers, that...

- Blanche Touhill: ...were either going or whom had gone.
- Jill Cooper: Yeah. I remember my cousin going to college because his brother was in Vietnam and I remember his younger brother going to college so that he would not be drafted because I think if you were in college, you didn't have to go to the war.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, in the early days, if you were in college, you were not subject to the draft until you graduated.
- Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm.
- Blanche Touhill: And so a lot of young people did go to college but then they put the...what do you call that where you have...everybody has a number and they pull the...
- Jill Cooper: A lottery.
- Blanche Touhill: A lottery, they had a lottery and everybody knew, if you got below a certain amount, you were going and if you got above a certain amount, you weren't going. So that made a big difference too.
- Jill Cooper: It did and then...my husband and I were just talking about this the other day...if your lottery number was low, you generally enlisted so that you would have a choice because if you knew you were going to have to go, you wanted to have some input as to what branch of the service that you went into.
- Blanche Touhill: And what you would learn too, what you would learn.
- Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm, yes, because I think if it was a low lottery, you ended up as infantry and if you enlisted, then you could choose to do something that you would learn more of a skill.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, and that was really the end of the draft in this country. Well, we still don't have the draft but Vietnam had such a bad effect, I think, that they just ended the draft and it had started, I think, in about 1940, because the wars formally started in '41 and I had relatives who had been drafted in '40 and the thought was that they would serve a year and then be released but they were in and you had December 7th when the Japanese attacked, then the Germans came in to support their Japanese allies. Those people stayed in.

Jill Cooper: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: How else was high school?

Jill Cooper: Well, I just really enjoyed the things I learned in high school. I took Spanish. I was very involved in math and science because those are my strong suits. So I enjoyed learning the math and science type of curriculum.

Blanche Touhill: Were you thinking of a scientific life?

Jill Cooper: You know, at the time I was in high school, I didn't know what I wanted to do. When I graduated, I had many friends who chose to go into education and I knew that that was not my calling. I just knew that that was not something that I would be good at. So, after being an undecided major for a couple of years, I discovered that...I was working for an optometrist and then I was volunteering at the optometric center downtown and there was a young woman doctor who had just graduated from optometry school and she was very enthusiastic and she was telling me how UMSL was going to open the Optometry School, and that they were going to accept women. So I don't think that was a given. So, at that point in time, then, I still continued to work but I went back to school, I went back to UMSL then with a pre-med type of major so that I could go...

Blanche Touhill: So you took the chemistry and...

Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm, yes.

Blanche Touhill: So you were aiming toward optometry?

Jill Cooper: I was aiming toward optometry school but then, I ended up getting married so my husband was in the Navy and so we got married and we moved to cities where there wasn't an optometry school so I continued going to school but eventually changed my focus to accounting. So, you know...

Blanche Touhill: Yes. Well, accounting is a wonderful career.

Jill Cooper: It is. There's one of those things. I don't have any regrets because that was the right course for me at that time but we occasionally talk at work whether we would choose accounting again and I said, "I'm not sure I chose accounting the first time around" but I think that I wish I had gone

to optometry school but I wouldn't trade my life now to do that. But I thought it was fascinating that there were women in that field and that UMSL was going to accept women and at one point, I did apply and was accepted but things changed.

Blanche Touhill: Did you go to UMSL when you went to college?

Jill Cooper: I started here. I went to UMSL the fall after I graduated from high school and went for a year and then, because I did not have a decided major, my dad encouraged me then to stop going to college and to get a job and if I wanted to...because my parents did pay for my tuition, but they suggested that I work and go to school part-time until I decided on a major. So then I went to St. Louis Community College for a couple of semesters and then came back to UMSL when I decided to go to optometry school so that's when I took my chemistries and my higher level math here.

Blanche Touhill: And you did all right on them?

Jill Cooper: Oh, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Isn't it interesting?

Jill Cooper: Yes, it is. I really felt like that was an area where I could be very successful.

Blanche Touhill: You didn't have to study as hard as you did in other subjects?

Jill Cooper: No. I still did well in my other classes but I think that the sciences and math came most easily to me. I went to school...when we lived in Connecticut for a while and we were in the Navy and then we moved to Virginia and I continued my education all through the times that we moved...

Blanche Touhill: And from where did you get your degree?

Jill Cooper: From UMSL.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, so you transferred the courses back?

Jill Cooper: Yes, it took me 18 years to finish my Bachelor's which is terrible but, you know, it's just...

