

An Interview with
Marilyn Fox

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

4 December 2015

interviewed by Dr. Blanche Touhill
transcribed by Valerie Leri and edited by
Josephine Sporleder



Oral History Program

The State Historical Society of Missouri
Collection S1207 Women as Change Agents DVD 62

NOTICE

1) This material may be protected by copyright law (Title 17, U.S. Code). It may not be cited without acknowledgment to the Western Historical Manuscript Collection, a Joint Collection of the University of Missouri and the State Historical Society of Missouri Manuscripts, Columbia, Missouri. Citations should include: [Name of collection] Project, Collection Number C4020, [name of interviewee], [date of interview], Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, Missouri.

2) Reproductions of this transcript are available for reference use only and cannot be reproduced or published in any form (including digital formats) without written permission from the Western Historical Manuscript Collection.

3) Use of information or quotations from any [Name of collection] Collection transcript indicates agreement to indemnify and hold harmless the University of Missouri, the State Historical Society of Missouri, their officers, employees, and agents, and the interviewee from and against all claims and actions arising out of the use of this material.

For further information, contact: The State Historical Society of Missouri, St. Louis Research Center, 222

Thomas Jefferson Library, One University Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63121 (314) 516-5119

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.

Marilyn Fox: My name is Marilyn Fox. It was Marilyn Widman. I'm married for 62 years and I have to say, I've had a very good life.

Blanche Touhill: Talk about your childhood: your mother; your father; your siblings; your grandparents; who you played with after school or before you went to kindergarten or something. Did you play just with the girls? Did you play, girls with the boys? Was it unstructured? Just anything you can talk about in your childhood.

Marilyn Fox: Well, my childhood was probably very different because my mother and father were immigrants from Eastern Europe so they were very quiet people. I can tell you a little bit about how they got to the United States.

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Marilyn Fox: My father and his family...he was one of four children...they lived in Ukraine and they had a store and they lived above the store but the Kozaks would come on the weekends and attack the house and finally his father said, "It's time for us to leave. We shouldn't stay here," and he had relatives in South Africa so he went to South Africa. He left his wife and his children. My father was two years old. He never really knew his father. His father was there for a while and then that flu episode broke out in the world, 1917, I think, and his father died. So my grandmother was left with the children and slowly, one at a time...because she had relatives in the States...she sent her children one by one on steage and my father and his sister were the last ones to go. He was 18 and they waited until their mother died. So you can imagine the different kind of experiences they have had. So they got to the United States and their relatives were very willing to help. By that time, his older brother was there and he had gotten a job. So they were all together, all four of them. Then, slowly, one by one, they got married. My father, I think, was 29 when he got married to my mother, who also was an immigrant. Sort of the same thing happened to their family. My grandfather was an Orthodox rabbi and he had relatives in the United States. He came to the United States without his family and it took him seven years to raise enough money to bring his family. By the time he raised enough money, World War I was going on and my mother, her siblings and her mother ended up on the road, kicking out of their house, ended up on the road, starving actually, and she never really talked very much about it but she did tell me one time that those planes were shooting down and "we had

to jump into the side of the road.” So finally, he was able to bring all the children, and I think the oldest ones were already in their teens, and my mother was one of the younger ones. So she went through the 6th grade, I think...no, maybe it was the 7th grade. She loved to read because she was always reading.

Blanche Touhill: Now, was she from the Ukraine too?

Marilyn Fox: No, she was from Eastern Europe.

Blanche Touhill: And when they came to the United States, did they go to New York or St. Louis or where?

Marilyn Fox: Well, they came through Ellis Island.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, but were they headed for New York or were they headed for the interior of the country?

Marilyn Fox: No, they weren't headed for New York because her father was in Springfield, Illinois.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, okay.

Marilyn Fox: And that's where they settled. And I have to tell you a story about my grandmother because she was a strong woman. When they were kicked out of their house, when the war ended, she came back to her house and she said, "This is my house; leave" and then she went to all the neighbors searching for her furniture and she got it back. That was what you'd call a strong woman.

Blanche Touhill: That's a strong woman.

Marilyn Fox: A very strong woman. When my brothers and I were young and we visited our grandparents often in Springfield, she never learned to speak English.

Blanche Touhill: Really?

Marilyn Fox: Yes. I never really was able to speak to her. I always got kisses and hugs all the time but we never could converse. My grandfather, being an Orthodox rabbi, did speak English and so that was different. So my mother and father were brought up in a different way, not such a good way, not from the parents but from the environment. And my parents

were quiet people so they also did not converse very much, because they were immigrants, although they were very...they entered and became very much part of the environment but they were still very quiet. So they didn't teach me a lot about their lives. I just happen to remember those few conversations that we had and I'm always mad at myself that I didn't ask more questions.

Blanche Touhill: But isn't it wonderful that they had the strength to get here? Did they send their children to the public schools?

