

An Interview with
Kathy Corley

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 Corley: [My] name is Kathy Corley.

Malaika Horne: And my name is Malaika Horne, as you know, and this is a project that seeks to interview women who are change agents, and so we want to have a conversation with you about your life, your career, and anything else you want to talk about. So first, talk about your early years, your youth, for example, elementary and secondary schools you attended.

Kathy Corley: Okay. Well, I was born here in St. Louis October 29th, 1952. I don't remember that day, but that's the day I was born. And I grew up in South City around South Grand Avenue [*i.e.* South Grand Boulevard], so my grade school was St. Pius V grade school so I went to kindergarten and grade school there, and then I went on to Bishop DuBourg High School, and I graduated from high school here in St. Louis in 1970, and then I took some courses at St. Louis Community College at Forest Park for about a year or so, and then I transferred into Webster College—that's what it was called at the time, Webster College. So I have a BA in English Literature in 1974 and then later went on to Washington University where I received my Master's Degree in English and American Literature in 1976. So that's my academic background.

Malaika Horne: Sure. And talk about your family, your parents, your husband, any children, and also mention their names.

Kathy Corley: Sure, okay. Well, I come from a relatively big family. My immediate family, I'm one of five brothers and sisters; I have two brothers and two sisters. I'm the second oldest. I'm the oldest girl in the family. Their names are Chris, Connie, Maureen, and Larry, and my two sisters live in different cities: L.A. and Atlanta, and two brothers live here in St. Louis, and my parents: my father was Ralph Corley. He was a mechanical engineer. He was also born here in St. Louis. He passed away about three-and-a-half years ago, and for a number of years he worked at Monsanto, and then he also worked freelance as a mechanical engineer designing instruments after he retired from Monsanto. My mother is still alive. She just turned 92 in February. She's Dolores Corley, and in her early pre-marriage years, she worked in the garment industry down on Washington Avenue, and she designed dress patterns. She made patterns and also did a little bit of modeling when buyers would come in. She would model, like, sundresses and things that were designed, which is really kind of nice. And then she met my father after the war, World War

ll, ended, and she worked occasionally in the garment industry just to pick up that extra money after the birth of a child here and there, but basically she was predominantly a homemaker in our family household.

Malaika Horne: So, when you were a child, what did you want to be—and it probably might have been many things—what did you want to be when you grew up?

Kathy Corley: Wow, lots of things. It would just depend—it would be different things at different times. In the earliest memories I have [it] was not so much a profession, but I wanted to travel. I was really fascinated with maps, and so, even as a child, I would get maps and get a little car and, like, drive through a city, like, I would pretend I was in New York, I'd pretend I was in London and do things like that. So I always had this interest in travel which I fortunately was able to do as an adult. In terms of careers, wow, that really ranges. It could be anything from one day when there's a career day at our grade school, I might want to be a nun that day, when we'd have nuns come and talk with us. I had a really good order of nuns, the Sisters of Loretto. They were wonderful. They educated me in grade school, and they're noted primarily for bringing education to people who don't have access to it; historically, that's what they're noted for, and of course, today, with peace and social justice issues. They were involved with the Civil Rights movement, the Anti-War movement, so I feel very fortunate to have the Sisters of Loretto at a very formative period in my life. So I was always interested in history a little bit, and politics and what's going with the world, maybe more current events, that sort of thing. And then, in different parts of time, I wanted to be a teacher; I wanted to be an actress; I always wanted to be a musician because I took piano lessons; and one time I wanted to be a doctor: just a lot of different types of careers, usually depending on seeing a movie or someone would talk to us in the classroom environment as a guest speaker, and then I would want to have that as a career. So those are my earliest memories of wanting to be about five different things in terms of career.

Malaika Horne: Well, it shows you were very goal-oriented.

Kathy Corley: Yes, yes, I was.

Malaika Horne: So let me skip to this question: What do you do now?

Kathy Corley: Well, currently full-time, I am a professor of film and video at Webster University. I've been there since 1985, so I'll be entering my 33rd year going into this next academic year; that's hard to believe that. And then I also have a secondary career or a parallel career as a filmmaker. I worked at KETC, the PBS station here in St. Louis, and KTVI, which used to be the ABC affiliate—I worked there, and I worked in public affairs, arts programming at Channel 2. I worked with Bonita Cornute on *Turnabout*. We worked together at Channel 9, and a group of us actually went over to Channel 2 when openings came up and worked on *Turnabout*, the magazine show over there. And then now I do freelance work. Every summer I do filming for Opera Theater of St. Louis which I really enjoy, and then I do my own documentary work, so that's currently what I'm doing. So in the summer months, I do freelance work and work on my own pieces.

Malaika Horne: Well, I hope you get a chance later on in this interview to talk more about your documentaries.

Kathy Corley: Oh, sure, of course.

Malaika Horne: I just wanted to get that occupation in since it was so close to what you were talking about...

Kathy Corley: Yeah, absolutely.

Malaika Horne: ...what did you want to be when you grew up. Going back to your early years, were you recognized as a leader, or were you considered a leader? Any...