- Blanche Touhill: No, it's what happens, it's what happens.
- Jill Cooper: Life happened in between there but I always stayed focused that that was what I eventually...I eventually wanted to achieve that and I do find that at times when...you know, I have nieces who are struggling to get through or even when I'm with Zonta students that we are offering scholarships to and they're lamenting the fact that it's taking them so long, I can say, "Well, it took me 18 years to finally get my Bachelor's" and it's not my proudest moment but I stayed with it.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, I think it is your proudest moment.
- Jill Cooper: By the time I graduated, I had three children and when I sat for the CPA exam, I had a toddler and two older children and it was not easy.
- Blanche Touhill: How many times did you take the test?
- Jill Cooper: Once.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, you passed it all the first time?
- Jill Cooper: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: Then you're to be congratulated.
- Jill Cooper: I gave myself one shot. I said, I can't keep doing this. It's a once and done.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, you're a very unusual person because most people take it at least twice and most take it three times actually.
- Jill Cooper: Yeah, they do but I just didn't feel like I had the luxury of being able to spread it out. I just felt like...it took a lot of time. I would get the kids to bed and study every single night until I'd fall asleep at the table studying and then start all over the next day and work. So I thought, no, I just...
- Blanche Touhill: Did you work as a CPA?
- Jill Cooper: At the time that the kids were...
- Blanche Touhill: Yeah, once you got the certificate?
- Jill Cooper: I worked not as a CPA initially. I was working part-time because, with three young kids and my husband travels a lot, so I was working as an

accountant for small businesses until the kids got a little bit older and then I went to work in public accounting.

Blanche Touhill: Well, talk about that. How was a woman in public accounting? When was that? The '90s?

Jill Cooper: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: How was a woman's life in public accounting?

Jill Cooper: I think it has been improving all throughout the years. I think that there are certainly a lot more partners that are men. I was trying to do this on a part-time basis because I had three children and I wanted to make sure that they were taken care of first. I didn't go into public accounting initially because of the hours and the only option was to work full-time and to work 60, 65 hours a week during tax season and I couldn't do that with the family I had. But public accounting has come a long way over the last 20 years that I've been in because they accommodate a more flexible schedule now than what they used to and now I see it as an opportunity for someone to go into public accounting and have a more flexible schedule, maybe not for the first part of the year but the rest of the year they do allow you to work part-time and to still progress, still be promoted because initially if you weren't full-time and you weren't working 65 hours a week, you had no opportunities for promotion. So my career was always secondary to my husband's because what I had chosen to do did not allow for me to be able to have any sort of a progressive career path. But it has gotten better and they have allowed technology to improve the flexibility of it over the last 10 years. There are a lot more women in public accounting now than there were when I first went into it and even because it took me so long to graduate, when I was in the science classes and the math classes initially, there were not nearly as many women. But, by the time I graduated, many years later, there were a lot more women.

Blanche Touhill: So you experienced both?

Jill Cooper: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Were there any female faculty in chemistry or math?

- Jill Cooper: No, I don't think I had any female faculty in chemistry or math, not when I was doing the pre-med type of classes, no, because by the time I switched to accounting and came back to UMSL, it was primarily business-focused for the curriculum I was taking.
- Blanche Touhill: And business doesn't have a lot of women either.
- Jill Cooper: No, that's true too.
- Blanche Touhill: They had Vicky (Sauter?) and Dian Hancock, but the accounting...oh, they did have a woman who was head of the department, Sylvia.
- Jill Cooper: Yes, that sounds really familiar.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, but I think there were several women who were like Master's level but they weren't the doctorate in accounting except for Sylvia, yeah.
- Jill Cooper: It's funny to think about how that's all changed and are there more women in business now?
- Blanche Touhill: Well, I've been gone for 11 years so I can't tell you but I remember the time when our School of Business or College of Business, which came later, really had very few women students and then they began to come and I was very friendly with a young girl and she said she thought she'd be a math major but she realized she was really an accountant and so I think a lot of young women who thought they were going to be scientists or mathematicians eventually found their way to accounting because it is a similar intellectual pursuit and it fits them better.
- Jill Cooper: That's interesting, and really, most of my friends went into education and none of them went into science or math type of careers.
- Blanche Touhill: No. When you were in high school and you took math and science, weren't you one of the few women in the class?
- Jill Cooper: Oh, yeah, absolutely. Most of my friends in high school were...
- Blanche Touhill: ...history, English or history.
- Jill Cooper: Yes, that's right, and the guys that I was friends with in high school, they were the only people in my class that I knew.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, and so you developed friendships with them.

- Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm, yeah.
- Blanche Touhill: Do you bump into anybody from your childhood or your high school anymore?
- Jill Cooper: Occasionally. I have several friends from high school that I still stay in touch with, mm-hmm. Our 40th class reunion is this year so I probably...we were just having this conversation at work yesterday, probably 10 friends from high school that I still stay in touch with.
- Blanche Touhill: Isn't that wonderful!
- Jill Cooper: Not all the time but, yeah, and those relationships go back and some of them that I was friends with in high school, I was friends with in even middle school and my best friend and I have been friends since we were 14.
- Blanche Touhill: And that still persists?
- Jill Cooper: Oh, yeah.
- Blanche Touhill: Even though you moved?
- Jill Cooper: Oh, yes, and she moved to Springfield when she was in her freshman year of high school.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness. Illinois or Missouri?
- Jill Cooper: Missouri, so we've lived a great distance apart through most of our lives but we are still best friends.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, you're like sisters.
- Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm, and I don't have a sister so she's probably the closest that I come to.
- Blanche Touhill: I know a lot of young women who formed those friendships when they were young and it's wonderful.
- Jill Cooper: It is.
- Blanche Touhill: What about your children, were they mathematical?
- Jill Cooper: Yes, my daughter is a nurse practitioner and is actually on staff at UMSL, in the Student Health Clinic.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, how wonderful!

Jill Cooper: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Did she go to UMSL?

Jill Cooper: She went to Mizzou and then she got her doctorate when she lived in Seattle at University of Washington.

Blanche Touhill: Wonderful.

Jill Cooper: Yes, so she's very mathematical and very science. My oldest son is very math-oriented. He's a chef but he has a...

Blanche Touhill: Yes, but I've always heard chefs are really chemists.

Jill Cooper: Okay, and that makes sense.

Blanche Touhill: And that the measurements and being very precise in some ingredients is crucial.

Jill Cooper: Oh, I can see that. He has a business degree from Virginia Tech but he ended up deciding he wanted to be a chef and my youngest son is not academic. He always struggled academically.

Blanche Touhill: He likes to do things.

Jill Cooper: Yes, he likes to do things. He likes to talk. He's action.

Blanche Touhill: He's a salesman.

Jill Cooper: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Is that how he makes a living?

Jill Cooper: Yes, he's in retail. He went to college with a theater major and has been retail but it's all about doing for him. He probably did fairly well in math but my husband's an engineer so it seems like we would have math kind of kids but not that one.

Blanche Touhill: Do you cook in a German way?

Jill Cooper: I don't that much because it's really not very healthy. I have recipes for German potato salad and things like that which I love to eat but if I cook

it, I feel just too guilty. So I'll buy a little bit of it and it's like, okay, I don't want to think about what's in it.

Blanche Touhill: Are you a baker?

Jill Cooper: Yes, I like to bake.

Blanche Touhill: I think the German/Americans were very much into baking.

Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Do you remember the old bakeries in St. Louis?

Jill Cooper: We didn't go to them.

Blanche Touhill: No, because you were in the suburbs.

Jill Cooper: I was in the suburbs.

Blanche Touhill: I was in the city and every few blocks would have not only a candy store and confectionary but then they would have a bakery.

Jill Cooper: Yes, we had the bakery in the shopping center that we could go to but it's just interesting to me how my mom and dad's generation were living in the city, they migrated to the county and now our children are going back to the city.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, are they?

Jill Cooper: Yes, closer to the city. They want to live...

Blanche Touhill: Where are they living?

Jill Cooper: My son's in Maplewood.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, indeed.

Jill Cooper: And my daughter really wanted to get a house in Kirkwood but they ended up just shy of that because...

Blanche Touhill: They're into [inaudible 43:56]?

Jill Cooper: Yes, they're into [inaudible 43:57] and they wanted to be in Kirkwood schools. But she did travel nursing and she just loved living in Boston and

San Francisco and Seattle and being in the downtown areas and public transportation, just the very urban settings were just fascinating to her.

Blanche Touhill: And where do you live?

Jill Cooper: I live in Chesterfield.

Blanche Touhill: Okay, so you took the normal (pattern west?).

Jill Cooper: I did, yes. Well, we were looking for...we lived in Virginia for a few years and when we moved back from Virginia, my youngest son was going into 8th grade and we were really looking for schools.

Blanche Touhill: For schools, sure. And the Parkway Schools?

Jill Cooper: Rockwood.