Marilyn Fox: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: So your mother and father got educated in this country?

Marilyn Fox: No. My mother...I think I said 6th grade, it might have been 7th or 8th grade.

Blanche Touhill: But when they got here, they went to work?

Marilyn Fox: My father was 18, yes.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, 18. He could get a job, yes.

Marilyn Fox: Well, he went to a yeshiva so that was different from public schools. I think my mother did go to public school but they started her in kindergarten. She was 12 when she got there because she couldn't speak English.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, so she went to kindergarten?

Marilyn Fox: She started in kindergarten.

Blanche Touhill: But she moved up fast?

Marilyn Fox: She moved up and, as I said before, she loved to read.

Blanche Touhill: And I bet her mother used her to translate.

Marilyn Fox: That, I don't remember.

Blanche Touhill: But, I mean, she could go to the grocery store and she could go around?

Marilyn Fox: I don't think she did that. I think that her children did that for her or her husband.

Blanche Touhill: How did they get to St. Louis or are you the one that came to St. Louis?

Marilyn Fox: No, my father's the one. He ended up with a job here.

Blanche Touhill: And did they have a hard time adjusting to this country?

Marilyn Fox: You know, I don't think so and the reason being that they already had relatives here. My father had two sisters and a brother. My mother had other relatives. I don't know that they were in Springfield but I have a feeling that there were a lot of other people that also had a similar experience. She did graduate from the 8th grade and then she didn't go back to school.

Blanche Touhill: No, she went to work or something?

Marilyn Fox: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Or stayed home and took care of the house?

Marilyn Fox: Yeah. But they loved the United States and I had education in public schools in University City.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, which were wonderful schools.

Marilyn Fox: Yes...Delmar Harbor and then Ward Junior High, which closed in the 9th grade and so we ended up spending the last semester at Hanley Junior High and went to University City High School.

Blanche Touhill: But Hanley Junior got knocked down eventually too.

Marilyn Fox: Yes, it did.

Blanche Touhill: And there's the housing development there.

Marilyn Fox: Yes, uh-huh. That was sad.

Blanche Touhill: It was sad but those houses are nice.

Marilyn Fox: Yeah, uh-huh, and we had a wonderful time at school. It was a fabulous school, fabulous teachers.

Blanche Touhill: Did your family encourage you to go to school?

Marilyn Fox: You mean, regular school?

Blanche Touhill: Your mother and father...yeah.

Marilyn Fox: Oh, there's wasn't a question about that.

Blanche Touhill: And did they want you to get good grades?

Marilyn Fox: They didn't really talk too much about that but I did.

Blanche Touhill: But they wanted you to go and to be educated?

Marilyn Fox: Mm-hmm, and it was the neighborhood. We lived in U City on Leland Avenue and all the kids gathered on the parkways and played or walked to other friends' houses. People knew each other. It was a very friendly place. Plus, Delmar had all kinds of stores, ice cream stores, a place you could buy shoes, the movies.

Blanche Touhill: And you could get the streetcar there?

Marilyn Fox: Yeah, you could ride the streetcar and you could ride your bike.

Blanche Touhill: Wasn't it The Loop or something right there at the entrance of ...?

Marilyn Fox: And the first grocery store, it was called Genberg's.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, sure.

Marilyn Fox: That I knew of anyway, in our neighborhood was a large grocery store because the only place that I ever really knew before that was, there was a kosher butcher shop and there was a little store next to it, like a small store that had vegetables and fruit and so forth like that. It was pretty close, I think.

Blanche Touhill: And the temple was right there?

Marilyn Fox: Yeah, we went to the [inaudible 11:55] synagogue.

Blanche Touhill: Is that the one that's right near the gates?

Marilyn Fox: It was [inaudible 11:59] which is out in county.

Blanche Touhill: Now, yeah.

Marilyn Fox: And right behind it was [inaudible 12:06].

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes.

Marilyn Fox: One was conservative and the other...

Blanche Touhill: Was more reformed.

Marilyn Fox: Yes, it was reformed, yeah. But it was a very friendly neighborhood. It was a great place to grow up and I have friends there that I've had since kindergarten.

Blanche Touhill: That you're still in contact with?

Marilyn Fox: Oh, yeah, we're still friends, yes.

Blanche Touhill: Was there a teacher that said to you, "Marilyn, you should move on and go to college"?

Marilyn Fox: Well, I think it was just, that was the thing we would do.

Blanche Touhill: It was expected?

Marilyn Fox: Yeah, I would say so. Washington U is right down the street.

Blanche Touhill: And you took the academic courses in order to get into Wash U?

Marilyn Fox: Yes, I guess so.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah, you took language and...

Marilyn Fox: It was a long time ago.

Blanche Touhill: I know, but there was...

Marilyn Fox: I liked school.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah, I went to the public schools in St. Louis, the high school and they had an academic...you know, if you were going to go to college, you had to take two years of Latin or something and you had to take math and you had to take science with a laboratory. There were certain things you had to take.