Kathy Corley: Hmm. I don't know if I was considered a leader, per se. I know in grade school my mother read to us when we were very, very young, and for some reason, I have this aptitude for reading at an early age, a very early age, and so in 3rd grade, I was eligible to skip a grade, so I went from 3rd to 5th grade, and I always did very well on standardized tests. I was always reading at a far advanced reading level. So in grade school, I always got this impression that I was smart, but I felt kind of odd about that at the time. I'm not sure why. It felt kind of uncomfortable. I remember after I skipped a grade, I felt really shy being with all these new kids, and I went to my teacher, Sister John Kevin, who is now deceased, and she was a wonderful teacher, and I said, "Maybe I should go back with my friends. I don't know anybody," and she encouraged me

to just give it some time and be patient, and I'm glad she did, because it was the best thing for me to do. So I got that impression, that that's what people would tell me because of my reading ability at a young age, but that kind of disappeared, I think, as I got older, because as you get out into a bigger world, you realize, well, there are a lot of people who are A-track students or who score high on an aptitude test. So I felt like I blended in more as I got older from that. And then, in terms of leadership, I think I got more of an impression of that when I got into academe and higher education, because I was either appointed to or maybe stuck with, as some people might say, a lot of different roles, like chairing committees. I was department chair for a number of years at Webster University in the School of Communications, one of the department chairs. So in that sense, there's a lot of leadership that happened on the university level. And I suppose being a documentary filmmaker, you have to take charge of your own project as a producer/director and direct crews, so there's a leadership element that's built into that career, so there's that.

Malaika Horne: So you talked about one particular teacher who encouraged you. This question is: Who encouraged you inside and outside the home? Anybody else?

Kathy Corley: Well, outside the home, it was predominantly teachers, especially in grade school, and also, I had several really good teachers in high school who took an interest in encouraging me to go on to college at DuBourg at the time—and also, this is in the 1960s—a lot of women, especially if you were from a working class or a lower-middle class type of economic strata, you didn't necessarily go on to college. You became a homemaker if you became married, or you worked different kinds of jobs, which is fine. I mean, there's nothing wrong with that, but college wasn't always encouraged, I think, at that time the way today I think there's a lot of assumptions, even from parents from a lot of different economic backgrounds. In my own home, my parents were supportive of me, but only when I was an adult. When I was growing up—I mean, they would praise me where I would come home with a very good report card, but in terms of going to college, their attitude was girls didn't go to college. "If we sent you to college, it's a waste of money, because you'll just get married after you graduate." So what I did is I made plans to move out of the house so I could be independently self-supporting, and then my

parents said, “Okay, well, we’ll help you a little bit.” So one of the reasons I went to a junior college at first was because I couldn’t afford—I didn’t get enough financial aid to go to either Wash. U. or Webster which were the two colleges I was looking at. And then I was able to get a good grade track record going, and I was able to get substantial scholarship money by the time I went and transferred into Webster University. So as we became older, my parents were very supportive and very proud of all their children, and I think they changed with the times just like a lot of very socially conservative kinds of people, thinking about traditional roles for women in that respect, so. But, no, as we were older, all of us, they were always very proud of their kids and what they did.

Malaika Horne: Any other early influences that you can think of?

Kathy Corley: Hmm. Mainly teachers. I know we had our next-door neighbor, Mildred Whacker [*spelling uncertain*] was her name—who’s now deceased, of course, because it was many years ago—was married to an executive at Southwestern Bell, and they just happened to live next door to us on Wyoming Street in a very nice two-family flat; had beautiful furniture and things in their home. And she would always loan me books to read and thought that was really a very interesting thing, that I wanted to read books, so I remember she loaned me a biography of Joan Crawford, and I brought it home, and my parents made me take it back because they said, “You shouldn’t be reading books like this,” because it was a lot about her marriages and affairs and everything.

Malaika Horne: How old were you?

Kathy Corley: Oh, I was in grade school, like maybe 2nd or 3rd [grade]. I was really young. I just found this the other day at home: when I turned six, my aunt gave me a copy of Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*, and it’s the book, *Little Women*, not a child’s version of the book. So that was the level of reading, and I was really interested in movie stars, which I thought was really amazing, so she gave me a couple of books to read, and that was one that I had to return it and say, “I can’t read this because my parents said that she got divorced and did things that people aren’t supposed to do,” and so I had to give it back to her, so. And she, I think, understood that in a way. But, yeah, she was also another influence definitely.

Malaika Horne: Okay. What about in college? Anybody in particular?

Kathy Corley: Lots of teachers. I know early on, the few courses I took over at Forest Park, I had an English lit. teacher who was very encouraging. One teacher who was really interesting was my biology teacher. I don't recall her name; I'd have to look it up. I think she might have even been an adjunct at the time, one of these people, like, at that time period in the '60s and early '70s, right out of graduate school, teaching their first teaching job, very enthusiastic about teaching. And she taught a biology class, and I really enjoyed biology. I liked dissecting animals when I was in high school, and I just liked biology a lot, and at the end of the semester, she called me after class and said, "What is your major?" and I said, "I'm going to be an English/Music double major," and she said, "Well, you have a really good aptitude for biology, and if you're interested ever in going in that direction, there's a lot of grant money available for women to get into the sciences, and I really encourage you to think about that," and of course I said, "Well, thank you; that's very nice, but I want to play piano and be an English major." And now sometimes I think about how different my life would be had I done that, so yeah.

Malaika Horne: Did you have any leadership positions in college?

Kathy Corley: Not really. I commuted, so I wasn't as involved as the students who lived on campus at Webster University. I know I attended a lot of events. One of my favorite memories of Webster University—or Webster College at the time—was when Gloria Steinem came to speak, and afterwards she sort of sat on the floor with us in a lounge area, and Joan Lipkin who is another—she's an area playwright and author. Joanie and I were classmates together. She was also an English major, so we all sat around talking about feminism, so and that kind of encouragement, I think, happened, but no, I wasn't active, interestingly enough, in those kinds of things the way I am as an adult where I'm on the board of different organizations and things. So I just focused on working a part-time job, trying to have perfect grades and working on that, so that's what I did in college.

