

An Interview with

Ann Divine

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.

Ann Divine: I've lived in St. Louis since 1971 and I worked for 33 years at the Meramec campus of St. Louis Community College as administrator.

Blanche Touhill: Talk to me about your childhood: who encouraged you; your parents; your grandparents; your cousins; your elementary or secondary school teachers? And who did you play with? Did those children talk about going to college or about leadership? Did you play a leadership role in your school? Talk about your youth.

Ann Divine: Okay. I'm the oldest of three girls and for much of my childhood, first, we lived with my grandparents and then they lived with us and so I was in a household of many adults. In my family, the question was not whether you would go to college but where you would go to college. My parents both went to college. My father, in fact, had a Master's Degree in chemistry and half of my grandparents went to college. So we're a long-standing college family. In the neighborhood where I grew up, there weren't a lot of other children since it was more like my grandparents' generation, it was their house. I played with the little boy next door. There were a couple of little boys down the street and my two younger sisters and we were the only children pretty much for blocks and blocks. But we had a great time. The house which some of my relatives still live in backs up to the big public park in Atlanta and between our property and the public property, there was undeveloped land which belonged to the city, which has since been developed as part of the park, but at the time it was sort of, to us at least, wild and untamable and when I was growing up in the '50s, Westerns were it. So we mostly played cowboys and Indians in our back yard, the neighbor's back yard, that undeveloped land. I would say I was pretty much the ring leader but partly that fell to me because I was the oldest and, to an extent at least, I could tell my sisters what to do. Good thing they're not here. So then, when I went to school, I guess I was still something of a leader, at least with the girls and I had a very happy childhood, a good experience in school. I'm one of those people who's always been adapted to school, liked school. As I said, it was just a question of where I would go to college.

Blanche Touhill: When you went to school, was there a teacher or two that you really liked?

Ann Divine: There were. There was my 5th grade teacher whose name was Miss Moy. I still remember liking her very much and I was one of the better

students. I don't remember anything specifically that she did except I do remember her as one of my favorite teachers. It was a big enough school that there were three classes in each grade. Every year there was a teacher who was supposed to be THE teacher all of the good students were supposed to be in her class and Miss Moy was one of those, and the...I think it was the 2nd grade...I was not in that group with the teacher you were supposed to have but I still liked the teacher and it was fine. So I have lived to tell about it.

Blanche Touhill: Did she say anything personally to you?

Ann Divine: I don't remember specifically. This was the era when being asked to stay after class and help straighten up the classroom was an honor and so she would do things like that but not exclusively to me.

Blanche Touhill: And in high school?

Ann Divine: In high school, went to a big public high school, not big by some standards but there were 15, 1600 students and it was 8 through 12th grade. We didn't have middle school or junior high at the time. Well, in the 8th grade, I was a cheerleader but then I got interested in the high school newspaper and was the editor of the high school newspaper. So, yes, I had something of a leadership position in high school also.

Blanche Touhill: And so you liked to write at an early age?

Ann Divine: Yes, and...this is unusual, I guess...they did standardized testing for everybody when we were in the 7th grade and as a result of that, because this was in the late '50s and the United States was scared to death about Russia winning the space race, the Ford Foundation funded what they called "the accelerated class" in high school which had 40 students, there were four elementary schools that fit into the high school. Mine was the biggest one but they took students who had scored well on that first standardized test and did a second round which was not just paper and pencil; we were actually interviewed by people and they picked, of that bunch...and I don't know how many were in the original group...but they picked 40 students to be in what they called the accelerated class, which meant that in the 8th grade, we took 9th grade classes; in the 9th grade, 10th grade classes, meaning we could avoid some of the less productive, lower level high school classes. So that was good. I think it benefitted me and it meant, in one way, that I was with the same...well, not just one

way...I was with the same group all the time so I didn't mingle as much with the general high school population but it had advantages to be with that group all the time and we knew each other very well and there are many people I started kindergarten with and graduated from high school with because there just wasn't that much turnover at the time.

Blanche Touhill: Are you still friendly with any of those people?

Ann Divine: I am. I went to a high school reunion last fall and saw a number of people, some of whom had been in that accelerated group whom I'm happy to see and talk to. I don't keep up with them on a regular basis but I'm always happy to go back and talk about old times.

Blanche Touhill: Did they all go to college?

Ann Divine: In my high school, something like 95% of the graduating seniors went to college. I don't know how many of them finished. The people I was close to finished but I know there were others who probably didn't.

Blanche Touhill: It's amazing that 95% of a large high school went on to college?

Ann Divine: Yeah. Well, I graduated in '63 and it was in the more educated part of town.

Blanche Touhill: So how did you decide what you were going to major in? Did you major in English?

Ann Divine: I did major in English. My father was a chemist and he really had hoped that I would go into science and I am interested in science; I'm not bad at science but when I was a freshman in college, when I was taking chemistry, I thought, do I want to spend my afternoons in the lab or in the library reading novels? And so I picked English and in many ways, I say I was born an English major because I always liked to read. I toyed with the idea of science and it would have made him very happy but I couldn't do it though, in the end.