Blanche Touhill: Or was it Rockwood, yes. They're both really very excellent schools.

Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Hazelwood was a wonderful school district.

Jill Cooper: At the time I went...my nieces went there recently and I don't feel like it did them justice.

Blanche Touhill: What do you like to do in St. Louis?

Jill Cooper: I love baseball. I'm a Cardinals fan so we do love to do that and we have a lot of friends and we like to do traveling with our friends. We just like to get to...

Blanche Touhill: Have you left this country?

Jill Cooper: Only one time, into Canada but I don't know that that counts. My husband travels all over the world with his job and one year when he was flying to Spain, he had a TIA on the flight and so they pulled the ambulance up to the airplane and took him right to the hospital. So that's really the only time that I have left the country.

Blanche Touhill: To take care of him?

Jill Cooper: Was to go to Spain.

Blanche Touhill: And help him back?

Jill Cooper: Yes, because he wasn't able to fly for 10 days because of having that but we have plans to travel as we retire and we're discussing going on a big trip next year with several of our friends to Italy and to Croatia, so hopefully that will come to fruition.

Blanche Touhill: Did you ever think you'd be saying that when you were a little girl?

Jill Cooper: No, no, because my parents were not travelers. We didn't take vacations as a child. We took one vacation and my parents told my brother and I that if we didn't stop fighting, we would never do this again and apparently we did not stop fighting because we never did that again.

Blanche Touhill: Was it [inaudible 46:30]?

Jill Cooper: It was, we went to the Lake of the Ozarks but they did not...they weren't big travelers until we grew up. They were true to their word.

Blanche Touhill: Even the Lake at the Ozarks was very small when it really began to attract people, to come to the lake. It's just a huge complex today.

Jill Cooper: It is, it's amazing.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, it is amazing. Talk about Zonta. Why did you join Zonta and what do you get out of Zonta?

Jill Cooper: I think Zonta is a wonderful organization and I was first introduced to it when I was living in Virginia and they were doing a lot of work with Habitat for Humanity and I was invited to go to a meeting through a co-worker and I just thought it sounded like such a great organization. We were then given the opportunity to come back to St. Louis a short time later but when I came back to St. Louis, I wanted to get involved in something here and found that there was a local Zonta club. So I looked into the things that they were supporting and the type of work that they were doing and felt like that would be a good way for me to spend my volunteer time.

Blanche Touhill: What do they do that you really like?

Jill Cooper: I really like their focus on education. I like that they work with single moms. I love that they support the community in a lot of different ways. We are working on a project now with the Wyman Center, the shelter for abused women and we're helping to renovate parts of their facility. I like

that there's so much variety. We have scholarships for disabled or challenged individuals. We work with women in construction on some different things and I feel like there are just a lot of ways that women are being encouraged to go into different non-traditional type of careers so that they can earn a living. There are so many single moms in our community at this point in time that they need to be able to support their children, they need to be able to support their families and have a better life.

Blanche Touhill: What do the women do in construction?

Jill Cooper: They do a lot of different things. They're carpenters; they're plumbers; they're electricians, and there's a whole organization, WIC, Women in Construction and they have done some presentations for us. We've supported them with scholarship money, some money for them. I'm trying to remember the exact project that they were working on but I think they were trying to get women to come into the professions. I even took one of my nieces with me to one of those meetings because she was seeking what to do...

Blanche Touhill: Sure, absolutely.

Jill Cooper: And so I just feel like they offer opportunities for some different paths. We have tried to focus with the students that we work with for (Women's Another Chance?) to encourage them to go into STEM type of professions because you're going to have a better opportunity for higher level of income.

Blanche Touhill: What is STEM?

Jill Cooper: STEM is...it's Science, Technology...you know what STEM...Engineering and Math.

Blanche Touhill: I'm just trying to do it so that it's on the tape.

Jill Cooper: I know and I appreciate that and I sometimes just have lapses.

Blanche Touhill: We all do. And so it's encouraging women to...especially those that have a scientific bent, that they understand they're welcome in those fields.

Jill Cooper: Yes, thank you.