Malaika Horne: Okay. I want to ask a question that really harks back to former generations. Fifty years earlier, what do you think you would have been doing, or another way to look at it: your grandmothers, what did they do?

Kathy Corley: [0:15:05] Okay. Well, let's see, my one grandmother—this is really kind of interesting. My mother grew up in South St. Louis, and she was pretty much raised by my great-grandmother. My ancestry predominantly on my mother's side of the family is from Ireland, and so I believe she's either first or second generation, I'm almost certain she's first generation. She pretty much stayed home and raised the girls, because she was one of—I think it's six sisters. No, five sisters, that's right, because she's one of the—it was all girls in her family, and my grandmother was very involved in local politics in St. Louis, so that was something that she got involved with, and union organizing, too. My grandfather started a union. So my grandparents were very much involved in union activities, so I would like to think that that's what I would be like, too, if I were in that situation. So that's what they did. So...

Malaika Horne: Any particular position as an elected official or elected politics?

Kathy Corley: I know she ran for—it's either the board of aldermen or city council or something within their district—because this was around Grand Avenue [*i.e.* Boulevard] and Meramec and around Virginia and Meramec and Grand—but she didn't win that election, and politics back then could get a little corrupt, too. Not that it doesn't today, but there was a lot of things that would go on, especially in local politics, and I think my grandmother wasn't involved with that, I think, but she was always going to meetings and organizing meetings and things, so.

Malaika Horne: And what type of union were they involved in?

Kathy Corley: Well, my grandfather formed a union. I don't know what it was called or the local or if it was part of a larger union, but he hung awnings on people's homes, so they unionized. And so he formed a union to do that because that was very common back then because people didn't have air conditioning. So everybody had awnings on their...

Malaika Horne: Yeah, those awnings have kind of disappeared [now?]. [*laughter*]

Kathy Corley: I know, right! Yeah, people don't use them anymore, but he had all different kinds of awnings that were retractable and things, and so he started a union for the workers so that they would be unionized and get better wages and working conditions.

Malaika Horne: I hope you don't think that some of these questions are redundant...

Kathy Corley: No.

Malaika Horne: ...but who influenced you throughout your career?

Kathy Corley: Wow, throughout my career, I would say it would be teachers I had as an undergraduate at Webster with whom I maintained contact, and, sadly to say, most of them are deceased now because they were much older than I am. But I would say one big influence was Sister Deborah Pearson. She taught in the English Department linguistics at Webster University. The Pearson House is named after her. She really encouraged me to think about university-level teaching rather than high school teaching. I'm certified to teach high school English, and she saw me do student teaching, and she was great because not only did she encourage me to do that, but she gave me a printout from an academic journal that I found the other day cleaning out files in my basement, called "English is a Pre-Professional Occupation," and she'd say, "You could go to law school," or "You could go into communications or journalism and do all different kinds of things." So she was great, and as long as she lived, I always kept in touch with her, even before I taught there in the '80s—because she passed away, I think, in the 1980s. I'd have to look up her exact date of death. Another person was the late Reta Madsen, taught at Webster University. Her husband, Bill Madsen, the late Bill Madsen, was department chair at Washington University. She was very helpful in terms of encouraging me to go to graduate school, and when I went back to teach at Webster, that was the tail end of her teaching years there. So it was just lovely to be able to be a teacher with her at Webster University, and then after she retired, I would go over to her home, and every time they'd get new video equipment, like a new VCR, I would hook it up for them, and then we would just sit and visit and things, and I really miss her terribly. She died of an aneurism very unexpectedly in her early- or mid-70s. She would've lived much longer than that. And Bill went on to live till his early 90s, and so I kept in touch with the Madsen family. The late Harry Cargas, also in the English Department at Webster, was super supportive of me. I remember one anecdote I can tell you that's a fun anecdote of Webster, but it talks about serendipity and how that can play a role in people's lives: When I was an English major in the Theater Department they had film history classes, and that's when they would show a movie on 16 millimeter and the late Marita Woodruff was a nun at the time, and then left that order and later was married, but she was

the teacher in the Theater Department of that, and so I did an independent study class on the filmmaker Ingmar Bergman, and so that was my senior year, last semester, so I finished school, I graduated with honors, everything was over, and I was going to do high school teaching and apply to graduate schools, and I get a call from the registrar's office a week after graduation, and they said, "We don't know how to tell you this, but you don't have a diploma, because she forgot to turn in your grade slip, and she's in Europe, and we don't know how to reach her," because it was before fax machines and phones.

Malaika Horne: Cell phones.

Kathy Corley: So I had to wait until August, when she returned, and I went on job interviews with this letter from Webster University, but I could not get my state certification to teach until I had my diploma in the State of Missouri, and she fixed it as soon as she got back, but I would go on interviews and I remember one, I think it was at the Parkway School District, I had confidential letters through the placement office at Webster, and the person who interviewed me said, "Have you ever read your letters?" and I said, "No," and he said, "Well, Harry Cargas wrote you one of the best letters I've ever seen for anybody coming on a job interview here," and I was dying to see that letter, but I probably should have asked him if I could have seen it, but I forgot about that later on. And then that's where I took a secretarial job at Channel 9 that summer, and I thought, "Well, I'll work here, because it might be interesting," and then that's how I got into film and television. So I worked there for a year, moved from being a secretary to a PR writer, and then Wash. U. offered me a full scholarship, so everybody said, "You should take that," and Channel 9 let me keep the job part-time till I was finished or whatever would happen, and then I finished my Master's degree, but decided not to go on with my Ph.D., and the primary reason was I wanted to do my dissertation on Flannery O'Connor, who was a relatively new writer at that time. And the person—all these people are now deceased, so—but basically said, "You know, there's nobody here who really is knowledgeable about her, and if you want to do that, you need to go somewhere else," and—I know—and I said, "Well, what would be appropriate?" and they'd say, "Well, Mark Twain or Shakespeare or..." And I said, "But there's lots of dissertations, and there's hardly anything written on Flannery O'Connor except religious allegory." That's primarily