Blanche Touhill: Did your sisters become scientists?

Ann Divine: They did not. They are less scientifically inclined than I am so I was pretty much the only hope.

Blanche Touhill: And talk about your college. Where did you go?

Ann Divine: I went to Agnes Scott College in Atlanta, a women's college. I always knew I wanted to go to a women's college. Now, I didn't always think it was going to be Agnes Scott, although, my mother, her two older sisters, their two cousins and a cousin of mine all went to Agnes Scott. I thought I wanted to go farther away. I always said the only disadvantage to Agnes Scott was that it was six miles from my house, although I did live on campus ultimately. I was interested in one of the seven sisters. I felt seriously about Vassar, maybe Smith, but what changed my mind was, after my junior year in high school, I was a American field service exchange student in Switzerland for three months, which was a long time to be away from home for the first time for a 17-year-old and while I really enjoyed that experience, it also made me think, I didn't want to go as far away as Poughkeepsie, New York to go to college and I wasn't interested in the women's colleges that were closer like Sweet Briar and Randolph Macon so I decided, my parents said I can live on campus; they would pay for that and so I'll just go to Agnes Scott and act as if it's farther away. Not as much as some people. I have a friend who grew up even closer to Agnes Scott than I did and she didn't get near her house until Thanksgiving. I had a little more contact with my family that freshman year.

Blanche Touhill: Did you have a car?

Ann Divine: Oh, we couldn't have cars. This was 1963. You couldn't have a car until you were a senior. But I confess to occasionally calling my mother and saying, "Would you come out and bring me..." ...whatever, which I couldn't have done from Vassar.

Blanche Touhill: Did you like Agnes Scott?

Ann Divine: I loved Agnes Scott. I would not give anything for my four years at Agnes Scott.

Blanche Touhill: Why did you like it so much?

Ann Divine: Because it was a place where there was no question that women could be leaders, academic scholars. I'd say maybe half the faculty was male but there were many...and the president and the administrators were mostly male...but there were many strong, smart, accomplished women faculty members and others and in class, you were surrounded by a whole bunch of other young women who had also been first in their class

in high school and we're not embarrassed about it and there was just...it wasn't so much that there was overt encouragement as that there was never a question that you could do whatever you wanted to do and ironically enough, I ended up with a group of friends who were mostly chemistry majors. So vicariously I guess I was sort of a chemistry major, but, you know, everybody was just there because they wanted to be there. They knew they could do it and there were a lot of women who majored in science, for example, and not just those feminine things like English and French.

Blanche Touhill: Were you a leader in college?

Ann Divine: I was. I was also, again, the editor of the newspaper, which, for some peculiar reason I never did understand the system, wasn't elected office. We had a whole bunch of facets of student government, all of which were elected positions and the newspaper was there and I started working on it when I was a freshman so there really wasn't any serious question that I wouldn't be elected the editor because nobody else was particularly interested, for one thing, and I was the obvious choice but I still had to be elected to that.

Blanche Touhill: And you were?

Ann Divine: I was, yes.

Blanche Touhill: Did you live in houses or dormitories?

Ann Divine: We had dorms. When I was there, there were six dorms. Three were new and three were old. One of them was the original building which was built in the 1880's and my freshman year, I lived in an old building and then for two years, I lived in modern buildings and then my senior year, I moved back to a different but another one of the old buildings. So I had a pretty comprehensive experience of dorm life.

Blanche Touhill: Which one did you like the best?

Ann Divine: Actually, I liked the older buildings. At the time, the new ones seemed sort of dazzling and actually, I did live in one the first year it was open and that was nice but when I went back to the older building, I was glad I had done that. They had, like, 12 foot ceilings and wide hallways and hardwood flooring and enormous windows, that sort of thing.

Blanche Touhill: Did you eat in the building or did you eat in a central place?

Ann Divine: We had a central dining hall. The population of the college at the time was, I don't know, about 800 students. By typical standards, it was a very small place and there were maybe 100 of those students who did not live on campus, or maybe fewer. I had a friend who was a day student who often spent the night in somebody's room on campus but it was mostly residential and everybody ate in the dining hall.

Blanche Touhill: And were there single or double rooms?

Ann Divine: Both. I had a double room for three years and then my senior year, I had a single room in one of the old buildings.

Blanche Touhill: And after dinner, did you go to the library or...

Ann Divine: Usually, yes. There was an old building on the quadrangle. It was the only building in the middle of the campus in what was otherwise open space and it has since been torn down. That was the original gym. It was called the Hub and it was the closest thing we had at the time to a student center. So, after dinner, many people would go to the Hub or outside if the weather was nice, and play a couple of hands of bridge, which I haven't played since, and then go to the library or there were study rooms in each of the dorms or, of course, you could study in your own room. But, yes, I've spent a lot of time in the library.

Blanche Touhill: We talked previously one time about singing in college. Where did you sing?

