

An Interview with
Julie Dunn-Morton

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

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Oral History Program

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PREFACE

The interview was taped on a placed on a tripod. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets []. Any use of parentheses () indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [""] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [] indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [(??)] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Josephine Sporleder.

- Blanche Touhill: Would you introduce yourself?
- Julie Dunn-Morton: Hi, my name is Julie Dunn-Morton. I'm the curator of Fine Art Collections at the Mercantile Library.
- Blanche Touhill: Would you talk about your early life: your family, your brothers, your sisters, your mother, your father, your grandparents, your cousins, the kids you played with as a child. Just, growing up, what was your elementary school like or your high school and talk about your youth.
- Julie Dunn-Morton: Okay. I think I would characterize my childhood as fairly typical and maybe a little boring, just a pretty quiet family life. I had two sisters and a brother. I was the middle child. My dad was in construction; my mom stayed home with us until we were all probably in high school age. We didn't travel a lot. We didn't do museums, things like that. We were more just hang around in the back yard and barbeque kind of people. I had a close friend from elementary school through high school. I was fairly quiet, not a real team person or club joiner. But I did enjoy the art club when I was in high school and we were very close with our cousins. We have a lot of cousins in the area and we had a lot of those big family gatherings. Holidays I always remember being very crowded in the house and sort of that typical Norman Rockwell kind of big family event. School was, I think, a little challenging for me. I was in that age that I started really young. I turned six and then started school, like, the next day. Looking back, having been a parent, I think I probably would have benefited from waiting a little before I started school. But I enjoyed school a lot. I think one sort of pivotal person I think of in terms of my schooling was my...well, we called it junior high then; now it's middle school...art teacher, Mr. Hughkle...give a shout out to him. He introduced us to art history every Friday and I noticed very quickly in the year that the attendance dropped off on Fridays. There was myself and maybe three other kids who regularly came to class and I was fascinated and I think that sort of hooked me in terms of a future interest. I always loved to draw and paint. My parents were children of the Depression and it was kind of, "That's a nice hobby, dear, but what are you going to do for a living?" And

realistically, being an artist is very challenging. But it sort of introduced me to the idea of art history. I could still work with something I really love and get dental with that. So that kind of pointed me in that direction. In terms of education, I guess I'm pretty standard. I went to the public schools, started out in a parochial school which I enjoyed very much. We changed to the public schools when I was in elementary school and I had a good experience.

Blanche Touhill: Did you play on the summer playgrounds or were there playgrounds in those days?

Julie Dunn-Morton: Oh, yeah. We were kind of on the outskirts of St. Charles at the time. It was before, really, the big growth boom hit there. We built a new house when I was about 12, which was a little more central and actually was very close to a public library. So we were close to a park. We would ride our bikes to the park. There was a swimming pool in the subdivision we lived in and we would go there regularly. I think one of my early proud moments was they had a little swim meet at the end of every summer and I won a trophy for the back stroke, not that I was a tremendous swimmer but I was the best of the three who competed. So as a child, that was pretty...a landmark for me. But I always enjoyed...we would ride our bikes over to the local public library, take part in the summer reading programs, things that were there. And I always enjoyed that. I've always been an avid reader and so we had, I think, a good mix of outdoor and indoor things over the summer. My parents weren't all that much about camp or organized activities and, really, I think did us a service by enabling us to learn to structure our own time and to organize ourselves.

Blanche Touhill: When you rode your bike, did you go with friends or with your relatives or with your siblings or all of the above?

Julie Dunn-Morton: My cousins lived in Ferguson and Florissant and places where we couldn't quite get together like that. We did have a neighborhood group of kids that we would go to the pool with.

Blanche Touhill: Boys and girls?

Julie Dunn-Morton: Yes, mixed, boys and girls. My brother and I and my younger sister were pretty close in age and we did a lot of things together: go to the pool; go to the park. So we were pretty close that way and I had some, even into high school, there were friends I knew who lived in nearby neighborhoods close enough that we would get together and go to the movies. At that point it was more...I think when you get into high school, it's kind of more of just a girls' group unless you're "dating." But, yeah, just a lot of activities. One of my sort of landmarks, I guess, in early high school, one of my girlfriend's grandmother lived in Sedalia and we took the train from Union Station over to Sedalia to go to the state fair, which we felt very adventurous at the time, going on the train by ourselves.

Blanche Touhill: Well, that was something.

Julie Dunn-Morton: It was. We were, I guess, about 15 and I guess it was kind of knowing that, you know, my mother put us on the train here and her grandmother would take us off the train there. It's not that there weren't stops in between but, yeah, we felt like we were quite the world travelers.

Blanche Touhill: So you had lunch?

Julie Dunn-Morton: Yes, we took our lunch on the train. But, yeah, it was a lot of fun.

Blanche Touhill: Well, actually, the lunch on the trains today are the hotdog or the hamburger.

Julie Dunn-Morton: True.

Blanche Touhill: Did they have a dining car, do you remember?

Julie Dunn-Morton: I don't remember. I think we were sort of under instructions to just get in the seat and stay in the seat, not to go wandering about the train.

Blanche Touhill: And that made sense.

Julie Dunn-Morton: It did, and it was fine for us.

Blanche Touhill: You know, today people are so terrified that their children would ride to the library or ride to the ball fields or whatever was going

on or the swimming pool and you took the train ride. Was there fear in those days that you were in danger as a child?

Julie Dunn-Morton: You know, I don't remember being told that. Of course, we sort of knew the "don't talk to strangers" thing but I just don't think we were as aware of the fact that abductions occurred, that bad things happened to children and I think there was just this sense that we were in a "safe" neighborhood because I do look back now and I think, we were quite young to be out and sort of unaccounted for, for hours at a time the way that we were, just riding around the neighborhood or going from one friend's house to another without phoning and checking in. So it's a very different world.