what people would write about at the time. And I said, “I want to do a totally secular take on her,” and I even talked about how cinematic her literature was, and that—I just lost them with that, and they just said, “No, you’ll have to go elsewhere if you want to do that.” And I was just pretty disenchanted with that process, and then I told them that I was going to leave. I’d finish my Master’s Degree and maybe come back at a later date, so. But things turned out for the best because I had worked at Channel 9. I made a documentary about Howard Nemerov, who was the poet laureate and was at Washington University; his show was on PBS, and so I was able to take my literary background and use it in the work that I was doing at Channel 9. So I was very happy about that. And so was Washington University. I still keep in touch with them for seminars about Howard Nemerov. And the few people who are still alive, I maintain contact with them over there, so—who were my teachers or related to teachers whom I had.

Malaika Horne: You’ve done well.

Kathy Corley: Thank you. [*laughter*] I work at it.

Malaika Horne: In general, anything that comes to mind: Talk about your life and your career, anything you’d like to just add on to this.

Kathy Corley: Wow, okay. Well, my life has taken all kinds of twists and turns. I’m pretty happy with my career. I really like teaching. I’m starting to get to the point now that I’ll be turning 65 in October, looking at, like, retirement in the relatively near future, although that seems so strange to me, because it just feels—especially when you just get back from a sabbatical, you feel kind of refreshed again, but I know that definitely by the time I’m 70, I’ll retire from full-time teaching. So I’m happy with that, and I’m happy with helping to build the programs that we have over there, and I still love my students; they’re great, for the most part. No, they really are; they’re really very good. So that’s good. I get the opportunity to teach overseas and travel. I was able to go to Cuba in March because we’re planning to do a course down there that we may have to move to next year because the class isn’t making. We don’t have 10 students for October, so we’ll probably move it to March, which is probably more likely for the students to take time away. It’s on break week. It would be a production class, working with a foreign language and literature class over there. So that’s exciting and nice to be able to do

that, and I like my colleagues tremendously. I work with a great group of people. In terms of my other career in filmmaking, that's what I feel like I wish I could do more of, because teaching is so time-consuming that I'm looking forward to phasing out of that full-time. I'll probably always do seminars or teach a class occasionally, but I really miss—I mean, every summer when it comes up, I love working for Opera Theater. I do their archival videos and their grant videos and do editing and shooting for them, and I really like it, and I'm currently working on completing a documentary about Brewer & Shipley, who are a folk/rock duo from the late '60s, early '70s, and this is their 50th anniversary year, so I'm completing that this year and editing. Right before I came over, I was editing, working on it so that's my goal, is to have that finished this year in conjunction and timed out with that. But I'd like to do a lot more documentary work, and I have one or two partially written screenplays. I'd like to do even non-fiction writing, essay, personal essay kind of writing and things that I just don't have time to do when I'm teaching full-time. My mother is still alive, and while she has caregivers, she's physically very, very healthy, but she has dementia, so that's been very challenging, because even with caregiving, it's just been a real struggle the last three years. She's been in and out of memory care homes that did not work out for her, and the moving her in and out of it, and we have great, wonderful caregivers for her, but it's been a real challenge for everybody, to maintain balances with all of that. So that's been good. And then I guess other things with my personal life, I don't have children of my own, but I had a long-term relationship with someone which ended about two-and-a-half years ago, and their kids have said, "You'll always be our step-mom," because they grew up with me, and now I'm in a very good relationship with someone who's an attorney and documentary filmmaker, and he's got a wonderful 13-year-old daughter and a 24-year-old son, and that's been working out. That's been almost a year. It'll be—right after I was here the last time, at UMSL, last August, so that seems very promising and nice and everything.

Malaika Horne: Very good.

Kathy Corley: So I feel like I can be a mom—a step-mother. I never would think about replacing their own mother, but—so that's been really rewarding. And I've wanted to have children, but it just didn't work out. My first husband did not want to have children, and that's why we got a divorce, the

primary reason, and with the second long-term partnership I had with someone, which was over 20 years, I had a miscarriage, and I was just getting older and older, and it was just very complicated and costly, especially with if we were to do the route of in vitro fertilization and everything. So while I wanted to have children very much, there's a story I'll tell you: When I was at Channel 2, I became friends with a woman who did talks about the Holocaust. She was in Auschwitz. Her name was Hildegard Friedman. Her husband was an artist, and she would go to schools to talk about her husband's artwork. He actually secretly did drawings in the camps and then afterwards did a lot of artwork, documentary drawings of camp life that would be in Holocaust museums all over the world now, he has his work displayed. So Hilda and I became friends after I did a piece on her and her husband's work, and she had asked me one time—this was when I was with my first husband—if I would want to have children, and I said, "Well, I really want to have them but we just have this talk every year, and he really doesn't want to have them." And she reached over and grabbed my hand, and she said, "Listen, Kathy, whether you have children or not, you have so much love to give to people that it will really be okay if you don't have children," and I thought, coming from a Holocaust survivor like that, I mean, I just felt like whatever happens in my life, that'll be fine. And as a teacher, I have hundreds of children as it is anyway.