Ann Divine: In the Hub. There was an old piano and a lot of college songs, some peculiar to Agnes Scott and popular songs that, for some reason, had just become part of the culture. For example, a classmate of mine was the youngest of five girls from Texas, San Antonio, who had gone to Agnes Scott and I credit...or fault, I guess, them for making the song "The Alamo," one of the standards and so we would sing that. Another favorite from the '50s was Teen Angel about the boy whose girlfriend had been killed on the railroad track when the car stalled because she had gone back to get a ring he had given her and we added some more cynical versus to that also so it was all a lot of fun.

Blanche Touhill: When you go back for reunions, do you sing these songs?

Ann Divine: Absolutely. They have even gone to the trouble to print up little booklets with the lyrics for those of us, older, who can't necessarily remember the fifth verse of Teen Angel. Yeah, it's just like the old days.

Blanche Touhill: And do you have friends from Agnes Scott?

Ann Divine: I do. I go to a reunion every five years. I don't necessarily keep up with them in between either but, because of the Agnes Scott Alumni Association, I have made friends in St. Louis, of people who were not in my class who were mostly older whom I have met here and I see some of them regularly.

Blanche Touhill: So you graduate from Agnes Scott and then what happens?

Ann Divine: Then I went to graduate school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I really wasn't prepared to get a job yet. I had no prospects of getting married and I knew I wasn't through with school so I spent a year in Chapel Hill, got a Master's in English and after that, I taught high school for three years in Atlanta, taught English.

Blanche Touhill: And how did you like that?

Ann Divine: Well, it was a private school. The students were...well, they were privileged which doesn't necessarily mean they were well behaved...classes were small. The students did have a lot of support, for the most part, from home. I think the biggest class I ever had was 21 and after three years, when I quit, I said, I hope I am never so hungry again that I have to teach high school, and it was a good situation for high school. It's just, I don't know, there's just too much going on in teenagers and I had some great students. I loved many of the students and it was a good experience but I did not want to do that for a long time.

Blanche Touhill: So, what happened?

Ann Divine: Well, then I came to Washington University to go to graduate school.

Blanche Touhill: To get a Ph.D.?

Ann Divine: To get a Ph.D. on which I had a head start because I had a Master's Degree. Nonetheless, it took me forever. It took 15...because I abandoned it several times. I mean, I took all my courses in a couple years.

Blanche Touhill: But you didn't write the paper?

Ann Divine: I did not take my exams or write my dissertation until...I didn't even think about it for many years and then I went back and finally finished after about 15 years. So I think I hold a record for the longest Ph.D. at Was U, at least in English which is a department notorious for people taking a long time. But I'm glad I did it. It was just sort of something that was hanging over me and in my family, you are supposed to finish things that you start so I felt guilty about it all the time.

Blanche Touhill: So you got to St. Louis and you were in the Washington U program. What was your dissertation topic?

Ann Divine: I wrote on five sort of novels of the 19th century and I say they're sort of novels because they were all written by people who wrote novels but in this case, these are sort of connected short stories. For example, Charles Dickens, famous novelist, his earliest book was called "Sketches by Boz" which is essentially short stories but it's the same characters throughout and so that was one characteristic but it's never simple. They also were all sort of centered around villages so, in fact, the title of my dissertation which I'm sure you're on pins and needles to hear, is "The Village Tradition" and there were five books that, as I say, were about villages that were sort of in decline. The books stretched from the 1820's to, I guess, the 1870's...late '60s, and the population was moving to the city even then and the villages were sort of isolated enclaves of older times and therefore a good way to look at a lot of social things.

Blanche Touhill: And one of them was by Dickens?

Ann Divine: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: And who were the other...

Ann Divine: I knew you were going to ask me and I probably can't name all five of them.

Blanche Touhill: Well, just name one.

Ann Divine: George Eliot.

Blanche Touhill: Why did you leave Washington U to not finish?

Ann Divine: Well, I had an opportunity, thanks to Agnes Scott again: In...I guess this was the middle '70s, the Carnegie Corporation was concerned that institutions of higher education did not have a lot of women administrators and so it partnered and gave money to this group of women's colleges, mostly, but not entirely in the Southeast. They used to call themselves the step-sisters because they weren't the seven sisters and it was schools like Agnes Scott, Converse in South Carolina, Randolph Macon...Goucher was one of them. There was one in Pennsylvania, in Pittsburgh, I guess, which I think has gone co-ed or merged or something and I can't remember the name, but one of the Claremont Colleges was a women's college and so the idea was that they were going to sponsor a program, the Carnegie Corporation, sponsored a program whereby a recent graduate which was defined as within the last 10 years, would be selected to serve an administrative internship at another one of those colleges. And I was at the far end of the time limit. I had been out about 10 years, but I was selected for that program by Agnes Scott and then I was assigned to be an administrative intern at Mary Baldwin in Stanton, Virginia in the Shenandoah Valley which has been in the news since for a number of things. But anyway, so I spent a year in the Shenandoah Valley working in the president's office and that led to my getting the job at Meramec then.

Blanche Touhill: But you liked it?

Ann Divine: I did like it, yes. I said, from the beginning, about administration, it's a life of extremes. On the one hand, you are crafting the vision for the future for the institution, and at the other end, you're saying, "Did anyone order a microphone for Tuesday?" So there was just this whole range of stuff and I liked it a lot better than actually teaching. So I stuck with it.