Marilyn Fox: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: But then, I took typing and shorthand too, so I took sort of a mixed curriculum.

Marilyn Fox: Well, what happened in my life was, I met my husband when I was still in high school.

Blanche Touhill: Was he in the same high school?

Marilyn Fox: No, he's five years older. He was at Wash U.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, okay.

Marilyn Fox: He came from a small town in Southeast Missouri, Desloge, Missouri. It was a farming, mining community and it was an entirely different kind of education but he was accepted to Washington U and we met at, like, a party and we started going out and what happened was, we got engaged. I was 18, we got married when I was 19. So I went to one semester of Washington University.

Blanche Touhill: And then you got married?

Marilyn Fox: And then we got married and I went to Miss Hickey's School.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, secretarial school.

Marilyn Fox: Secretarial school.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, it had a very good reputation.

Marilyn Fox: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: You know, it's still around but it's got a broader curriculum now than it had.

Marilyn Fox: And got a job afterwards because we had to both work.

Blanche Touhill: Was he still going to Washington U?

Marilyn Fox: No, he had graduated. He was five years older.

Blanche Touhill: Was he an engineer?

Marilyn Fox: Business.

Blanche Touhill: ...major, all right.

Marilyn Fox: I had our first child when I was 20 and the last one when I was 30 and so I really wanted to go back to school and I tried doing it at, I think it was

Meramec and I took one course because I had five kids. I think I had...did I have five then, because I had four, I either had four or five and I just didn't do it. It was a very time-consuming, you know, if you want to be a good mother. I couldn't, personally, take that one and raising all those kids myself. As I look back now...you know how you look at pictures with your family and everything...I said, how did I ever do that? I have to say, we have great kids. They're really good people.

Blanche Touhill: Are they in the business?

Marilyn Fox: The three boys are. The two girls live in Israel.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, do they?

Marilyn Fox: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: And what are they doing in Israel?

Marilyn Fox: Well, actually, their life revolves around charities and our oldest daughter has two girls, both of whom have been in a service organization, one in the Army three years, one in the Navy two years and the older one is in her third year of university at Hebrew University and the other one...they usually have a year between when they start school. She's actually interested in film so she's been looking at schools in the United States as well as in Israel.

Blanche Touhill: But they want to stay in Israel? Yeah, they do. Are they married?

Marilyn Fox: Not yet.

Blanche Touhill: So, did they go together or did one girl go first and then second?

Marilyn Fox: There is three years difference between them so one was in the Army for three years and then they kind of take a year off. They have to study for tests and kind of get back, and the other one, she's been out a year so she has to take, I guess, SATs and stuff.

Blanche Touhill: Does Hebrew University have a program in film?

Marilyn Fox: I don't know the answer to that. I know she talked about some school that did and I really didn't hear if Hebrew did or not.

Blanche Touhill: Do you go over and see them?

Marilyn Fox: Well, I did. It's getting a little...so they come to visit us.

Blanche Touhill: But they're pioneer women. They're building a country, don't you think?

Marilyn Fox: Oh, yes, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: So, did they go when they were 18?

Marilyn Fox: Into the service?

Blanche Touhill: No, into Israel?

Marilyn Fox: Oh, our daughters, no. They both graduated college. The oldest one went first. I'm trying to think of how old she was. Now she's 60...61. Her first trip there was in high school and then I guess that became something that became part of what she thought she might want to do and when she graduated...she went to Clark University first and then Michigan and then she decided that she was going to go to Israel. She went there for a while. She came back and got a Master's in public health and went back. She's been there ever since.

Blanche Touhill: And the other sister joined her?

Marilyn Fox: Well, the other sister was living in New York and she became involved in a synagogue in which she decided that she wanted to go to Israel and so she went to Israel. They both have very full, very active lives in charities and leadership and all things like that.

Blanche Touhill: Now, you've been involved in charities?

Marilyn Fox: Yes, I have.

Blanche Touhill: Why did you decide to do that?

Marilyn Fox: Well, actually, I didn't do much of that when my kids were young but I think that all started when I became involved in the Jewish Federation and the JCC and I wouldn't ever have called myself a leader before but some people develop, mature later...

Blanche Touhill: Yes, and you did, is what you're saying?

Marilyn Fox: Yeah, uh-huh, and so as the time went on and I felt more comfortable and really believed in what I was doing so that, I think, started the kinds

of things that I'm doing now and then, as my kids grew older and I only had one child left in the house, it was much easier to do.

Blanche Touhill: Where did your children go to school, your boys?

Marilyn Fox: They went to public school. They started out at Spoele and then they went to West Junior High, and then to High School and they all graduated from there. Then they all went to different universities.

Blanche Touhill: But they all wanted to go into business with their father?