Malaika Horne: *[laughter]* That's right.

Kathy Corley: You know that because you've taught as well. So I just want to have very positive, supportive relationships with people in my life, especially younger people.

Malaika Horne: So my work-life balance question is probably going to be more unique for you.

Kathy Corley: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm, right.

Malaika Horne: Anything you'd like to add to that, how you were able to manage home and work and other things?

Kathy Corley: [0:30:02] Sure, yeah. Well, I think it's a big challenge if women have children or don't have children, because you have family caregiving needs, because until we had the situation arranged for my mother, we were doing it. So I was running back and forth from the campus and

taking care of her with my other brothers and my two sisters who would fly in town and do that. So I think perhaps it was easier for me, because I didn't have children of my own, but I did have step-children, and there's always responsibilities and support that you can have with that. I think the work balance part though is I'm happy that I've rotated out of the department chair work and things of that nature. It's better to pass the baton on to people who are going to be there for a long time. I'm getting ready to retire in the upcoming years, and it doesn't make sense for me to continue to do that, and no one else is doing it, although they're happy as long as I keep doing it, because I work well with everybody, and then as anybody in academe knows, the department chair is not a position that's a desirable position. It's a lot of responsibility and not a lot of authority sometimes. So that's been a struggle. This year, for example, one of the challenges I had was one of our Film Studies teachers actually had a heart attack and died while teaching a class, and so I had to step in in the last part of the semester and take over her class with no records, because it was such a sudden death that her family didn't know where files were kept or anything. So there's always something with teaching that's very unexpected all the time, but I was happy to do it because she was a dear friend and colleague. But teaching is that way. You just can't predict and control it a lot. It's 24/7. It really is.

Malaika Horne: Well, this question will segue right into what you've been saying. This is about leadership lessons. Did anything impede your progress? Were there big challenges or failures?

Kathy Corley: With leadership challenges?

Malaika Horne: Like being chair or any of the other things you were involved in.

Kathy Corley: Okay. Well, I know being a woman and being a producer, especially decades ago in film and television, was challenging, but I always treated everybody I worked with with respect, so I got along very well with male crew people, because there was this mutual respect for what they did and what I did. So I found that to be very helpful. So I have to say, I think because I worked in public television, and because I worked in documentaries, it was easier—not easier—I had fewer impediments, let's put it that way. It's never easy, but...

Malaika Horne: Why? Why?

Kathy Corley: Well, I think in feature filmmaking in Hollywood, there's countless articles about how difficult it is for a woman to be a director, and of course with the recent success of *Wonder Woman* and then people like Kathryn Bigelow with—when something becomes successful at the box office, then they start changing things, and I think what I find very encouraging about my students, millennials, is they're much more open about roles, that there aren't prescribed roles, whether it's gender or job or anything, and I think that they're going to be the ones to really make those changes happen. I think the old guard is going to retire out of it and rotate out of those roles. So I think—even though I would love to direct a feature fiction film, and possibly someday I'll do that because I don't find, with the lack of limitations with digital equipment, that's very possible to do that, but the fundraising and all the logistics of it are always a challenge. As Sherry Lansing said—she just came out with a recent autobiography—she said, "Filmmaking isn't easy for anybody. It's a struggle to raise money and everything, but for women, there's even more of a challenge." But with documentary filmmaking, I think because the equipment is more accessible and people have done it all over the world in all different kinds of communities, that form of storytelling, it's—there have been fewer impediments for women to do documentaries, and I've never had someone look at me and say, "Well, who are you to direct this documentary?" It's like that, so. So...

Malaika Horne: That's good to hear.

Kathy Corley: Yeah, it is, so I'm lucky that I had that. And then I like the fact that even the people I work with—I made a documentary on the late Henry Townsend, the blues artist here; Howard Nemerov—all the subjects of my documentaries, whether they're men or women, they've always worked very well with me in terms of a sense of, we're working on this project together and not pulling rank or playing games or anything like that. It's been a really—I've had really good working relationships with my crews and with the subjects of my documentaries [*inaudible* 0:35:07].

Malaika Horne: Did you mention something before about Josephine Baker?

Kathy Corley: Yeah, I did. Yes, I made, it's actually a remix, is probably a better way to phrase it, on the 100th anniversary of her birth in St. Louis. There were a lot of centennial celebrations here and in Europe, especially in France, and a local attorney and filmmaker, Paul Guzzardo, had this idea to take

the FBI files and do a reader's theater to tell the story about why there were FBI files kept on Josephine Baker. So it had to do with her coming back to the States, and then she got into a situation with J. Edgar Hoover and Walter Winchell where she went to the Stork Club in New York, was not served a steak, and then it escalated, and then that's when all these figures come into play. Walter Winchell was there; didn't do anything. He denied he was there, which was a lie, and he was friends with Hoover, and then that's when a file was kept on her. It was not an active [*gestures* "air quotes"] investigation but it's over 400 pages of a file on Josephine Baker.

Malaika Horne: Because of that.

Kathy Corley: And so it's called *SECRET* because the stamp on top of each file is the rubber stamp of "SECRET", and the amount of redaction with the black bars through all these documents is really quite amazing. So what we did is a reader's theater I did with another filmmaker—several filmmakers—of video of loops that were run on a triptych screen configuration behind them, and they were FBI files. So basically I took the audio track from the reader's theater reading the FBI files, and I put together a short 15-minute piece on why there's an FBI file on Josephine Baker, and that was—I really, really enjoyed that. That was just great, so.