Blanche Touhill: Today, it is.

Julie Dunn-Morton: Yes, certainly.

Blanche Touhill: I have a relative who has a small child and she just really is terrified if the child is out of her sight and she takes her to school, she picks her up from school. It's a whole different kind of experience.

Julie Dunn-Morton: Well, it definitely is and sort of rang in when a close friend of mine who lives in Seattle...this was about seven or eight years ago...her daughter was abducted off the street, was just riding and they were within a block of their house. It wasn't as if they were at the mall or far distant from her home.

Blanche Touhill: Did they get her back?

Julie Dunn-Morton: They did. Actually, the person eventually stopped and freed her at a gas station and drove away. But the young girl had the presence of mind to immediately identify herself to the people in the gas station and tell them what the car looked like and they caught the man very soon after. But, I mean, she was still extremely traumatized, of course. But it's not that you're unsympathetic to stories that you hear on the news, but when it happens to someone that you know, it's just a very different situation.

Blanche Touhill: Do you know what year that was roughly?

Julie Dunn-Morton: I think I said seven or eight years but now, I'm sure it's quite a bit longer, about 10 years ago.

Blanche Touhill: Did you take art when you were in high school? You did and that led to the art history?

Julie Dunn-Morton: I did. I've always been interested in drawing and painting. My parents gave me a John Maggie art set which you'll have to be my age or older to understand who that person was, and I enjoyed the art classes in high school. I was a very timid artist. I was a fairly timid person at that point but, as I said, the art history was really intriguing and just the idea that I could express myself in that way and so it's something that I sort of kept up with casually throughout my life and I still enjoy doing it and I think it's also helped me as an art historian, to deal with different media and to understand the challenges that an artist might face.

Blanche Touhill: What media do you like best?

Julie Dunn-Morton: I like watercolor because I tend to overwork oil. It's hard for me to stop. I keep wanting to make it better and with oil paints, you can very quickly just create a big muddy mess because you can overwork it. The oil dries very slowly so you have a lot of opportunity to work and clearly I don't limit myself very well. And watercolor, once it's on the paper, it's nearly impossible to make a change. So it kind of forces me to be decisive.

Blanche Touhill: Do you see the picture before you make it?

Julie Dunn-Morton: In a way, yes. I think when you look at the landscape or you look at the still life in front of you, you kind of instinctively move until you find the angle that feels right and then you kind of go from there.

Blanche Touhill: Well, then, when you graduated from high school, what happened?

Julie Dunn-Morton: I knew I wanted to do something. We didn't have a lot of money and I knew that college was very expensive and I didn't want to ask my parents for that until I knew for sure what I wanted to do

and so several of my friends were thinking about going in the service and so I thought, well, why don't I look into that?

Blanche Touhill: Women as well as men?

Julie Dunn-Morton: Yeah, actually three of my female friends in high school were interested in the service. And so I took the test for the Army and the Air Force, just to see what they were like. I liked the nature of the Air Force test much better. It was more intellectual. The Army test asked you what kind of tools you were familiar using and so I scored quite well on the Air Force test and decided to enlist in the Air Force and this was in 1973.

Blanche Touhill: Now, did your friends enlist ultimately?

Julie Dunn-Morton: Yes. I had another friend who went into the Army and one friend who went into the Navy and was actually the first woman signalman on a Navy ship which she was very excited about and her mother was terrified, not happy at all about that posting. And I have to say, I was very nervous about telling my parents about this. I had an uncle who was in the military so it wasn't that they were against that per se, but I think it was a bit more feminist than they expected from their very quiet middle child. And I remember sort of laying brochures around the living room in hopes that they would sort of pick them up and get a hint, which they didn't, until finally my mother said, "Have you got a job at a recruiting office?" and then I had to sort of break it to them. And it took a little persuading. My mother immediately recognized the educational benefits which my father did, too, but I think he was more protective. I think that's the point at which I learned that my mother was a little bit more of a feminist than she let on because she was very supportive of it, I guess cautiously supportive. She was still worried about me being off on my own and all those sorts of things that parents worry about. But in the end, they were very supportive of me.

Blanche Touhill: Was Vietnam just about over or was it still on when you joined?

Julie Dunn-Morton: '73...yeah, still going on, I guess. I'm sorry that my history is rather weak.

Blanche Touhill:

It was the end though.

Julie Dunn-Morton:

Yeah, it was winding down, yes. And it was a time when I think women's role in the military was changing. When I went through basic training, women did not do the confidence course, the crawling under the barbed wire and all that sort of thing. We did have certain physical tests that we had to master but I do remember being kind of surprised. It was one of those situations where I thought I had signed up for one job and I actually got another and I know that at times I think recruiters did a little bait and switch, like that. I don't think that was the case with me. I think it was just a genuine numerical error in my job assignment. But I ended up being a radar operator which, it's a completely outdated job now but at the time, I was in, like, the third class of women to go through this training. So people would say, "Oh, you're such a ground-breaker," but it was quite by accident. I mean, it's not that I intentionally said, I'm going to break into a man's field. It did put me in some situations where I think my diplomacy was really tested because my first assignment was at a remote radar site in North Dakota which was seriously, just for perspective, 130 miles from the nearest MacDonald's. So, when you're 18, that matters to you. It was very isolated, it was a small site with maybe 130 people altogether and in a field where most of these men had been in this field for 20 years. A lot of guys there are getting ready to retire and their wives were not too pleased that there were now two 18-year-old women working round the clock shifts in a dark building with their husband because it was dark for the radar screens. There were shifts around the clock. You could be there from midnight until 8:00 A.M. So it was very awkward and the other young woman that was there was from New York. She was very feisty and outspoken and a lot of makeup and nail polish and just the kind of girl you don't really want working with your husband at midnight on a cold North Dakota night. And so I was very...hardly wore make-up, kind of home town girl so I decided I needed to play that girl next door card and just be friends with the wives and try to help them understand because, from my point of view, those wives were the closest thing I had to a female support group and I said, you know, it's this or it's just hanging out with that one girl in the barracks

and we got along but you need more than one friend. I think that it helped that I was just such a normal person. I liked to bake bread, I knew how to cook and knew how to sew and so I could connect with the wives on sort of that homemaker level. And it made a difference, I think. At one point I remember the commander...we were at some sort of reception, not that I normally hung out with the commander but we were chatting and he said, "You know, the things that you do with the wives really make a difference here, to help them understand that women can be part of the service." So it was a very interesting time for me. It was very challenging for a quiet person like me, fairly shy, to be put into that position but I look back on that and I feel sort of proud about how that worked out.