Marilyn Fox: Not at the beginning, no. I think that happened later on; not the girls, they didn't want to. I don't know, maybe they would have if had gone to business school, I don't know.

Blanche Touhill: But they didn't go to business school?

Marilyn Fox: Hm-mmm, they didn't.

Blanche Touhill: So you got interested in JCC.

Marilyn Fox: JCC, the Jewish Community Center and the Jewish Federation. That's probably where I really started developing wanting to be involved. It was much easier to do and learn because I think you do have to learn that.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, I think you have to learn it too, and you have to choose non-profits that you believe in their cause.

Marilyn Fox: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: What other groups do you belong to, charities, just one or two?

Marilyn Fox: Well, the Variety to Children's Charity.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, that has been a huge success. Was that always a success or did it keep building and building?

Marilyn Fox: Well, I don't know about it at the very beginning. I've been involved for about 20...21 years and it has grown.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, that's what I've...

Marilyn Fox: It has grown and it is so sophisticated in helping families, their kids and I happened to get involved in that because I was named Woman of the

Year back in '93, I guess, and then a new executive director came on that year.

Blanche Touhill: Was that Albus?

Marilyn Fox: Yeah, Jan.

Blanche Touhill: And is she still there?

Marilyn Fox: She's still there; yeah, she's still there.

Blanche Touhill: But she's been there almost 20 or 25 years.

Marilyn Fox: She's been 20.

Blanche Touhill: Twenty years, okay. You admire Jan?

Marilyn Fox: Yeah, but what happened was, with me personally, was that I had never really been around disabled children. Fortunately, I didn't have that experience in my own family and the first time, when I was Woman of the Year, very difficult times, Jan's first year, and we would go out and meet the families at these affairs and then I'd have to go into the restroom and then would say, "Where have you been?" and I said, you know, it was something that, when you see that and you realize, there are things that could be done.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, there are things that can be done, and especially equipment and that's what Variety Club specializes in.

Marilyn Fox: Well, they specialize in lots of things.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, do they now?

Marilyn Fox: Oh, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: So they broadened their mission?

Marilyn Fox: It's not even Variety Club anymore; it's St. Louis Variety to Children's Charity. They have extended through Jan. She's been a wonderful leader and she has great ideas and everything now, from the kids being in the show this year...

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes.

Marilyn Fox: You have no idea what it does for children. It is just amazing.

Blanche Touhill: You know, that sells out. I get calls, "Can I get tickets for..." ...what was it this year?

Marilyn Fox: I'm always out of time at the time, unfortunately.

Blanche Touhill: But it was something...it doesn't make any difference what they were playing, but at the last minute, people will be frantic, they'll say, "Can't you get tickets?" and I call over to the theater and they say, "No, we're sold out" and I think the Friday night performance was the one that I was getting the calls for and I can't tell you how many people stop me that I don't even know and they say, "We went to that children with disabilities" and they say it's just wonderful.

Marilyn Fox: It is and you would be amazed at how many young girls have pretty voices and they [inaudible 26:17] and some that, even they don't have pretty voices, it doesn't matter.

Blanche Touhill: No, it doesn't matter but it works.

Marilyn Fox: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: And they have the children in wheelchairs who act.

Marilyn Fox: Oh, yeah. Well, that's just one phase. They have the Adventure Camp.

Blanche Touhill: What is that?

Marilyn Fox: The Adventure Camp is, during the summer, three or four weeks, they have a camp, a very well developed camp with nurses, all planned out for activities for the kids, ranging from music to art to...I can't even remember all the things...to sports.

Blanche Touhill: Swimming, I bet, for some children.

Marilyn Fox: And climbing the wall and swimming.

Blanche Touhill: And it's their opportunity to sort of have a vacation.

Marilyn Fox: And to do what everyone does.

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Marilyn Fox: And then, now they have these wheelchairs and these wheelchairs, they're electric and they're very heavy so the families, it's very difficult to

take that child...you can't take them in a car but now you can take them in a car because what happens is that we provide the ramps and the connections to connect the chair into a...

Blanche Touhill: A platform or something?

Marilyn Fox: Yes, into, not a regular car, yes.

Blanche Touhill: I ran across somebody who had a business like that, that he had these vans and he could get the person in the wheelchair and...

Marilyn Fox: But these are the families' cars. They're a big car and so they're provided with the ramps and the ability to clamp those wheelchairs down. So now the kids can go places with their families. The families can take them places. I'm just telling you a couple things, things that they do.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, no, I need to know those things.

Marilyn Fox: And then the zoo, they have things at the zoo and then they have bicycles that they put together. People give donations for the bicycles. They put the bicycles together and the kids get to ride bicycles and special bicycles and then they have all kinds of equipment, some that help the kids stand because when they stand, that provides other ways of helping the body and there are many other things.

Blanche Touhill: Do you think someday, Marilyn, those will be used for the elderly, that same technological breakthrough that has helped children? I bet that could transfer into helping senior citizens.