Blanche Touhill: So you finished the internship and did you meet the other people that were in the program?

Ann Divine: Yes, we had a week of orientation and then we had a mid-year meeting and I guess we had a final meeting at Cedar Crest College in Pennsylvania which was the administrative center of this program and so there were...I can't remember exactly how many schools were in this group, maybe 17, maybe fewer, so there's one from each group and we met throughout the year.

- Blanche Touhill: What happened to all those women?
- Ann Divine: I have no idea. I'm sorry to say, I have no idea. I remember hearing, in the first year or two, after that experience, that I was the only one who really had an administrative job in higher education.
- Blanche Touhill: At the end of the year?
- Ann Divine: Mm-hmm, and I don't know whether that was by choice on the part of the others or if they just couldn't get them, but this was by now, I guess, 1975.
- Blanche Touhill: Did Carnegie ever do it again?
- Ann Divine: I think they did it for...the original grant was for three years and then I think they extended it for a couple more and I knew a woman who did it the next year, who was the Agnes Scott person from the next year, someone I had known in college but I didn't know anybody else and I have no idea what happened to the others, unfortunately.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, it would be an interesting follow-up.
- Ann Divine: It would, mm-hmm.
- Blanche Touhill: So how did you learn about the Meramec job?
- Ann Divine: Well, a person I knew from the English Department at Wash U was teaching part-time at Meramec and saw in the newsletter that they were advertising for an assistant dean of Instruction and she sent me a copy of that and so I applied.
- Blanche Touhill: And did you like St. Louis at that time?
- Ann Divine: I did. I've always said I came to St. Louis to go to Wash U and I figured I'd be here three years. Then I get this internship in Virginia and live there for a year but when I came back to St. Louis, I was surprised that it sort of felt like coming home and so I've not seriously considered leaving since then because I like many things about St. Louis...I'm speaking to a native...somewhat to my surprise, and I have said I couldn't live in Atlanta again. It is just too crowded and fast and congested and I know this because I visit my relatives there now and I'm much happier here.
- Blanche Touhill: So, go on. You went out to Meramec and you were the assistant dean...

- Ann Divine: I was the assistant dean of Instruction. At that time we had a dean of Instruction, an associate dean of Instruction and an assistant dean.
- Blanche Touhill: Is that like the chief academic officer?
- Ann Divine: Yes, the titles at St. Louis Community College seem to change about every five years but at the time, that was it. They had the dean of instruction...and those were the only three truly academic administrators because the divisions were headed by what they call "division chairs" who were, in fact, faculty members who had release time for sort of administering the division of which there were seven. So all of this points to how much simpler a time it was.
- Blanche Touhill: And were they men or women?
- Ann Divine: They were all men. Much was made, a lot of it out of my hearing, of the fact that I was the first woman administrator they had. The only other woman who had anything like an administrative job was the registrar which is sort of a typical female job, over time. And so I was the only one who had any real contact with the academic portion of the institution, which is supposed to be the point.
- Blanche Touhill: And how was that?
- Ann Divine: People just couldn't get over the fact that they had hired a woman and I wasn't all that young but I looked young and so they sort of just..."What? You're the dean?" More than once students mistook me for another student. Of course, we have older students at the community college, as you do here. But it was fine and they said, the dean of Instruction and other people who had been on the hiring committee, said more than once that they would not have hired me if I had...they would not have looked at me if I hadn't had that administrative internship experience, plus, when I was interviewed, they flew me out here from Virginia for an interview. It was during spring break and so most people weren't on campus. The committee was the dean, the head of Financial Aid who had been the last administrator hired, which is sort of a tradition, and the head of the Math Department and the dean was a former math teacher. One of the questions was, "We have your college transcript here..."...of course they never heard of Agnes Scott..."We have your college transcript here and we see that you had three-quarters of math. Can you tell us what those were?" and I said, "Yes, it was one-quarter of set theory and

two-quarters of calculus,” and years later, a guy from the Math Department said, “We didn’t expect you to say that and that’s the reason we hired you.” Well, I knew they didn’t expect me to say...they expected me to say, “Well, first we learned to count on our fingers and then, you know, we had these big balls...”...or something. When I said “set theory,” they were floored...so Agnes Scott has served me well.

Blanche Touhill: So that was your father’s influence too, wasn’t it?

Ann Divine: No, I think it was required. I don’t think I had a choice. I would not have rushed into a set theory class left to my own devices.

Blanche Touhill: But it got you a job.

Ann Divine: Yes, it did.

Blanche Touhill: How long were you at Meramec?

Ann Divine: I was at Meramec for 33 years.

Blanche Touhill: And what jobs did you hold?

Ann Divine: I was the assistant dean and then I was the associate dean and then I was the associate dean for Career and Academic Programs which was essentially the same job with a different title and a few more responsibilities. Then I was a division dean, I was an acting division dean, I was then...because they changed organization and titles several times, I was the executive dean. We didn’t have a dean of Instruction or vice president of Academic Affairs. That was the closest we had and so I was the executive dean for at least 12 years. And then the year before I retired, they changed that position to vice president of Academic Affairs which I was and two or three times in my last five years, I was also the acting president, once for a period of seven months. So, “What was your title?” is not an easy question.