Blanche Touhill: I wonder when women got in the Air Force because the Air Force was part of the Army, wasn't it?

Julie Dunn-Morton: Yes. Well, there was the Women's Air Corps. In fact, my director's mother was in the Women's Air Corps. So I guess the '40s, maybe even the '30s.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, in the war.

Julie Dunn-Morton: Yes. So women were very active early on.

Blanche Touhill: I meant in World War II.

Julie Dunn-Morton: Right.

Blanche Touhill: What was your term there?

Julie Dunn-Morton: It was a four-year term. I spent two years in North Dakota and after that got a really wonderful assignment to McCord Air Force Base at Tacoma, Washington and I still am very fond of the Seattle area, still have a very close friend that I met there. She still lives in that area.

Blanche Touhill: And was she a radar specialist too?

Julie Dunn-Morton: No, she was actually an aircraft repair person. And it amazed me that she's quite petite. She just barely made the height and weight requirements for the Air Force and I was often surprised

that she could lift that toolbox that they're required to lift. But she had also a very good term. She was in four years as well and then got out of the Air Force. So, yeah, that was a great assignment.

Blanche Touhill: And she stayed in Tacoma. Was she from...

Julie Dunn-Morton: She's from the Oregon area, northern Oregon so it made sense to her to stay in the area. She got married shortly after she got out of the service, as did I. So that's where our lives kind of split, but she's one of those people I've always stayed in touch with.

Blanche Touhill: When you married, did you marry a service person?

Julie Dunn-Morton: I did.

Blanche Touhill: And did she too?

Julie Dunn-Morton: She did, yes. That happened quite a lot. Then I was in the Tacoma area for a while after I was married. My husband went to Alaska. He had a remote assignment for a year and so I and my young daughter came back here to St. Louis and stayed with my parents for that year. It was just one of those military challenges. Military families face that all the time. And from there we went to Florida for a few years which was close to where his parents lived and I've always kind of treasured the fact that we could be by one or the other family, within an hour or two.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, or a good friend.

Julie Dunn-Morton: Right, so that your children have that opportunity to know their family members and also on an Air Force base, it's very easy, there's a certain bonding that happens with Air Force wives. Then there was a little bit of a...I don't want to say stigma...but a little something attached to me because I was prior service so there's always some level that you're not aware of until you run into it, of how other people perceive you. But I have to say, it was a good life though. The housing was good; the children had young people nearby to play with; there are other children. So it was good but it was one of those situations where the marriage just didn't work out and so the children and I returned to St. Louis.

Blanche Touhill: And you have two children?

Julie Dunn-Morton: I have three children, and my youngest was just about two when we divorced. So we came back to St. Louis and I had just enough time on my GI Bill to finish a Bachelor's Degree. I had taken some classes, off and on, while I was married and so I had sort of one of those life path decisions to make about whether to go with accounting, which was the classes I had been taking. I think my parents' conservative nature was winning and I was going with accounting because I thought, you can always get a bookkeeper's job or an accounting job. But I really didn't like it. I was really good at it but it was really boring to me and I thought, well, you can make a better living doing the boring job of accounting or you can probably make a lot less money but really enjoy what you're doing if you go with art history. And beyond the decision, how can I best support my children, was kind of what lesson am I teaching my children. And so, even though my daughters were quite young, I talked it over with them and I said, "This is what I'm going to do and this is what it's going to mean for us, that we need to be careful about how we choose to spend our money but your mom's going to come home at the end of the day feeling pretty good about what she's doing." And it probably didn't mean a lot to a six-year-old but that's kind of where the lesson started.

Blanche Touhill: Where did you get your degree?

Julie Dunn-Morton: I got my Bachelor's here at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Blanche Touhill: And who taught you art history?

Julie Dunn-Morton: I had Ruth Bowen and Ye'elle Evan as my advisors and genuine mentors to me and still friends today. And I remember when I interviewed for the job I have now and Ruth Bowen was there and she was kind enough to write a letter for me and she's just been so supportive. Really, the whole Art History Department here was terrific when I came back. I don't remember if we were called "returning students" or "non-traditional students" at that point but, you know, adults coming back for a degree. And it was just a wonderful experience.

Blanche Touhill: And how many years were you here? One or two?

- Julie Dunn-Morton: It was a year-and-a-half, it took me to finish my degree.
- Blanche Touhill: And they took all the courses that you had taken?
- Julie Dunn-Morton: Yes. Several of these had been taken while I was in the military and some at a community college near where we were stationed. I think the one transfer issue that I had didn't really surface until I was, like, one semester away from graduating, as always, you go through that review and apparently there was some discrepancy between the credits I was given for an algebra course by the college of the Air Force and the way those credits would be applied here so that I might have to take another algebra class. Well, you know, I was panicking and I still remember standing in front of this person's desk going, "Look, I'm going to go on for an art history degree so algebra doesn't matter to me." I swear, this is how I got the credits and apparently I made a fairly persuasive argument and he said, "Okay, I see what you're saying. We're not going to build on that. We're fine." And then they agreed to accept it. So it's a big relief.
- Blanche Touhill: I know sometimes there's a question of what's in the algebra course and there might be a section that you didn't have that they have in Algebra I and so they say, "Well, you have to take algebra." I've come across that.
- Julie Dunn-Morton: And their concern was that I wouldn't be prepared to move on to a more advanced course. They didn't want to give me credit, as you say, if I hadn't covered all the appropriate ground. So, yeah, I was very relieved when I left that office.
- Blanche Touhill: Now, did your parents help take care of the children while you went to school?
- Julie Dunn-Morton: They did. I actually lived with my parents the first year because it was a little challenging financially and just emotionally and I still remember, my thought was, because I knew I had a limited window of time on my GI Bill, my mother didn't tell me this until much later but she said before I moved back that she would check with the university and see what the application deadlines are and help me get ready to do that. And she actually...I'm going to have to say "lied" to me and told me that I had missed the