Marilyn Fox: I don't know if they have that or not.

Blanche Touhill: No, no, I don't think they have it now but I'm saying, I think once you make a breakthrough in one group, it seems to me it has to be adjusted but I know plenty of people who sort of live in wheelchairs and the fact that they could stand up and let the blood flow throughout the body is wonderful.

Marilyn Fox: Well, I don't know if they can do it with all the children. I know that, depending on the kinds of...

Blanche Touhill: Oh, that's true, ailments that they have.

Marilyn Fox: Yes, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: And I know the membership of the Variety Club has expanded. They've raised millions of dollars, haven't they?

Marilyn Fox: Oh, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: I don't know how much they...I remember when Jerry Lewis came. You always have a headliner who comes.

Marilyn Fox: We have some very charitable people that are involved.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, you do, and I guess they give of their own time for this, these actors.

Marilyn Fox: No, I think they have to be paid.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, they pay?

Marilyn Fox: Yeah, they have to be paid.

Blanche Touhill: I've been to your dinners and it's just a gigantic crowd.

Marilyn Fox: It is, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: I think it's one of the largest crowds that I can think of.

Marilyn Fox: Well, now we have it at the Peabody.

Blanche Touhill: Oh.

Marilyn Fox: And so the stage there is fabulous in the auditorium and then we have...

Blanche Touhill: Do you serve dinner?

Marilyn Fox: Oh, yeah, in the different...

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Marilyn Fox: Well, we need more than one dining room.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, I'm sure you do. So you give a lot to that but you get a lot out of it?

Marilyn Fox: Well, I've been chairman of the dinners for...this is the 20th year.

Blanche Touhill: Wonderful.

Marilyn Fox: So I've learned more, I'll tell you, I have benefitted so much from it.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, and then the community has benefitted as well.

Marilyn Fox: Oh, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: What other charities are you in?

Marilyn Fox: I'm still in the Missouri History Museum, Missouri Botanical Gardens.

Blanche Touhill: How is that?

Marilyn Fox: It's fabulous.

Blanche Touhill: Do you like the new director, Fran?

Marilyn Fox: Fran is fabulous.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, she is.

Marilyn Fox: She is so well educated; she is so bright. She knows what she's doing and the staff is really excellent.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, they are.

Marilyn Fox: And so I'm just proud to be able to be part of that.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah, and you know, I never go to the History Museum that I don't learn something. They always have changing exhibits...

Marilyn Fox: Yes, they do.

Blanche Touhill: ...and I am a historian so...

Marilyn Fox: You would really enjoy her.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, I do know her.

Marilyn Fox: Oh, yeah, and she's straight-forward.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes.

Marilyn Fox: She's a terrific person.

Blanche Touhill: But she's a professional.

Marilyn Fox: She's definitely a professional.

Blanche Touhill: Obviously she knows what she's doing.

Marilyn Fox: She does, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Were you there when the uproar occurred? Oh, okay. So you got through that, the board lived through that?

Marilyn Fox: Oh, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: But that was a hectic time.

Marilyn Fox: But I always had great respect and admiration for Bob.

Blanche Touhill: For Bob, oh, yes. He worked with us, between the St. Louis campus and we used to have history professors that would go over and research in the Missouri Historical and I do think he changed the Missouri Historical Society from being focused on the VP gowns and Lindbergh memorabilia to reach out to a wider group in St. Louis.

Marilyn Fox: He is very well educated.

Blanche Touhill: And he's very well educated and he would write. He would go off on leaves of absence to write his next book or whatever it was. He's a very thoughtful man, very thoughtful man.

Marilyn Fox: At one time I belonged to the...they had, like, a women's group there, not for very long but you would look forward to his lecture there. It was so fabulous and also, he used to get board lectures there at the board meetings and it was so fabulous. You always learned something.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, you did.

Marilyn Fox: And it was terrific.

Blanche Touhill: Well, the Botanical Garden went through a gigantic change too, with Peter Raven stepping back and Peter Weis Jackson coming.

Marilyn Fox: Oh, he is a talent.

Blanche Touhill: Isn't he wonderful?

Marilyn Fox: He's wonderful, he and Diane.

Blanche Touhill: He's such a quiet man. When he came into town, I met him. It was a big reception or something and there were 200 people there and I looked at him and I thought, oh, he's such a quiet man, because Peter was so vociferous, you know, and Peter Weis Jackson came in and he was so quiet and then I got to know him and I thought, now there's...

Marilyn Fox: He has a great sense of humor.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, he does, his use of words, the way he can use words to get his thoughts across but I will say, I like Peter Raven too.

Marilyn Fox: Oh, yeah. I think the Garden was very fortunate to have them both.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, I agree with you. I remember as a child...and I don't know whether you came to the Garden as a child...my mother always liked to plant flowers so we would traipse off to the Garden. It was really getting very run down, do you remember, in the old days before Peter came?