Malaika Horne: [Sounds fascinating?].

Kathy Corley: And that did the rounds with film festivals around the country and things, so that was really nice, to do that.

Malaika Horne: Well, I want to just stay on this a little bit longer before we go on about your leadership lessons. What did you learn from any of these experiences? I know you didn't have typical ones like maybe in commercial filmmaking, but any leadership lessons you'd like to convey.

Kathy Corley: I'd say, for women to have the courage to make tough decisions. Sometimes I prefer the path of least resistance, and I'll think, like, "Well, I'm not going to deal with this, because..." or "I'm not going to make an issue about this, because it really isn't that important, and even though I wish it were like this, I'm just going to let this go," and I think the idea of being mindful and picking up on cues when something's going in a direction that, "No, that's really not the footage I need to get. I really need to do this, or maybe I need to get a different cameraperson,

because this isn't working out with the configuration we have," that there's ways to dismiss people. I had to do that at Channel 9. We would have student interns who didn't work out, and you have to learn how to say, "I'm sorry, but we're going to have to terminate your internship at the end of the day because you failed to show up," and you have reasons and documentation. I think with leadership, it's really having the courage to be honest and having the courage to call people on things as you see it and not to accuse somebody of something, but just to say, "I noticed that this happened. What was that about?" and then see what happens with that. So I think that that's a big lesson I learned, even in life, with relationships, to really—and the ones that went on longer than they should have, I probably should've forced issues more, like, to be with someone almost 20 years, and this person clearly didn't want to have children, and I did, and every year thinking, "Well, maybe he'll change his mind." Well, no, of course he won't. So that's the kind of thing, to have leadership of your own life, have a sense of agency that you can make decisions that are going to benefit you and the people around you, too ultimately. So, yeah.

Malaika Horne: Sure. Describe your leadership style.

Kathy Corley: Well, let's see. I would say—well, I'll pick up on something that somebody mentioned to me. What I like to do, especially if there's a form of conflict going on, like a department issue or a student teacher issue or something going on in a class that I have to mediate—people are not getting along or doing something—If there's any kind of conflict, what I'd prefer to do is hear all the different perspectives and digest that and then make a decision rather than, "This is what I want to do, and you either back me up or talk me out of it." I really want to hear what people have to say before I make a decision with something, because somebody can bring up something that you hadn't really thought of, and then if you come out with a very strong idea but you really don't have all the facts yet because you're still fact gathering, then it looks like you're wishy-washy if you go, "Well, I know I told you this yesterday, but now I've changed my mind." Even if you say, "Well, I have more information," then someone can say, "Well, why didn't you wait until you got the information?" So that's one thing. I try to help people reach consensus if I can, but sometimes you can't do that; it's not going to be consensus, in which case you have to make a tough decision like, "Well, this is what's going to happen."

Probably the hardest ones happen when it comes to when raises are allocated in a job, and you're a manager, or one of the hardest things I had to do at Webster is one of my colleagues, after looking at all of his evaluations on his third year review, which is the cutting off point when this is going to happen, I had to tell him—somebody I was very good friends with and a wonderful colleague but he wasn't doing his job properly—that he was going to get a terminal contract, and that was very, very difficult to do that. But I did, and then years later, because we're still friends, he said that was the best thing to happen to him, because he wasn't doing a good job, and he had to go and learn how to be a teacher. He's now got a very successful career at a state university. He's been there for years. But he said he wasn't ready to do that at that time, and that those evaluations were accurate, and that that was the right thing for me to do. So, yeah, so that's hard, when you have to terminate an employee.

Malaika Horne: Sure, yeah. Do you think that men and women have different styles generally, not so much specifically?

Kathy Corley: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I do.

Malaika Horne: How so?

Kathy Corley: Yeah. I think men will sort of—I've seen good leadership with men, don't get me wrong, but I've seen—somebody once said you can learn more from a bad leader than you can sometimes from a good leader, and I've seen people make just awful decisions without knowing the full picture, and I've seen men more often just stick with that first decision, and it's like, "By golly, I'm not changing my mind, and this is what I said at first, and this is how I still think," and then as time goes on, everybody knows that that's not the way it should be resolved, and then, sometimes when they do let go of it, then they're very quiet about it, you know, like they act like this whole thing never happened or sometimes reinvent what happened a little bit. So I see that with men, even in general, that men aren't afraid—I've seen men apply for jobs that they have no qualifications on, but they're just going to bluster their way through the interview, and if they get it, great, and if they don't, well, that's okay, too.

[Unknown]: [I suppose so?]

Kathy Corley: But I see that a lot. I don't think women do that as often.

Malaika Horne: This study supports what you're saying.

Kathy Corley: Yes, I'm sure it does. I'm not surprised.

Malaika Horne: So what do you look for in others as far as their leadership potential? I guess young people or not so young people: what are the potentials, you think?

Kathy Corley: I would say with young people especially, when I see someone who's a self-starter, when I teach my documentary filmmaking class, I see a handful of students where they come in with an idea; by week two, they've got an outline; by week three, they're shooting it; and then other people in the class are like, "Well, I don't know what I want to do," and they're kind of wishy-washy about it, or they're going to get started late, and when I see someone where they do all the assignments the way you're supposed to do it, very professional, and they have this self-initiative that no one has to prod them into doing the work. That's something I really encourage that with leadership with them, because if you're a filmmaker, you have to work with a team at various points. Even if you're shooting alone, sooner or later you're working with film festival curators, and you're always working with a group of people in media. So any kind of leadership like that. I would say the self-starter, someone who takes the initiative, someone knows how to communicate with a crew, how to have good human relationships, that human resource is very, very valuable. You'll get better work out of people if they're treated well. And not to have temper tantrums and flare-ups and things like that. So when I see that in a student, to try to get them to try to learn different ways of behavior, sometimes you can't get them to learn that, but you can try.