application deadlines and that I wouldn't be able to start until the next semester because I literally would have had to move back and start classes within two or three days. And she said, "I just wasn't sure that you were emotionally ready to be in the classroom" and she was quite right. I was just putting my blinders on and saying, "This is what I'm going to do." So it was a good thing that I took at least a little time to kind of get myself settled, get the children settled. My mother really was sort of a second parent to my children. We had to work out some rules about who's in charge when but it worked out well and I know my children are very close to my parents and I've always valued that.

Blanche Touhill: When you graduated from college, did you have a job?

Julie Dunn-Morton: I did not but I got a job fairly quickly.

Blanche Touhill: At the Mercantile?

Julie Dunn-Morton: No, actually, I started out working at Art Mart. That was my first job and I was a floor manager there, personnel manager, started in sales but they very quickly asked me if I would take that position, I think because they hired a lot of college students and I was more mature than most of the students working there and so they thought, "Well, she's a mother. She has that maternal voice she can use." And it worked out well. It was a good job. I still enjoy going to Art Mart.

Blanche Touhill: And there was a little accounting in it?

Julie Dunn-Morton: Well, not accounting.

Blanche Touhill: With the manager.

Julie Dunn-Morton: Right, just making staffing schedules and that sort of thing. But it was a good job because they were very aware of the need to keep people trained properly to do their job and I was able to take some management classes while I was there and I've looked back to those several times.

Blanche Touhill: And did you take those at UMSL?

Julie Dunn-Morton: I did take some business courses, some business writing and that sort of thing but these were the kinds of workshops that were offered by specialty companies specifically for management training. But I've always found those to have been very valuable.

Blanche Touhill: It must have been wonderful to be amongst all the different media.

Julie Dunn-Morton: Yeah, the challenge was to get home with your paycheck because I really loved the materials and it really did sort of foster my ongoing interest in fine art.

Blanche Touhill: Were you always satisfied that you went in the military?

Julie Dunn-Morton: Yes, I always thought that was a good decision. I've never regretted it. I think it taught me a lot about self-sufficiency. I was in a job, not so much in North Dakota but the position in Tacoma was more of an oversight position. At the remote sites, you were feeding information to a control center and so I went from the remote site to the control center and it was the sort of situation where, if an unidentified aircraft showed up on the radar and they couldn't figure out for sure if it was valid information or if there was some computer error, I was the person they would turn to and say, "Is that good data or should we launch the fighters?" And there's a lot of fuel costs and things involved in launching fighters and so, for a fairly shy, quiet person to be given basically 15 seconds of a sweep of a radar to decide, it was a little taxing, and twice in my two years there I was called upon to do that and both times I was on the conservative side and said, "No, give me one more sweep" and by the time it came around, the site realized they had an error, made their correction and there it is, in the safe zone with its data and I was extremely relieved. But, yeah, it was very tense. There were times that it was very tense and then most of the time it was just fairly mundane. But it did really give me some life skills, just managing myself, decision-making, budgeting. You can talk to your kids all you want about how to manage their money but when they've got total control of the checkbook, they make mistakes. You just have to learn from your mistakes, and eat Ramen Noodles for a while until your budget comes back. So I learned a lot. I was always glad that I did that.

Blanche Touhill: Did your other siblings join the service?

Julie Dunn-Morton: No, none of them did actually, and always my mother still comments about how surprised she was that the quiet one was the one who left home but came back.

Blanche Touhill: Why did you leave Art Mart?

Julie Dunn-Morton: The schedule, the shift schedule was very demanding because they were open late hours. It's retail and so it was putting a lot on my mother to take care of the children, until late in the evening and it's retail. It wasn't the kind of thing I wanted to do and I knew that eventually I wanted to go back at least for my Master's and I was basically trying to just become a little more financially stable and wait until my children got a little older so that it would be easier for me as a single parent to take them with me to go to graduate school. So I spent the time kind of looking at schools and trying to establish a plan.

Blanche Touhill: The GI Bill was gone?

Julie Dunn-Morton: Right, that was gone and so I knew that what I needed was a sort of 9:00 to 5:00 job so that I could do school and latchkey or daycare after school a little more easily and then take that burden off of my mother. And so I was able to get a couple of office jobs subsequently. In terms of the nature of this interview, I think probably the most relevant one is that I was a receptionist at a construction company here in St. Louis and that was really interesting because my dad, having been in construction, I had a little bit of history but I was definitely dealing with that male workplace, a woman in the male workplace. I had a supervisor who was really a groundbreaker in terms of trying to...I mean, she genuinely loved construction and she understood it and to try to be a project manager in a construction company and totally dominated by men and not to put too much of an emphasis on the physical but she was also, again, very petite, very attractive and the kind of woman that men whistle at, don't listen to, if you know what I mean. And so she really had to work hard. It was also the first time that I experienced sort of that...something that I've seen happen with women who work really hard to get ahead in a