Marilyn Fox: You know, I don't think I...

Blanche Touhill: The paint was sort of chipping off something, and I was a kid and I'd walk in and I'd think, oh, I don't know about this place, it seems to me, and Peter Raven came in and he just turned it around.

Marilyn Fox: Oh, yeah. He's brilliant. He's a great guy. We're very fortunate to have those two, very fortunate, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: And both those organizations, the Missouri Historical and the Garden, always had good boards.

Marilyn Fox: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: It always had interesting people on the boards.

Marilyn Fox: Right, yes.

Blanche Touhill: And they both supported their leaders very much.

Marilyn Fox: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: I think Peter Raven must have been there 25 or 30 years?

Marilyn Fox: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: And how long was Bob Archibald there? He must have been there 20 years or 25.

Marilyn Fox: I don't know if it was 25, I think...

Blanche Touhill: More like 15 or 20?

Marilyn Fox: Yeah, I think 20 maybe. I've sort of forgotten now.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I went over to meet Bob Archibald when he first came into town and the Missouri Historical wasn't looking very good at that time and, remember the man that was there before?

Marilyn Fox: No, I didn't know him.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I looked at Bob and he said, "Well, now, someday we'll have something together between the campus and the Missouri Historical and we'll share a faculty member or something," and by golly, he...and I thought, where is he going to get the money to do that and then he got into the Zoo Museum district. That was the big thing Archibald did, and, of course, Raven had gotten into the Zoo Museum district earlier.

Marilyn Fox: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: I think Raven must have been the first one into Zoo Museum District but I don't know that.

Marilyn Fox: I don't know that either.

Blanche Touhill: And what other boards were you on?

Marilyn Fox: I'm on the Webster board.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, Webster is an interesting institution.

Marilyn Fox: Oh...

Blanche Touhill: And you love Beth Strobel?

Marilyn Fox: I love Beth Strobel. She's a dynamo.

Blanche Touhill: She is a dynamo and she's sort of a quiet person.

Marilyn Fox: I don't think so.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, she's not quiet?

Marilyn Fox: I don't know. At board meetings and everything...

Blanche Touhill: She's very business-like.

Marilyn Fox: She has a wonderful sense of humor, yeah, so I admire her and respect her tremendously. I've been on that board for a long time. I was off for a while but [overhead speaker in room comes on]] probably after...

Blanche Touhill: So, go on with what you were saying.

Marilyn Fox: So, Beth is different from the others under which I was on the board and not that the others weren't good, but she's got her own personality, her own drive, her own...and I think she's very successful. She's made lots and lots of friends in the community and I admire her tremendously.

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Marilyn Fox: And we just had the 100th anniversary.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, which is marvelous, isn't it?

Marilyn Fox: Yeah, isn't that unbelievable?

Blanche Touhill: Yes, it's unbelievable.

Marilyn Fox: I remember when that university had its first gentleman...

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Marilyn Fox: ...who was...they changed it from...

Blanche Touhill: Loretta order, whatever it was, to be Webster University.

Marilyn Fox: Loretta...

Blanche Touhill: Well, it was run by the Loretta nuns. I don't know what the name of it was at that moment.

Marilyn Fox: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I remember Sister Jacqueline. Do you remember Sister Jacqueline...

Marilyn Fox: Yes, I do.

Blanche Touhill: ...when she brought in the theater.

Marilyn Fox: Mm-hmm, and how important that theater is. Oh, my gosh and they have such a wonderful arts school.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah, they do.

- Marilyn Fox: You know, theater arts.
- Blanche Touhill: And their graduates have gone on to be stars.
- Marilyn Fox: Yes, they have, and we just had...the closing was the gala. We had 500 people there. We raised a lot of money and the students performed part of the activity and [inaudible 40:26] were so good, you said, I just know in my heart these kids are going to Broadway. They were terrific. They were really terrific. You know, you just get so excited about that, don't you?
- Blanche Touhill: Yes. I think what Webster has done, but particularly under Beth...I'm not saying the previous leaders didn't do it because they all did it to a certain extent, but she's more community-oriented, I think.
- Marilyn Fox: Very, yeah. You see her out there. I think that's very good.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, you see her out and about.
- Marilyn Fox: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: And that takes a lot of time and energy. She has a dedication but I think they were all good people, but it was a small little Catholic school college and it's now really an internationally known university.
- Marilyn Fox: Yes, it is.
- Blanche Touhill: And they were so smart to go into that international arena.
- Marilyn Fox: That was quite a long time ago.
- Blanche Touhill: Yeah, that was Leisure Dean, wasn't it?
- Marilyn Fox: Yes, it was.
- Blanche Touhill: And his friendship with Sverdrup, wasn't that it? He was an ex-general and he got them onto the bases? I think that's how they started and then it just sort of grew.
- Marilyn Fox: Yeah. It's amazing. Oh, I'll tell you a story. When my husband was ambassador of Belgium...
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes.
- Marilyn Fox: ...and I was at a luncheon and I was talking to someone and they said that their daughter was going to Webster University in Leiden and I said, "Oh,

I'm a member of the board of Webster University." She brought her daughter over to me. It was very cute. It was very sweet. Well, she ended up, I think, finishing up in England but she really liked it.