Malaika Horne: So, advice to others, particularly women, who want to make a difference: what advice would you give them?

Kathy Corley: I would say, especially in the times that we live in now, to not hold back. I would say that taking action is always better than holding back or being afraid. To not let fear hold you back from doing something. If something's holding you back because you don't have enough information, that's one thing, but to try to find ways to overcome fear, and to try to find ways to learn how to focus, and to find out what do you really want to accomplish, and to go after that, because there's so many distractions

from social media, to everything that can go on, and to try to find structure and create your own structure in your life to make things happen.

Malaika Horne: [0:45:29] Very good. Your hero or heroine or mentor?

Kathy Corley: Wow, okay. Let's see, I would say I have lots of celebrity—by celebrity, I mean people in history and current events...

Malaika Horne: And it could be someone you know directly or someone you've read about, or...

Kathy Corley: Okay. Well, my mentors, I would say, in school were Harry Cargas, Reta Madsen, Sister Deborah Pearson were all mentors and heroes to me very much. So when I was at Channel 9, I had a mentor, David Liroff, he was the programming director. He went on to WGBH in Boston and went on to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, so he is a very high up official, really encouraged me as a mentor, and he's like one of my idols in terms of working in public television especially. In terms of other people, different political figures: Hillary Clinton, I think, definitely I would count her because she went through a lot this year. No matter who people may vote for or not vote for, I think what she does with her life after the election I think is very important, and it's been very interesting to hear her talk and hear her speak, so I would say she's definitely a mentor. There's many women filmmakers around, both in fiction film and non-fiction film that are mentors. Agnès Varda, who is now—I think she's about to turn 90. I have to look up her birth date, but she's one of the original French New Wave filmmakers who's still—she's not only living, but she's still making films, and she does three-dimensional multimedia art, as well. So she's definitely somebody I really very deeply admire. So I would say people in politics, people like Agnès Varda in my own filmmaking career I really admire.

Malaika Horne: You touched upon some awards and recognitions. Any others you'd like to mention?

Kathy Corley: About my own?

Malaika Horne: Yeah.

Kathy Corley: Okay, let's see, with Howard Nemerov I received a regional Emmy Award for that. That's for the Midwest National Academy of TV Arts and Sciences. I've had a number of awards for the films that I've made, especially *SECRET*, the Josephine Baker piece, won several awards. There was a Humanitarian Award from Big Money Film Festival; just a lot of different first place awards. [I'd] have to actually have the list in front of me because that actually did pretty well. I think people were really interested in the subject matter, as well. I've had a couple of Emmy nominations for different films that I've done locally, and then *Turnabout*, as a series would, get nominations. That would usually go to the executive producer, which would be Bonita [*spelling uncertain*], but I worked on award-winning pieces like that. In teaching, I've won several awards like Women in Media Award; the William T. Kemper Award, which is a very nice cash award from Commerce Bank; Emerson; I won a teaching award, so it's been in teaching and in filmmaking, in documentary filmmaking.

Malaika Horne: You've been reading almost all your life?

Kathy Corley: Uh-huh.

Malaika Horne: What are you reading now?

Kathy Corley: Wow, what am I reading now? Let's see, I'm reading a manual on learning Adobe Premiere, because I have to teach it in the fall, and I'm working with different software programs. But aside from that, I read a lot of journals like *Atlantic*, and I get the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, so I'm always reading that, and I read slate.com, Salon, The Daily Beast. There's a lot of different political things that I read. In terms of other types of work, I like reading biographies. I just got Sherry Lansing's new biography because I'm interested in her film career as a film producer, so that's what I'm just starting to read now, so.

Malaika Horne: Okay. Hobbies, and I know I wanted to talk about travel. I know that's probably one of your hobbies.

Kathy Corley: Yeah, I should have put that in hobby. It is a hobby. I love to travel. I've been...

Malaika Horne: Where have you been?

Kathy Corley: I've been to Brazil about ten times, and I've been all over because my former partner was Brazilian, so we would see his family a lot. I still have many contacts down there, and I was able to travel from the Amazon all the way down to the South of Brazil. I've been all throughout Europe, because I've been able to teach for Webster. I've taught in Vienna, Leiden, and Geneva, and then when I'm over there, I have friends over at these campuses, so I'll go on vacations and travel, [primarily] in Switzerland and France. I was over in England last year. I got to do a whole Beatles tour. That was fun, to go to Liverpool, because I've always wanted to do that. I want to do more traveling in the United States, especially road trips kind of things, and do that. And then other sports, I just started kayaking late last summer/fall, so I bought a kayak, and I'm doing that. I listed yoga as a—I mean, it's a hobby, but it's also something that I do on—I wish a more frequent basis, but every week I do yoga. I try to do about 10 minutes every day when I wake up. And hiking, I love to hike in nature trails, so.

Malaika Horne: Okay. So, what is one message you'd like to leave about women as change agents, just anything that comes to mind.

Kathy Corley: I would say don't let fear hold you back. I would say to find ways, whatever it takes, if it's reading books on it or have a therapist or whatever, to find out what's causing it, and try to—and sometimes you can't overcome it. It's still scary. It's scary every time you teach your first class of the semester. You're in a room full of strangers, but you have to acknowledge it and know that it may always be there when you're doing something, but whether it's fear of failure, fear of rejection, or whatever, to just sort of acknowledge that it's there, but to work past it and to keep moving forward to getting to doing the things that you really want to accomplish.