male field and it wasn't her, it was another woman in the company who...I mean, this was two ends of the spectrum...my supervisor was helpful and supportive and did everything she could to help women advance, and the other woman sort of defended her position very aggressively and was almost afraid to have another woman challenge her or even show competence because she was very nervous about not being able to maintain her position. And I think it was personality, of course, but also the way that their supervisors treated them. So that was a very eye-opening experience for me, having come from the military and the situations that I faced there, to see how it played out in a civilian job where the chain of command was not quite as firm as it was in the military. So, again, a real learning experience. But that was a very good job for me as well. But then they changed hours. The hours, again, became a little bit of a challenge and I went to another construction company which was really sort of 9:00 to 5:00 and a very different situation there because the people that I was dealing with really were salesmen who were selling products or renting equipment and my supervisor kind of looked at me as, again, like this more mature person. I was older than or at least the same age as most of the salesmen and he flat out said to me, "Put them under your thumb. Get them under control. Make them take those calls," and I went, "Okay." And it's interesting to me to look back now, when I think about the difference experiences I've had and how they've helped me grow, one of those was when I had an internship as an undergraduate at the St. Louis Art Museum and one of the things we had to do was give a gallery talk, which still, kind of coming out of that shyness and quietness, I remember talking to my friend in Seattle and telling her about what I was going to do and I still remember, she put her hand over the phone and she says to her husband, "Bob, listen to this: Julie's going to stand up in front of people and talk," and they both just burst out laughing because she really couldn't imagine me doing that and I literally was almost ill in the ladies room immediately beforehand.

Blanche Touhill:

But you learned.

Julie Dunn-Morton: But the thing is, I loved it, the fact that people came up to me afterwards and said, "You know, I've never thought about it that way. You've really made me stop and think about something." That was the moment...I mean, I knew I loved art history and I wanted to try to make that work but that's one of those moments when I knew, you can really make a difference for people. And my friend in Seattle is so active in women's issues and is very active in the battle against sex trafficking. I mean, she's making a difference in women's lives every day and there are times when I'll be talking to her and I'll say, "You know, I admire so much what you're doing and the impact that you're having on so many people's lives and I sometimes think, what do I do? I write about pretty pictures," and she said to me, "Julie, you save our culture. You interpret our culture for the next generation," and it was kind of her to re-interpret that for me because it is easy sometimes, I think, to lose focus on the importance of what you do. So I'm lucky to have such good friends.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, you are, and obviously she loves you very much.

Julie Dunn-Morton: We're very close.

Blanche Touhill: You're like sisters.

Julie Dunn-Morton: We are.

Blanche Touhill: So then, go on. You ultimately went back for your graduate degree?

Julie Dunn-Morton: I did. Sort of a landmark was both of my daughters passed the Red Cross Babysitters Training course so I knew that they were well equipped to keep an eye on their 10-year-old brother and I applied to several schools and had a good offer from the University of Delaware, plus the ability to work with Wayne Craven who is a art historian that I admired very much. So we moved to Delaware.

Blanche Touhill: It's a beautiful setting.

Julie Dunn-Morton: It is. It was a wonderful place, northeast corridor is a wonderful place to be because of the many cultural opportunities there and

certainly my children had field trips that they would never have had here. With all due respect to the Science Center and the many wonderful institutions we have, to go to the Smithsonian with your class trip was great for them. It was a wonderful program. That was the point at which I started to notice, because at UMSL, the department was sort of evenly male/female. At UD, again, there was really more men than women which was kind of interesting to me but I began to see, looking in my class, was predominantly women and the more we would talk about our experiences and our friends in other programs, it became clear that art history was becoming a more predominantly female field and I think that still, to some extent, holds true, but it was a wonderful experience.

Blanche Touhill: Was it a two-year program?

Julie Dunn-Morton: Two years for the Master's and then two years for the doctorate.

Blanche Touhill: And you stayed at Delaware?

Julie Dunn-Morton: I did. It was one of the reasons I went there because at the time, Wash U did not have a doctorate as well and I didn't want to go through the application process and move again in two years. And so, looking back, I think, a single parent, three kids, heading off parts unknown, it was kind of a risky proposition but it was one of those moments that I thought, this is what I want. I want this for myself. I want to set this example for my children. I'm not going to say whatever it takes, but I was willing to pay a good price for that and I've never regretted it.

Blanche Touhill: You got a graduate assistantship then?

Julie Dunn-Morton: I had some teaching assistantships while I was there and I had some scholarship.

Blanche Touhill: And you probably had a little money saved?

Julie Dunn-Morton: I had some money saved and I, of course, had a student loan, right.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, you did take out a student loan?

Julie Dunn-Morton: Oh, I definitely had student loans, yeah. And honestly, I don't know anyone in my class who had a free ride. Everyone that I knew had either partial assistantships or something. You know, the funding just isn't what it was. Like, for example, my advisor, Wayne Craven, was a tremendous mentor for me but his experience was so different. You know, he would say to me, "I guess I don't understand why you have to have a job," and at that point, I was in the program several years and I guess I felt comfortable enough with him and I said, "Well, you know, Professor Craven, my kids have this bad habit of eating. I'm not sure what you expect me to say because you know the funding that I'm getting," whereas he and his colleagues of his generation, they were paid to go to school.

Blanche Touhill: Was anybody else in the program similar to you, a single mother with raising children?

Julie Dunn-Morton: No, actually, I was looked at as a bit of an anomaly and most of those students were, I guess, four or five years out of undergraduate or maybe right out of undergraduate. We would have barbeques. There was a married couple that had a house and we'd have these barbeques and I guess after my Master's, about two years in, another family came. The husband was in the program. The wife and children came along. My kids babysat for his kids. So there were at least some other children at these barbeques. But I still remember, after the first barbeque, the next day that we were back in class, one of the young women, we were chatting beforehand and she said, "Julie, I came to an important decision yesterday, thinking back on the barbeque. When I have children, I'm going to send them to you to raise and you can send them back when they're 18 because your kids are pretty cool," and I took that as a huge compliment and I said, "Thank you, Karen, but no thank you." I think it was a good experience for my children too. I've always spoken to them in an adult way and expected them to learn and catch up which they do and I think it's always served them well, and I was always very proud that they could hold their own in a conversation with someone who was in a Master's program and weren't afraid to say, "I haven't heard

about that. What's that about?" and not to be embarrassed to ask.