Blanche Touhill: But you worked your way up through the administration?

Ann Divine: Right, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Was it unusual for somebody to stay that long and move up in the community college?

Ann Divine: Not, I think, as much as in other higher education institutions but to a degree. I mean, as you well know, typically you have to move to move up. You, of course, managed not to have to do that so we have very similar experiences in that regard.

Blanche Touhill: That's right. We both went to one institution and sort of made our way up the ladder in the same institution. Talk about Meramec... What does Meramec do and how long did you stay?

Ann Divine: Well, when most people hear the words "community college," they think some sort of hands-on technical program and many community colleges, including St. Louis Community College, have programs like that, not so much hands on. None of the campuses...but Forest Park has automobile repair but none of them have a lot of those more industrial kind of shop sorts of programs. But Meramec had the fewest. Meramec was, and still is, focused on transfer programs. It was more academic, general education, there are some allied health programs and social work, criminal justice, that sort of stuff, but mostly it's more...not to denigrate the others...but more academic and focused on trying to get people to a four-year institution and that was what I liked about it. There were a lot of faculty members, even though the faculty is predisposed to not like administrators, there were many faculty members I did like and because we had all gotten out of college at about the time when academic jobs were drying up in general. There were a lot of people there who, like me, didn't think they would ever be at a community college and had also thought, well, you know, I need a job. I'll just be here for a couple of years and then I'll go to, I don't know, the University of Michigan or Harvard, and weren't able to do that and also, I think, settled in and realized that it was a good place to be.

Blanche Touhill: Why was it a good place to be?

Ann Divine: Well, I could also talk for days about why it wasn't a good...it was a good place but, like anywhere, there are a lot of negative things. I think it was a supportive institution, a lot of good people on the faculty and in other positions, a fairly strong tradition of having been there for a long time and being proud of the institution and what they were doing and opportunities they were offering students and because of the jobs I had, I have a lot of stories about students who were just n'ere-do-wells essentially but there were so many who were good who couldn't go

anywhere else for financial reasons, family reasons, afraid to leave home reasons, which I think is unfortunate, but who came there when they could have, under other circumstances, gone anywhere because they were perfectly prepared and smart enough and came to Meramec, got what they needed and then went someplace else and were very successful.

Blanche Touhill: And you were part of that?

Ann Divine: Well, I like to think so.

Blanche Touhill: And the faculty and the administration were proud of that?

Ann Divine: Yes, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Did the community college...they always said to me it's a movement, it's not...

Ann Divine: I never understood that.

Blanche Touhill: I wondered what that meant.

Ann Divine: Well, I think that made sense in the late '50s, '60s when all of these communities like St. Louis were starting community college, but once you've been there for 40 years, it's no longer a movement; you're established. So I never use that term.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I know that they didn't like the term "junior college."

Ann Divine: That's right because "junior" sounds lesser. And there are junior colleges that I don't think anyone has really called it that anymore, but there were junior colleges that weren't community-based like Stephens started as a two-year junior college. But community college makes much more sense as a descriptor, I think, because it's right there in the community and, in the case of St. Louis Community College at least, it has local tax support so it really is part of the community and does a lot of things for the community.

Blanche Touhill: What do they do for the community?

Ann Divine: Well, I was thinking of the non-credit courses that, I got the catalogue for fall the other day and there is a dazzling array of stuff you can take for non-credit, some of it business and career-related, some of it purely

hobby, you know, ballroom dancing, crochet, tours of historical sites around the city, that sort of stuff.

Blanche Touhill: Actually, I just got the book myself and I thought it was a dazzling array.

Ann Divine: Good.

Blanche Touhill: At reasonable times and at reasonable rates.

Ann Divine: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: It was astounding. It was what Oasis is doing but via the community colleges, reaching out, especially, I think, to people who are a little older or younger people who had some time.

Ann Divine: Right.

Blanche Touhill: It's saying we are part of the community.

Ann Divine: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: How many students did you have at Meramec?

Ann Divine: The most we ever had was a little over 13,000 which was too many. When the colleges were planned, Meramec was to be the smallest one. Forest Park was expected to be the biggest because it was in the city and they were planned in 1960...'61 and then what happened was 44 was built and there was all that residential growth out in the Southwest and Meramec just mushroomed and while I was there, we built...I'm trying to think...maybe three new classroom buildings just to accommodate the growth and in the big picture, it's a good problem to have, but it was just bursting at the seams.

Blanche Touhill: How many acres did you have?

Ann Divine: Seventy-six. I usually don't know the answer to acreage questions but that one I do know.

Blanche Touhill: But I imagine you were bursting at the seams?

Ann Divine: Nowhere to park, yes. We had classes in all kinds of places on campus that were not specified to be classrooms and that's what led to the creation of first the South County Education Center and then the West...

Blanche Touhill: In Lindbergh?