Malaika Horne: Do you think that women have more fears maybe?

Kathy Corley: I think so.

Malaika Horne: What reason?

Kathy Corley: Because I think men grow up with a sense of entitlement like you have a right to do this and of course you should do that, and parents are more proactive about their son doing this or going to school and getting this job or this career or whatever, and I think with women, it's more like, "Be

careful; watch out; be cautious, especially driving home.” And I mean, these are very real things, to be aware of your environment, and everybody should be aware of their environment, male or female, but I think you just grow up with fear: that you could be hurt; if you do this, it might be dangerous; it might be risky; if you force an issue with your husband or partner, it may lead to divorce or a breakup, and maybe that’s too scary to do that, and maybe you shouldn’t do it, and—There’s always a lot of fear going on, restraints all the time, I think, in women’s lives.

Malaika Horne: When you’re relating to these young women, for example, how do you reach them with that message?

Kathy Corley: When they come in, and they show me something they’re working on, and it’s like, “Oh, this isn’t very good,” and I’d go, like, “Well, actually, I don’t agree with that.” And I’ll tell them, I’ll talk about what’s good in their work and then areas like, “Now, if you don’t think this is very good, what is it that’s not good?” And then I try to get them to talk with me, and then I’ll try to help them improve it, and women—not so much the younger ones, because they grow up with technology; they grow up with cell phones, and they’re actually much—the harder ones are the adult learners, where they’re afraid to learn a new software program and things like that, and they have a fear that something won’t go right, and they don’t know how to fix it, especially with computer technology and things like that, and men do that too, because they’re all kind of intimidated and afraid of things, especially a new software program that you’re working the bugs out as you’re using it. But I just try to get them to put the negativity about themselves aside and focus on the work and not take it as a personal failure, that they didn’t like the way the open of their program is, and it’s too dull, and they want something more exciting, but they don’t know what it is, and they don’t know how to end their documentary, and they don’t know how to edit it, and they have all this footage, and they don’t know what to do with it. And I just try to help them break it down into steps instead of being afraid of that ultimate deadline that is looming, weeks away or days away, that they just have to break it down into steps, and the things that happen in life are the things that are scheduled, and to just do that.

- Malaika Horne: Okay. I'm getting close to the end, and this is a good question: What is the theme of your life?
- Kathy Corley: Wow. I would say...
- Malaika Horne: Or themes?
- Kathy Corley: Okay, okay. Overcoming adversity, mainly personal adversity, that it's possible to do that, so that kind of overcoming an obstacle is a theme. Wow, that's really a tough [question]. I should have thought more about this. I would say overcoming obstacles is probably the biggest theme, overcoming fear which I know is part of that theme. It's like a sub-category, but wrestling with fear and just learning how to identify and reach a dream that you have, a goal that you have are probably big themes in my life, especially as I get older, as I'm approaching my—I'm in my mid-60s now, and as I get older—having a sense of, I'd say, the sense of journey, that my life has been a really interesting journey, and I don't know where it's going to take me, and I feel like it's very expansive, too. [unintelligible 0:55:51]
- Malaika Horne: Sounds like you've taken risks, that...
- Kathy Corley: Yeah, yeah.
- Malaika Horne: ...you could stay tethered to maybe the traditions that maybe others in your environment had.
- Kathy Corley: Yeah, taking risks is a big theme in it, too, yeah: overcoming adversity, taking risks, being able to go after a dream, go after a goal.
- Malaika Horne: And being creative [unintelligible 0:56:14].
- Kathy Corley: Yes, yes. Oh, definitely, yeah, definitely creativity is a big theme in my life, yeah.
- Malaika Horne: Okay. So is there anything that we missed?
- Kathy Corley: I don't think so. I think I covered pretty much everything, the questions and also thinking about the last time we did it, this is tape two for that. No, I think we've pretty much covered things, so.
- Malaika Horne: What about retirement? This is my last question.

- Kathy Corley: Oh, okay.
- Malaika Horne: You've touched upon it, bits and pieces throughout the interview, but once you retire, where do you see yourself?
- Kathy Corley: Oh, I am going to be so engaged in all the things I don't have time to do. I'm going to have more time for my family and friends. I'm going to be able to take more time for my filmmaking, for writing. I just see it as a big adventure. I don't see it as—I mean, I love my job, and I will miss people there, but then I'll always have this connection with them, so I never would feel that I would be cut off from them. I just think retirement is just like the ultimate adventure. I just am very excited about it.
- Malaika Horne: And you have connections all over the world.
- Kathy Corley: Mm-hmm, yeah, yeah.
- Malaika Horne: So you intend to be an active retiree.
- Kathy Corley: Mm-hmm. Oh, yes, very much. Very much. There's nothing retiring about it, yeah, so.
- Malaika Horne: The "non-retirement movement," as I heard you say.
- Kathy Corley: That's right, yeah! It is. It is, so, yeah.
- Malaika Horne: Well, Kathy Corley, I want to thank you so much for a very enriching and fascinating interview, and hopefully I'll see you sometime in the near future. I'll definitely be following your career.
- Kathy Corley: Oh, that's great. Well, Malaika, it's a pleasure to be interviewed by you. You're welcome. Thank you so much for doing the interview, and thank you, Josie, for running camera and doing the interview, too.
- Malaika Horne: You're welcome.