Blanche Touhill:

What fields did your children go into?

Julie Dunn-Morton:

All of my children have a certain amount of artistic talent of some kind. My oldest daughter, Ericka, is a photographer. I recognized very early that she had a good eye. She has a wonderful eye for color. She can see a color and match it perfectly and she just has a good compositional eye. I gave her a Polaroid when she was about eight and my mother said, "You know, it's kind of a waste for a child that young." She's never cut a head off in a picture. She's just always had a good eye and she still is a practicing photographer, although she has a day job to kind of keep things going but I encourage her always to follow that career. My middle child, Rebecca, was always a writer and always a reader. She's one of those people who had a book going everywhere she ever went, at every grandparent's house and could keep all the stories going in her head at the same time and she's now a senior publicist at Random House Viking in New York. She went to a Master's program in publishing at NYU and so she loves that. She's very happy in what she's doing. And my youngest, Matthew, who was really the closest, I think, to being a practicing artist. He's a good sculptor, he's quite good with drawing, very imaginative, and actually got into a drafting program in high school and learned 3D AutoCAD which, he loves to do that and so now he's an engineering assistant working for a concrete company in Kingston, Ontario. His wife's Canadian and he designs large-scale molds like for highway supports and things. So he gets to work in the 3D AutoCAD all the time and he still has his sort of hobby of modeling on the side.

Blanche Touhill:

And where did your older girl go to college? Oh, she went to NYU?

Julie Dunn-Morton:

Actually, Ericka, my oldest, went into the Air Force as did Matthew. I had two children who went in the service and she did photography in the Air Force. Then she got her Bachelor's Degree in graphic arts and design at Wilmington University. After I left the Delaware area when I got this job in St. Louis, my children were all either out on their own or in college. So they all kind of stayed in

that northeast area. Rebecca was at Chatham College in Pittsburgh when I moved, for her undergraduate and then she got married and stayed in the Wilmington area until she went to NYU and after graduation, got a job and so they've stayed there.

Blanche Touhill: So she's the one that didn't go in the service?

Julie Dunn-Morton: Correct, yeah. She was the one who said, when Ericka came home the first time and said, "You know, in basic training, they teach you how to roll your socks so they all look at the same in the drawer," and Rebecca said, "Why do you do that?" and I said, "That's why you're not in the Air Force, because you asked the question." So they had good experiences. My son actually was in the service during the Afghan war and did go twice. It was extremely stressful, to put it mildly, but with things like e-mail, it was easier for us to sort of keep in touch and he actually volunteered for a two-year assignment in Soule, South Korea which would take him off of the rotation for the Middle East, sort of a complicated equation but that's what it would do. And so that's actually where he met his wife. She was over there teaching English and they met.

Blanche Touhill: On she's the Canadian?

Julie Dunn-Morton: She's the Canadian and so they got married shortly after he got out of the service.

Blanche Touhill: Think how the world has changed.

Julie Dunn-Morton: They have a very global story.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, from you being a St. Charles girl...

Julie Dunn-Morton: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: ...and then the world changed and you changed with it.

Julie Dunn-Morton: Right, that's what we do. That's what we have to do.

Blanche Touhill: Tell me how you came back to St. Louis.

Julie Dunn-Morton: I was actually working in the Delaware Art Museum. I was in the process of writing my dissertation so I was no longer taking

classes. I started there as a front desk assistant and worked my way up. Because of my brief accounting experience, I got a position assisting the head of HR. That was still part-time and then when their docent trainer and tour coordinator left, I applied for that job and that was basically just walking into the director's office with my resume and saying, "Look, I can teach art history and I know how to teach; I can do this," and he said, "Okay, let's give it a try." It was a great experience for me. Then when this position came open, so much of my dissertation research and even my Master's research was done at the Mercantile that I was very familiar with their collections so when this position came open, I was able to get that which was terrific.

- Blanche Touhill: I remember when you came, you came to manage a certain collection, didn't you?
- Julie Dunn-Morton: Yes, there was a family foundation that had a partnership situation with the university such that the Mercantile had sort of a custody arrangement.
- Blanche Touhill: What was the name of that?
- Julie Dunn-Morton: It was the Woodcock Foundation.
- Blanche Touhill: That's right, the Woodcock because I went down to South St. Louis, they lived near Carondelet Park.
- Julie Dunn-Morton: Yes, Holly Hills.
- Blanche Touhill: And we looked at what they had and then John said, "Yes, they would fit into what..."...were you on that trip too?
- Julie Dunn-Morton: No, I was not.
- Blanche Touhill: You came after that arrangement was made?
- Julie Dunn-Morton: Right. The collection was here and they had established funding for the position and then they had the search and brought me in.
- Blanche Touhill: But then John realized he needed an art historian, probably the curator of art.

Julie Dunn-Morton: Right. Well, and they were very interested too in having an art curator there to oversee their collection and plus they had a very strong web presence that they wanted maintained. They wanted more online exhibits because I remember the job posting asked for an advanced degree in art history with an emphasis on American art and a thorough knowledge of HTML and I remember looking at that, going, good luck with that. So I applied, basically said, "I'm sure I can learn this" and I did and luckily things progressed quickly into things like Dream Weaver and other software that did the coding for you. But I will admit, I was a little daunted by the idea of online exhibits but I have become quite fascinated with them and I think they're a tremendous learning tool.

Blanche Touhill: Does Mercantile do that now?

Julie Dunn-Morton: We have not done as many. With various staffing changes that have happened, the time to do that just isn't there but I'd love to get back to that for us.