Ann Divine: Well, it was in the Lindbergh School District originally. It was in an old elementary school and I can't remember what street it was on. And then they built a building which is very nice, new center and we had a West County Education Center which has evolved into the Wildwood campus.

Blanche Touhill: So you really have five campuses?

Ann Divine: Well, there's also a city campus, the Harrison Center.

Blanche Touhill: Near the hill?

Ann Divine: No, it's in North St. Louis. It's the William Harrison Center which is small. It's much smaller than any of the others and there is sort of a corporate training center up near Florissant Valley. So there are four main campuses and the original plan for the community college was to have four campuses and they own some land. They didn't build on it because it was in the middle of nowhere when the college started. There was land out somewhere sort of due west around where Lafayette High School is or somewhere.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, it was Wildwood.

Ann Divine: No, no, it was further in. The college held onto that land so long that they felt, they will never let us build a college out here so they sold that and bought the land in Wildwood because now the population, of course, is pushed further west.

Blanche Touhill: And it was Cosande that...

Ann Divine: Joe Cosande, yes.

Blanche Touhill: ...who had that idea?

Ann Divine: Mm-hmm, the founding chancellor.

Blanche Touhill: Was he right?

Ann Divine: I think so. I never knew him. He retired right before I came but his name was always spoken with reverence and I do think he and the first presidents did a very good job of recruiting good people to run the college. There were a number of people at Meramec who had been lured

away from St. Louis University, especially administrative jobs and they hired very good faculty, even now, hire good faculty. So I think that was really the lasting part of Cosande's vision.

Blanche Touhill: I think it was too and I've often thought if the community college was just in one space, it would be gigantic because you probably have, total, 35,000 students a year or are there more?

Ann Divine: No, probably that. I don't know what the current numbers are but Meramec was typically 11 to 12,000; Forest Park would be 8 or 9; Florissant Valley, 9 or 10; o, yeah, 30,000.

Blanche Touhill: Which is a remarkable number...

Ann Divine: Right.

Blanche Touhill: I think the University of Missouri-Columbia, the last time I looked, was about 23, 24,000 and think of the plant that it takes to have that size.

Ann Divine: Right, including dorms in that case.

Blanche Touhill: Including dorms, yes. You never built dorms though, did you?

Ann Divine: We never even thought about it. I think it was partly philosophical, that, you know, this is a commuter school and that's what people want and also, in the case of Meramec, Kirkwood would not have put up with that, frankly, and there was no space. It's all those well-established neighborhoods.

Blanche Touhill: Actually, there was no space at Forest Park or even at...

Ann Divine: Right, although Forest Park, because, of course, for a long time, the arena was in that space but that has been developed so that would have been an option had we been interested, and Florissant Valley has a lot of unused land on its campus. Florissant Valley's campus is the biggest and they have a pond and these wooded areas and so, had they chosen, they could have done dorms.

Blanche Touhill: But it was really for the community, yes.

Ann Divine: Mm-hmm, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: But you have foreign students?

Ann Divine: We do. From time to time...I don't know the situation now but we have had formal exchange programs, usually not people who came for an entire semester but we had a lot of foreign students just through natural immigration.

Blanche Touhill: And they live in St. Louis.

Ann Divine: Right. Meramec and Forest Park also has a lot of Bosnian students.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, of course. What are the specialties of each of the schools?

Ann Divine: Forest Park has always been considered the allied health campus, although their nursing program is on the other two big campuses also because of its proximity there to the medical center. It has far more medical-related programs than anybody else. Florissant Valley has always been engineering, even though, again, both Forest Park and Meramec had engineering courses and programs but that was really what Florissant Valley focused on and Meramec on transfer and business, although they always have business students.

Blanche Touhill: And the others had a regular academic program?

Ann Divine: Oh, yes, yes. Every campus had a comprehensive transfer program.

Blanche Touhill: Are you proud that you spent your life with the community college?

Ann Divine: I am. I would never have expected to do that. When I look back, I see that I was always sort of interested in academic administration and always sort of academic but when I thought about it, I would have expected to spend my life somewhere like Agnes Scott and when I got to Meramec, within a couple of years, I realized that I really liked being in that more diverse atmosphere whereas I didn't necessarily want to spend a lot of time with some of the guys who taught engineering. They were interesting and they added to the mix, whereas at a place like Agnes Scott or any purely academic institution, they're all pretty much alike. They're all academics and have less interest in some of the practical aspects of the world. So I found that to be interesting and invigorating.

Blanche Touhill: Well, also, you were in Meramec when it was really mushrooming up?

Ann Divine: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: And so your entrepreneurial skills...

Ann Divine: It's very exciting.

Blanche Touhill: What are some of the things you helped build?