Blanche Touhill: Tell me about your role as the wife of the ambassador. What was your title?

Marilyn Fox: My husband called me something. No, they just called me "Mrs. Fox" or "Marilyn Fox" or what, but he called me Ambassadorable.

Blanche Touhill: Oh.

Marilyn Fox: There was something going on at the embassy. They were filming something or something and I think that the news person must have heard him calling me that or saying something so when he wrote in the French newspaper, he called me "Ambassadorable." It was hysterical; it was really funny.

Blanche Touhill: Was that a challenge, to go and be the wife of the ambassador?

Marilyn Fox: No, it wasn't a challenge. It was fabulous. It was so interesting because I really didn't know...there are, I forget how many, 150 people or maybe more in the embassy and they're either women or they're men and their wives and their families and everything so what I wanted to do was to meet all these women. So it took me a little while. I just thought, you know, that should be part of my responsibility, to do that. So you have to do it through the embassy. You can't just call up people and say...so I put together...I asked them, I said, "This is what I want to do, have the tea in the morning, invite them for coffee or tea and something to eat and then just talk and get to know each other." So that's what I did maybe once every month.

Blanche Touhill: Were they different women or the same women?

Marilyn Fox: It might not have been every month. It might have been every couple months or so. No, it wasn't the same women, and then you would meet them at parties and then you would know them. Anyway, so what I did was invite them and then we kind of sat around in a circle and I said, "I'd like to find out about you and I'd like to tell you about myself," so I wanted them to feel very comfortable, so I started and I told them about Sam and me and our kids and how it was such a privilege to be part of

this and then, I thought it was something that really brought together my being part of the whole thing and them getting to know that we're people, that we want to meet you and we hope that your life is good, because, you know, they stay three years. They have to pack up their whole house and move someplace else. I didn't know that and I thought, oh, my gosh, what if I had to do that? It's like taking your whole life apart and putting it back together again. So they have to be very dedicated people.

Blanche Touhill: I bet they appreciated the opportunity to meet you as a human being.

Marilyn Fox: That's what I was hoping for, yeah. And then when you see them someplace, you go, "Oh..." ...you would know them. I just want someone to just feel comfortable knowing each other.

Blanche Touhill: Now, what would your mother or grandmother have said if they knew you became the wife of the ambassador?

Marilyn Fox: I don't know if they would have understood it at all.

Blanche Touhill: Well, what if they did understand?

Marilyn Fox: Well, my grandmother wouldn't have because she never learned to speak English so we never really communicated, just with hugs and kisses.

Blanche Touhill: What about your mother?

Marilyn Fox: My mother would have been very excited, yeah. Well, actually, if she had been living and was okay, she would have...

Blanche Touhill: ...would have been with you.

Marilyn Fox: No, she wouldn't have been with us but she would have visited. We would have made sure that she did.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I think the immigrant mother who brought the kids and got her house back and her furniture back, to think that she got to America, she got all her children together in one place and that her granddaughter became the wife of the ambassador. I mean, that's something that's just incredible.

Marilyn Fox: That's the United States of America.

- Blanche Touhill: That's the United States of America.
- Marilyn Fox: That is the United States of America.
- Blanche Touhill: Were you involved in charities overseas?
- Marilyn Fox: They don't have charities in Belgium like they used to.
- Blanche Touhill: No, I understand, yeah. The government subsidizes a lot of things that we fund through charities.
- Marilyn Fox: Mm-hmm. You didn't see a whole lot of that. Some of the women did things but, like, something like the United Way, there was no raising any kind of amount of money like they do here or anyplace else in the States. So it's just different. Yeah, it's done by the country more.
- Blanche Touhill: Is there some award or awards that you're really proud of?
- Marilyn Fox: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, we talked about that, yeah. What about, did your mother ever say she was proud of you?
- Marilyn Fox: I think she did, when I graduated high school, just things you did when you're in grade school and so forth. They were very quiet people, really. I mean, they had friends here and they learned that they were able to integrate and everything but they were quiet. They weren't just real gregarious or like that.
- Blanche Touhill: Did they vote?
- Marilyn Fox: Yeah, they voted. They loved Roosevelt. Oh, man, that was their man.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, a lot of people loved Roosevelt, the fact that he could get elected four times says something about him. I know there are people who hated Roosevelt but I know there were a lot of people who really did admire him and gave him credit for a lot of things.
- Marilyn Fox: Mm-hmm.
- Blanche Touhill: If you had been born 50 years ahead of time, what would have happened to your life?
- Marilyn Fox: I could have gotten killed in the Holocaust.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, you could have.