Blanche Touhill: I remember that family did want that because they wanted to have the schools be able to look at the pictures of their collection.

Julie Dunn-Morton: We did a lot of outreach with teachers and worksheets, little things that they could easily incorporate into their classroom. So, yeah, it was very gratifying and it helped me use a lot of what I had learned at Delaware in terms of working with designing tours and programs for children.

Blanche Touhill: Have you kept up with the other people that you went to graduate school with? Have they got jobs in museums around the country?

Julie Dunn-Morton: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: What are they doing?

Julie Dunn-Morton: Several are professors. Most of them went into the academic world. Facebook makes it very easy to keep up with people and so I've enjoyed sort of reconnecting with some of them there. I tend to go to New York fairly often with business-related things, which

is convenient so that I can see family, but also many of them are in the New York area. So, yeah, I think I've kept up with the people that I was close with there and it's always been very gratifying when you know someone and you know they have knowledge or expertise and you can connect with them very quickly.

Blanche Touhill:

At what point did you decide to get the Ph.D.? Was that a journey in itself or was that something you always had your mind on that goal?

Julie Dunn-Morton:

I went in thinking that I would do the doctorate as well because I went to graduate school thinking that I would be a professor and it's more important in the academic field. It's not as often required in the museum field. But it was my work at the Delaware Art Museum that helped me realize that the museum field itself plays an important role and I remember Professor Craven asking me why...I think he was a little concerned I was turning to the dark side and he said, "I thought you were going to be a professor" and I said, "I thought I was too, and honestly, I enjoy teaching but..." ...I think there was this sort of coincidence of me teaching undergraduates at a time that my children were reaching that same 17, 18-year-old and there's only so much of that teenage angst you can deal with in one day before you kind of go over the edge. And I found that I was not as patient with the undergraduates as I wanted to be as a professor because I was dealing with it at home as well. And these were just occasional teaching jobs. I was still taking classes or writing my dissertation. But by being at the art museum, I could see having an impact on young children, on adults who didn't think that a museum was a place for them. And so both audiences need to be introduced and they need to be exposed to those materials but both audiences are very valid. And I remember saying to Professor Craven that I was observing my docents on a tour once when a group of Head Start children came to the museum and the Delaware Art Museum is a wonderful facility but it's in a very elite neighborhood, one of those situations where they were on the perimeter of the town and then the neighborhood sort of grew up around them and I said, you could almost see it on the faces of

these young inner city children coming off the bus. They were very uncomfortable with the neighborhood they were in and we brought them inside and the Delaware Art Museum has the premier collection of American illustration, including many of Howard Pyle's pirate paintings that were used for illustrating stories and when the docents get them in front of one of those paintings and put a pirate shirt on them and a patch on their eye and say, "Now we're going to be the painting and you be this person and you be that person" and the children pose and they're saying, "Now, what do you hear? What are you saying? What happens next?" and the children become so engaged. From that moment on, they own that museum. It's there for them and they're just experiencing it. One thing I thought was really wonderful was they would always give the children in the school groups a family pass so they could bring their families back and to see these young children come in on a Saturday or a Sunday with their parents who may or may not feel comfortable there either and these little children just walk up to the desk with the pass and say, "I'm paying today," so proud to bring their parents and say, "Come and see my favorite painting." That opens doors that you can't even imagine. I remember saying to Professor Craven, "If we don't reach these people, who are the members of the museums in the future?" And so that, to me, says what we're doing is beyond valid; it's essential. And I think he hadn't really thought of it.

Blanche Touhill: So you chose the right door.

Julie Dunn-Morton: I think I did.

Blanche Touhill: For you?

Julie Dunn-Morton: For me. You know, my daughter, Rebecca said that one of her professors said to their class, "If you find yourself doing on the weekends the same thing that you do for your job, you're in the right job."

Blanche Touhill: So really, this goes back to your junior high school where you took art history...

Julie Dunn-Morton: It really does.

- Blanche Touhill: ...and you, all of a sudden, even your artistic endeavors took a second place to loving art and wondering why did a painter do it this way rather than another way.
- Julie Dunn-Morton: Exactly, yeah, it really opened that door for me.
- Blanche Touhill: Let me change the subject for just a minute: If you had been born 50 years earlier, what would have happened in your life?
- Julie Dunn-Morton: I have to think my life would have been very different. I can only compare it to my aunts, to my grandmothers, to what their life was like and I only say that, not because there weren't groundbreaking women in that generation, but I think where I lived, you know, the small community, there was at that time not a college right there in my community that I could easily go to. I think I would have had to work a lot harder and I'm not sure that I would have been introduced to art history the way that I had been. I think that education was different. I think I probably would have been a more traditional housewife who maybe took some art, did things on the side. I think perhaps the one outlet I might have taken advantage of in the way that my mother did was the Missouri Extension. She was in an extension club and still is today, which was a creative and educational outlet for women and a sort of community of women. So maybe that's a way that I would have gone.
- Blanche Touhill: And did they focus on home ec?
- Julie Dunn-Morton: They did a variety of things, I remember. Many of the things, the presentations or the speakers were practical and informative. I still have my Missouri mix recipe book that came from the Extension Society but I do remember things like basket making and other sort of creative activities. So I think it was a nice mix.
- Blanche Touhill: The arts?
- Julie Dunn-Morton: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: And have you gotten any award or awards that you really are extremely proud of?