Ann Divine: Well, I started two career programs: the Occupational Therapy Program and the Physical Therapist Assistant Program. I think the Occupational Therapy Program has been closed because of things that have happened in the healthcare field regarding occupational therapy. The Physical Therapist Assistant Program is still there and thriving. I did a number of things in just the way the academic program was run and documented which, you know, are sort of clerical stuff but I feel like I sort of brought order to chaos in a number of areas and got some stuff established which is still going on, and the primary thing...and this was fairly late in my career...well, it had to wait until I was in a position and had the authority to do this...I discovered that when we hired faculty members, we did not ask them to give a teaching demonstration and what really brought this home to me was I found out Wash U does and I thought, Wash U is a research institution and yet they want their faculty to demonstrate that they can teach before they hire them. I thought, why aren't we doing that? So I instituted that when I became the executive dean and could have some influence over hiring of faculty and I cannot tell you what a difference it made. You could tell within two minutes of people giving their demonstration who could teach and who couldn't and we hired very few duds after that. I know they're still doing that. Somebody would stand up and say, "Well, I usually like to start off class by..."...so and so..."and then I would typically..."...and the other person would stand up and say, "Okay, today we're talking about Mark Twain." It was just night and day. I think that's the most lasting effect I had and the one I'm proudest of.

Blanche Touhill: And what do the students say about teaching at Meramec?

Ann Divine: I think they generally like it. I mean, you know students, they're always...people are going to find something to complain about. But we sometimes, depending on the time of year and the circumstances, sometimes we had candidates do their teaching demonstration in front of real students who were very helpful and I remember one, this guy had a pretty strong accent and it took a while...you could understand it but you had to sort of get into the rhythm and so he was one of the ones we

asked to teach a class of real students and the students' responses were, "Don't worry about his accent. He's great. We can understand him."

Blanche Touhill: Well, Meramec has always had the reputation of having standards and that the quality of the faculty, although the community college has always been a good source of education in the Metropolitan St. Louis area.

Ann Divine: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Do you want to comment on presidents of Meramec?

Ann Divine: Well, only to say...let me think for a minute...

Blanche Touhill: How many did you work for?

Ann Divine: I think six and I will just say they were very different and some were much better than others.

Blanche Touhill: I always remember you were very respected by the faculty.

Ann Divine: Well, thank you. I think you're right.

Blanche Touhill: How did you do that?

Ann Divine: Well, I think they knew that I was an academic also and I remember I had originally thought I would try to get my whole dissertation published, gave up on that, but I did have a monograph drawn from one of the chapters of my dissertation published and I don't even remember what it was about now but I put that announcement in the campus newsletter and one of the English faculty members came up to me and said, "You published an academic article. I've never known an administrator who published an academic article before." So it was that kind of thing and I think, knowing that even though we had our differences about how things were done, I was on their side because I recognized that they were the heart of the institution and there was no reason for anybody else to be there if we didn't have the faculty and the students.

Blanche Touhill: Let me ask two questions. It's sort of changing the subject, and then I'll go back to your professional career: If you had been born 50 years earlier, what would your life be like?

- Ann Divine: Oh, I'm sure I would have been a housewife and not done anything outside the house, although I would have been a housewife who read all the time, let the beans boil over because...which I still neglect to do because I was reading a book. So it would have been far less interesting or challenging 50 years earlier.
- Blanche Touhill: And is there some award or awards that you have received that you really are proud of?
- Ann Divine: Yes, there is, you'll be surprised as what I'm going to tell you: When I was editor of the high school newspaper, they gave an award to...this was the State High School Newspaper Association, I guess was the title. They gave an award to the high school newspaper and its editor that they considered the overall best in the entire State of Georgia and I won and I was at the convention where they had been announcing awards and, of course, I was talking to the person next to me when I suddenly heard they were announcing my name and the fact that the newspaper had won the award and it was a three-part award: It was the honor, of course. There was a silver bow which I still have that's engraved with the name of the newspaper and there was a free vacation for a week at Calloway Gardens which was this resort out west of Atlanta, maybe 80 miles, for my entire family. And so I used to say that my father and I were the only ones who had paid for a family vacation. It was just all sort of a surprise and I'm still very proud of having done that.
- Blanche Touhill: How did your family react to the news that they were going to Calloway Gardens?
- Ann Divine: Well, they were thrilled. We had never been. It wasn't the sort of vacation we usually took but who's going to turn it down?
- Blanche Touhill: So you went and you enjoyed it?
- Ann Divine: Yes, we did.
- Blanche Touhill: You had a wonderful career at a time that women were beginning to take administrative positions. What made you a leader?
- Ann Divine: I think several things: one is recognizing that everybody is engaged in the same enterprise. We're all in this together. The faculty like to think they're special and they are to a degree. On the other side, the

secretaries like to think that they have unique problems that need to be aired and I think everybody has a different role to play but we're all working toward the same goal and the more we recognize that we have more in common than we have differences, the better off we'll all be, the better we'll accomplish the goal and the happier everybody will be. So I constantly preach that. I think also that people, the faculty in this case, knew that I did respect what they did and thought that they were doing a good job, were well prepared for the job, were, for the most part, trying to help the students, which was what they were supposed to be doing. And on the other side, with people like the secretaries, I would never take an imperious attitude and ask somebody to do something that I should be doing or something that I wouldn't do, like, if I said, "We got to clean out the files," I didn't say, "You clean out the files," you know; "We're going to clean out the files" and I would plow through a file drawer as much as anybody else. So I think that leaders need to be prepared to recognize that they haven't always been in a leadership position, that they rose out of an area where everybody else is, that in many ways, they're just like everybody else and circumstances and, I don't know, talent and luck have propelled them forward perhaps but they shouldn't forget where they came from.