Marilyn Fox: And judging from the fact that all my grandparents were in Eastern Europe or Ukraine, that could have easily happened.

Blanche Touhill: You would have been in the war.

Marilyn Fox: Yeah. A lot of their relatives did get in. I remember, as a little girl, my parents used to get things from their relatives and then they would start getting things and they'd be talking together and, even as a little girl, I knew something was wrong but I never knew until much later. And they would get these letters and the writing was in Hebrew, I guess, which I couldn't read and then, they never really talked about it to us kids.

Blanche Touhill: But you were all shocked when you learned about the death camps?

Marilyn Fox: Yeah, oh, my gosh, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: And I remember after the war, I worked at one time in the late '50s and '60s in New York at Queens College for the city university of New York and there were faculty who had the tattoo of the number and you'd just look at them and think, to go through that experience and to be able to finish your education or maybe they had their education before they lived through the Holocaust and then to make it to the United States and be teaching, that's a great strength of character, to be able to live through that. Then I worked, when I was younger, I worked on the St. Louis City Playgrounds as...you know, a playground because I was going to go into teaching and that was a great job to have in the summer and I remember we had parents of some of the children who had the tattoo and I assumed that the Holocaust Museum out at the JCA, isn't that where it is?

Marilyn Fox: It's on the campus of the Jewish Federation.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, it's on the Jewish...

Marilyn Fox: It's in that building.

Blanche Touhill: I imagine they've kept the oral histories of some of those people.

Marilyn Fox: Oh, they have, yeah, and they actually have programs where they bring students through.

Blanche Touhill: Of course, yes, I knew about that. Well, you and Sam have been together how many years?

Marilyn Fox: 62.

Blanche Touhill: What do you think is the purpose of your life in this country and how you look at America?

Marilyn Fox: Well, I look at America as the best country in the world because it has freedom, it cares about people, it tries to help people and I think that...I mean, there are ups and downs in every government and everything but the whole environment and the whole way that people try to live, they have the opportunity to do that and I think that we're very fortunate to be living here and that it's part of our lives that we learn how to help other people.

Blanche Touhill: Did you carry that message when you were the wife of the ambassador to Belgium?

Marilyn Fox: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: And how was it greeted?

Marilyn Fox: Well, you don't just go around saying it to a group but I think you do it by the way that you live and how you treat other people and give charity where you can there, which we did. Actually, we still do it. Sam is still involved in some of the charities.

Blanche Touhill: If you had to say what was the theme of your life...

Marilyn Fox: I hope the theme of my life was living in happiness and teaching that to my kids and being part of the community and trying to help the people and be kind to other people. I hope that that's what it was. I could say that about my kids. They're really great people...and my husband.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, but it's the fact that you do believe that when you work in these charitable organizations or these community boards, that kind of service helps to make this area and this world a better place?

Marilyn Fox: Yes, I do.

Blanche Touhill: Because you wouldn't spend your time doing it unless you did.

Marilyn Fox: Oh, yeah, I think it's very, very important to do that because it takes you past yourself. It shows all the important things in the world, that in whatever little way you can do it, you can be helpful and bring happiness and kindness and a better place to live maybe or whatever it is, help do that. I think it's very important.

Blanche Touhill: Do your sons engage in this charitable activity?

Marilyn Fox: They all do.

Blanche Touhill: And your daughters-in-law and grandchildren?

Marilyn Fox: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: So you've taught that lesson to them?

Marilyn Fox: Well, I hope; I guess I did.

Blanche Touhill: Well, if they're doing it. I think sometimes the best teaching is to do it yourself and then people watch you and then they pick it up themselves. Well, so you're saying you had a very happy life?

Marilyn Fox: I have. I mean, we all go through things that aren't so happy but I have no complaints at all except maybe one or two having to do with health.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah. Is there some charity that you're going to focus on in the future that you haven't focused on before?

Marilyn Fox: Not that I know. I'm not saying that I wouldn't.

Blanche Touhill: Yes. So you're open?

Marilyn Fox: Well, it depends on your age, your health, that kind of thing.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, no, I understand. But I'm just saying, you're flexible?

Marilyn Fox: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Well, thank you very much for coming. It was a wonderful conversation and I do think your volunteer activities have defined you and defined the community and there aren't that many people, I think, who have given so much to charitable organizational development other than you.

Marilyn Fox: Oh, thank you, but I really think there are a lot of wonderful people in St. Louis who work very hard.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, but you've worked practically all your life.

Marilyn Fox: Well, all my adult...after my kids grew up a little bit, yeah. I've made so many wonderful friends. It just enhances your life, not only with the things that you do for others but with developing friendships that are sincere, that are deep, that are fun and knowing people who are so good.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah. Well, thank you very much and tell Sam I said, hello.

Marilyn Fox: I will.