- Julie Dunn-Morton: I've gotten a couple of scholarship awards which are always very gratifying, to have someone sort of validate your academic efforts. One moment that sticks out for me in my career was the first time that I had a paper accepted at the College Art Association which was...it is a bit of a landmark for an art history student because it's a very large conference, it's very competitive and it was my Master's thesis research. So it was a nice sort of external validation. It meant a lot to me.
- Blanche Touhill: What was your Master's topic?
- Julie Dunn-Morton: The early sculptures by Harriet Hosmer, comparing them to the writings of women at the time and the sort of concurrence of themes there.
- Blanche Touhill: And what was your doctoral dissertation?
- Julie Dunn-Morton: It was art patronage and the museum movement in St. Louis, so spanning about 1840 to 1910.
- Blanche Touhill: And are you published in those areas?
- Julie Dunn-Morton: I have not published specifically in those areas. When I came here, I immediately started working on a handbook of the art collection and that took up a great deal and it's a publication I'm very proud of and I'm currently doing research toward a catalogue resume on Frederick Oaks Sylvester, a local painter.
- Blanche Touhill: Is there anybody you want to mention that helped you, and by helping you really sort of define or put you in the right direction for your career?
- Julie Dunn-Morton: Well, in addition to the people in my education that I've mentioned, I have to say my mother, who I always took to be a very traditional person, in one conversation, looked at me with an intensity that was sort of atypical for her and said, "Never settle" and I think part that that sort of hung in the back of my mind and I think that's part of what gave me the courage to go ahead with graduate school, to just not settle for the boring accounting job that was safe but to go out on a limb and do something that would mean something to me. And on another level, which may

be a little hard to describe, my Great Aunt Virginia was my dad's father's sister and she was such a stylish and poised and professional woman. If I think about a professional woman, I think about her, even at these large family gatherings at Thanksgiving. She was impeccably dressed, always wore heels, always wore hose and I remember one time helping to serve the food and she said, "Will you get a bowl for the green beans" and I got a bowl from Grandmother's cupboard and she said, "Oh, no, honey, not that one, the beans will look much better in this bowl" and I had never thought about how the food looked in the bowl or on the plate and I guess I had a funny look on my face and she said, "Presentation is so important" and she put them in the bowl and she's talking to me about how the colors complemented to make the beans look more appetizing and it was a whole new world for me. One of my mother's strengths was not cooking but to look at everything, not just food but everything you do as a complete package and just to always think more broadly about the impact of what you're doing and how everything affects everything else. It made me start to look at things like how do these curtains look next to this wall, just everything. I looked at book covers in a new way after that discussion with her and I just always remember thinking, it's not a hard thing to do and it just makes your whole life more enjoyable.

Blanche Touhill:

Well, you've had a very interesting life because, as a quiet person, you sort of...I think going in the service gave you a time to breathe and decide what is that you wanted to do but once you decided, you did it.

Julie Dunn-Morton:

I did, thank you, and I've never regretted it. I've met wonderful people. I'm surrounded by amazing collections of art and it's a terrific thing when you're having a tough day with your software not working properly, you can take a break and walk out and look at some of the most important pieces of art in American culture and know that you're helping take care of them.

Blanche Touhill:

I know that you started this committee before your coming. Did they even have an art curator before you came? Were you the first art curator?

- Julie Dunn-Morton: I was the first art curator for the Mercantile Library.
- Blanche Touhill: So you could develop your own plan in a way because you started the docents.
- Julie Dunn-Morton: Yes, we did start a docent program and I have to give due credit to my director who was really director and curator for many years, he's a terrific supporter of the art collection and realizes its importance. So it was wonderful to come into a position and have that kind of support of someone who valued the art as much as I do.
- Blanche Touhill: And when you developed the committee, is that when the Berger developed their committee and the Pot developed their committee?
- Julie Dunn-Morton: The boards, you mean?
- Blanche Touhill: Yes.
- Julie Dunn-Morton: The Pot and Berger collections had boards in place.
- Blanche Touhill: Okay, so you had to create yours?
- Julie Dunn-Morton: Right and my director, John and I worked together to determine an appropriate and sort of logical timeline for reaching a point where a board was a good thing for the art collection to have. So it's been part of a long-term plan.
- Blanche Touhill: And it's turned out to be wonderful because they've been great fundraisers, haven't they?
- Julie Dunn-Morton: They have been. We are so lucky to have the supporters that we have. I mean, St. Louis has a wonderful art community and as a community, we're very fortunate to have such a diverse variety of museums available and we have a group of people who really appreciate Missouri art and artists and the mission that we have here.
- Blanche Touhill: And you speak a lot around town or in the library?
- Julie Dunn-Morton: I do. I've been given several opportunities. I sometimes give, like, a one-time tour for art history professors here on campus who

take advantage of the collections and want to introduce their students to that. Other institutions, I've given talks at the art museum for the Sheldon. I'm giving a talk in St. Genevieve this weekend and then over at Cedarhurst in July. So it's a nice opportunity to just keep the speaking skills sharp and to have a chance to look into different topics that I'm interested in.

Blanche Touhill: And you bring children to the museum?

Julie Dunn-Morton: We have a little bit more of a challenge here being a working academic library, our collections are so strongly tied to Missouri history that we're a natural match for 4th grade social studies; however, even the best behaved 4th graders are still noisy, even when they're well behaved. And so it is a little bit of a challenge because our primary audience is, of course, the university students and we can't be disruptive for them. We have had groups come in and they've always had a terrific experience. We just have to work it in in a logical way.

Blanche Touhill: But I bet you're now getting scholars coming in to look at the artwork?

Julie Dunn-Morton: Oh, we do. We've had that for years, largely because John, himself, has been so interested in the art and done research on our paintings and sculptures so they are very actively used and, in fact, we have works on loan to five different museums nationally and internationally right now.

Blanche Touhill: And you're doing part of the New York Times, aren't you, where the pictures or the photographs are...

Julie Dunn-Morton: We do have a photo service with the New York Times and they draw heavily on our archival collections.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I really appreciated this conversation and you really were a pioneer.

Julie Dunn-Morton: I never really thought of myself as a pioneer. I'll admit to being very surprised when I was asked to participate so I'm very honored and I'm very appreciative, thank you.

Blanche Touhill: Thank you very much.