Blanche Touhill: Do you meet ex-students as you go around town?

Ann Divine: No, I don't, because I never had prolonged contact with students. I mean, I used to occasionally. I'd be in a store and somebody would say, "Thank you, Dean Divine." What? Because I would be on the stage at various events and they recognized me. But my direct contact with students was mostly those who had a problem, often of their own making. So they didn't want to see me again and it was mutual.

Blanche Touhill: What does your mother think of your career or your sisters? What happened to your sisters?

Ann Divine: Well, my second sister went to law school and practiced law in Kentucky for a number of years. She has quit doing that and worked for a while at the Bluegrass Museum and she really just now sort of...she's not formally retired but she doesn't work. She just does little projects that she's interested in, not law.

Blanche Touhill: Where is the Bluegrass Museum?

Ann Divine: It's in Owensboro, Kentucky where she lives.

Blanche Touhill: And she was a lawyer there?

Ann Divine: She was a lawyer there. She went to George Washington in Washington, D.C. for law school and then worked for legal aid in Louisville and some places in Eastern Kentucky and then her husband is from Owensboro who was also an attorney. He has retired, and they moved back to Owensboro, I don't know, 25 years ago, and she did some work for some...I mean, she had a regular job at some kind of social service agency in the area, which was practicing law for them. My youngest sister lives in Atlanta. She finished college. She did not go on to other education. She and her husband own a consumer marketing firm and she works in that though she's trying to work in that less and less because she would like to think about retiring.

Blanche Touhill: And your mother?

Ann Divine: My mother always says that she never expected that her children would achieve the heights they had achieved, which, you know, I think why not? You brought us up thinking, you went to college, all your family went to college. You always told us we could do whatever we wanted to do so why are you surprised? But, I guess, nobody in our immediate family had been a lawyer or had a Ph.D. before so I understand why, and consequently, she's extremely proud and she deserves a lot of credit for it because she did always take the attitude, "You can do whatever you want. You don't just have to get married." She always said, "You know, there are things worse than not being married and one of them sometimes is being married," which I thought was very advice. My father died six weeks before I graduated from college so my mother was a very strong...she's a very strong personality anyway but she certainly was very influential about what we all did.

Blanche Touhill: Especially when you talk about graduate school and an internship for a management position.

Ann Divine: Right.

Blanche Touhill: Were you always a manager?

Ann Divine: I guess so, looking back, and again, if you ask my sisters, they would say, yes, that I was always trying to organize them to do what I thought ought to be done, whether they liked it or not.

Blanche Touhill: I think, when you talk about, you played cowboys, that you managed the play group.

Ann Divine: Yes, and even better than that, I sometimes managed it so that they all went off doing something and I could sit under a tree and read, say, "I'll just be here waiting for when you bring back the Indians," or something.

Blanche Touhill: What else do you really want to say have affected your life?

Ann Divine: Well, I do like the aforementioned Charles Dickens and I read at a very young age the Bronte's "Wuthering Heights," "Jane Eyre" and also Thomas Wolfe's "Look Homeward Angel" and his other books, which is what I wrote my Master's thesis on, "Look Homeward Angel," and I couldn't tell you why...well, the language is so hypnotic and poetic. That's one of the big attractions of Thomas Wolfe but almost any certainly 19th century English novel and a lot of 20th century novels. I'm a fiction person.

Blanche Touhill: Are you reading today?

Ann Divine: I am reading today. At the moment I'm reading Richard Ford's "The Lay of the Land" and I'm not sure I really like it but I'm a person, once I start a book, I'm going to finish it. I'm about halfway through and I'm liking it better.

Blanche Touhill: Now, I know you retired a number of years ago so what have you been doing since then?

Ann Divine: I have been reading a lot and, for the first year, I could do things with my husband and then he got sick and was for two years, so he's been dead two-and-a-half years and since then...I usually answer the question, "What are you doing with yourself?" with, "Whatever I damn well please," which is reading and just sort of puttering around. I've supervised some work on my house, boring stuff like that.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I know you were involved in the Scholarship Foundation.

Ann Divine: As of the end of June, I left the board of the Scholarship Foundation, after eight years and I spent the last two as chairman of the Program Committee which is...there are four committees. Every board member is on a committee and the Program Committee is pretty much the one that deals with the main business of the Scholarship Foundation, namely how they select students to be given interest-free loans and how they communicate with students and all of that. So, certainly that was another leadership position, and again...I won't go into details but I made some changes, not individually, but I got some changes made that I think have improved their program and I'm proud of that also.

Blanche Touhill: What I find is interesting is you spent your life really opening educational opportunities to people in higher education, which is a very worthwhile job.

Ann Divine: Yes. Well, thank you. I'd like to think so.

Blanche Touhill: Thank you for this interview.

Ann Divine: Well, thank you for asking.