- Blanche Touhill: They may have to have a few struggles but they're going to be all right in the long run.
- Jill Cooper: That's right.
- Blanche Touhill: And I think the trades as well. I think the trades are very good for young women who don't like the academic world, per se, but you have to be pretty smart to be a carpenter and an electrician and a plumber.
- Jill Cooper: That's true.
- Blanche Touhill: Those are not programs for people who are not alert.
- Jill Cooper: No, that's true and you have to be willing to work hard. Those are not professions that you can take the easy way out. They're physically challenging.
- Blanche Touhill: And you're judged by what results.
- Jill Cooper: And you're judged harsher.
- Blanche Touhill: You're judged harsher, it has to be right.
- Jill Cooper: Yes, and I think that they have to be prepared for that and that they're not judged by the same standards as their male co-workers.
- Blanche Touhill: If you had been born 50 years earlier, which is probably between your grandmother and your mother, what would your life have been like?
- Jill Cooper: I would have probably been more of a stay-at-home mom, although my grandma went back to work.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, did she?
- Jill Cooper: Well, during the war. I think that there were so many women that went to work during the war and she did that and then she also was...
- Blanche Touhill: What did she do during the war?
- Jill Cooper: She worked, I think she was making bullets and packaging bullets.
- Blanche Touhill: At the small arms plant?
- Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Out on Goodfellow, Goodfellow and Natural Bridge.

Jill Cooper: Mm-hmm. So she did that when that was the appropriate time but then she also, just to help support her family because they were struggling a lot during that point in time...

Blanche Touhill: Well, they had come out of the Depression too.

Jill Cooper: Yeah. She would bake bread and she would be getting up all night long and pushing it down and letting it rise again and getting back up and doing it a couple hours later and then my aunts, who were a little bit older than my mom, would deliver the bread. They would get up and before they went to school, they would deliver the bread throughout the neighborhood and collect the money so that that would help their family.

Blanche Touhill: You know, you're the first person that ever told me that. That's a wonderful story.

Jill Cooper: Huh, and I just found that so inspiring, that sometimes you just have to do whatever you have to do to help, you know, keep food on the table for your family and I admire my grandma a lot for being able to do that. I find her fascinating and my mom always wanted to make sure that she had her own source of income and I think that I grew up just feeling like I needed to be able to have my own income. When I was having trouble staying on track with going to college, our neighbor had a husband who was in a serious accident and was not able to work and she did not have skills to support her family so she had to go back to school and I thought, you know what? I just need to make sure that I get this job done. I need to get the education that I need for myself and for my family so that I can support my family if ever need be and hopefully it wouldn't.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, in case of an emergency, yes, you do.

Jill Cooper: Yeah, and I always feel like I need to have the intellectual challenge of working.

Blanche Touhill: How did your husband react to that?

Jill Cooper: Oh, he was completely supportive of it. We negotiated it with our third child. We had two children and I was going to night school, he was going to night school too because he was in the Navy for six years but he didn't have a Bachelor's Degree. He was a nuclear engineer from a Navy

standpoint but he did not have the credentials so we were both going to night school and so he was traveling a lot and he said, "Okay, I'm going to change jobs so that I can be home more. I'd like to have a third child" and I said, "Okay, this is the package then. We have a third child, I stop working temporarily and finish school." And so that was our agreement. So it all worked out.

Blanche Touhill: As you're reaching the near future and the far future, why don't you walk about today and then tomorrow, after you and your husband retire. Since I didn't ask it before, which one of your teachers really made a deep impression on you?

Jill Cooper: My 1st grade teacher was Mrs. Green and I will always remember her. She was just very nurturing and she set the standard for learning. She taught all the fundamentals and it just made me love learning. So I feel like, that she was extremely instrumental in setting me on the right path. As I look back over my career, I've been at (Donner Ashe?) which is an accounting firm, for about 12 years now and that's the longest I've ever been at any job. My husband, Mike, spent 27 years at General Electric after six years in the Navy and now we're both looking not too far down the road to retirement. We really hope to travel and spend time with our three grandchildren and hopefully there will be more down the road as well. My parents did not get to watch our children grow up and did not get to celebrate a lot of our accomplishments because they died 25 years ago and I really want to be around to watch my grandchildren grow up and to watch my children celebrate their life's successes and my husband has traveled all over the world during his career and there are many places he would like to return to with me by his side so that I can enjoy those as well.

Blanche Touhill: Well, it sounds like you've had a wonderful life. Do you still sew and cook?

Jill Cooper: I do, I cook less and I sew less because I make costumes and curtains and things like that and those things are not as important as they once were. I don't have to supplement the income by doing those things as much anymore and we do really value our faith and being a part of our church. So those will be things that we focus more on as we have more time available.

Jill Cooper 6-23-2015

Blanche Touhill: Well, thank you very much. It was a wonderful afternoon with you and I wish you well in your endeavors.

Jill Cooper: Well, thank you so much.