

An Interview with
Barbara Fraser

at *The* Historical Society of Missouri St. Louis
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Oral History Program

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PREFACE

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

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

Blanche Touhill: Introduce yourself.

Barbara Fraser: I'm Barbara Wall Fraser and I'm delighted to be here. Thank you.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, I'm glad you're here. Talk about your childhood, Barbara: your parents; your grandparents; the kids in the neighborhood; how did you play, and who in that circle, that intimate circle said to you, "Barbara, you have ability and what is it that you want to do"?

Barbara Fraser: Well, I grew up in a very loving family. I had three older sisters and Mother and Daddy and they were extremely nurturing and I think, because I was the fourth child, I never thought for a minute that my life wasn't secure. I really believe that that helped me in later life when it seemed that 99.9% of the world was against me and I would think, I don't really...I had strong roots, and roots is correct. My father was from North Carolina, a little country town, and my mother was from New Orleans, sort of the country slicker married the city very, I'd say, protected person. So I felt that we had a little bit of excitement and culture in our house and we traveled a lot as children. My father was a medical doctor and Mother stayed home and I really feel that I had just a very loving...now, my father was very strict so it wasn't just all roses. You sort of had to tow the line but I had a nice little neighborhood. I had a girlfriend...well, really, a family down the street and her mother, Mrs. Little, was something of a role model in that in 1960, she voted for John F. Kennedy against, I think her husband's wishes and she made it very clear in her household that that was completely all right, that being not in sync with one's spouse in terms of politics was completely okay. And I look back on that because she was a role model in many ways but she truly...I mean, I remember it was sort of a jolt. Our minister, I was an Episcopalian, our minister lived sort of behind in back of us in the church parsonage and, really interestingly, he also I think would have arguments with my very conservative parents about political issues and then, even at the dinner table, we often had discussions, I would say, arguments would go way beyond what they were but we had some energy going at dinnertime. Probably most times we just sat and ate and talked about whatever our day was, but I remember flat out arguments in which I got up from the table and got Encyclopedia Britannica to make my point and, interestingly, some issues Britannica was wrong. In any case, I think that I grew up in a very nurturing, protected environment. I was going to say,

unlike today's children, my friend and I walked down to the creek across the street and behind her house and we played down there for hours and hours and hours and never thought for a minute that we were unsafe. Now, we were probably 10 or 11 or 12 years old but still, I played in the back yard, and Mother did sort of put, like, the big lemonade thing out in the back yard and you didn't go in unless you had to go to the bathroom in the summertime. It was a very fun, I think a very nurturing environment. So in that sense, yes, I guess my family would be something of my mentors. Also, we had a housekeeper who, in the '60s, I think, made a very big point of realizing that she could kind of indoctrinate me and so she did. She was African American and would say things that..."Well, did you see that?" or "Did you notice that on TV?" or just little things. She wasn't in any way out of line but taught me some very progressive ideas.

Blanche Touhill: To be aware.

Barbara Fraser: To be aware, and I will say, my mother, I really have to give her credit for this too: she said to me at an early age, "You're no better than anybody else, but nobody else is any better than you," so it was a very egalitarian value system and education was my father's probably strongest value, and manners, making sure that you were polite to everybody, that you were no better than anybody else. Those were, I think, very strong values.

Blanche Touhill: So your mother and father were together in their approach to raising these children?

Barbara Fraser: Yes, I think Daddy was much more strict and Mother was not.

Blanche Touhill: She could get you to do what she wanted to do, but she approached it in a different way?

Barbara Fraser: A little bit differently, yes.

Blanche Touhill: Did you ever think of being a doctor?

Barbara Fraser: You know, it was funny because, of course, in the 1950's and '60s, I think not many women were doctors. My father respected some women doctors just tremendously. He had huge respect for them, but one woman who was a doctor didn't practice and she didn't even have

children and I think he felt that it was a tremendous amount of education for a position that one would not do. So my choices, as a child, were teacher, nurse and secretary and I think everybody in our family knew that secretary was absolutely out of the question because I wouldn't put my clothes away; I was very messy, so I definitely was not in that realm and my father had great respect for nurses but he felt...we got the message very early on that many doctors did not have respect for nurses. So he probably encouraged us to be a teacher but, in fact...and all four of the daughters, all four of us became teachers. We all got married two years after working on our own, and certainly that was not purposeful but it's sort of the way it worked.

Blanche Touhill: It was the way.

Barbara Fraser: We graduated from college, we worked for two years and then we got married.

Blanche Touhill: You saved a little money and then you...

Barbara Fraser: Yeah, and we got married. We were on our own. We lived independently from our parents.

Blanche Touhill: But did you live independently before you got married?

Barbara Fraser: Absolutely.

Blanche Touhill: You did?

Barbara Fraser: All of us did, yes.

Blanche Touhill: Did you live together?

Barbara Fraser: No, I have a sister who's 10 years older than me and actually born on the same day I was so I was, like, her 10th birthday and then another sister is 8 years older and another one who's 2 years older. So none of us...we're sort of two families in many ways as well. My parents were better off. When I was in the 10th grade we traveled to Europe on this big...you know, seeing 15 countries in 45 days and even as children then, my father was huge on travel so when I was seven, 1955, so turning eight, we traveled to Mexico for about six weeks. We drove there from North Carolina down to Mexico City and then two years later, we went to Canada. We never passed the Mississippi River but we traveled all of

North Carolina and then we had a vacation every year. I say that because my mother had always had vacations and when I was quite old, I asked my father, "So, where did you go on your vacations in the summertime?" and he was a farmer. He looked at me...and worked his way into med school, though I think he came from entrepreneurial parents or a father who had a store and a mill and all sorts of things...but he said, "We never took vacations" and I remember thinking, I never knew.

Blanche Touhill: I don't think people took vacations in your father and mother's...well, your mother took vacations.

Barbara Fraser: Well, mother did.

Blanche Touhill: But your father's generation...I think even your mother's experience was very rare.

Barbara Fraser: I think you're right but being from New Orleans, they left the heat and went to Wisconsin and I think they went to one of these camp cabin places. I am descendent from a woman who had five sisters, so six women and then I was one of four women and then my daughters are one of two. Now it's up to them to provide males and they have. They both had boys, grandchildren.

Blanche Touhill: When you went to elementary and secondary school, were you a leader? Did you play music? Did you do performances? Was there any teacher or religious leader who said, "Barbara, you have ability. Just keep going"?

Barbara Fraser: I think I had fire even then, in my belly. I was trying to think if I was anything in the 6th grade. I don't know that I...we had student council and very likely I was on the student council. I feel quite sure of that, and I will tell you, in the 4th grade, we went to the state legislative building in Raleigh, North Carolina and I wanted to be on the floor of that legislature. I really did.

Blanche Touhill: Did you?

Barbara Fraser: I did, but I think I wanted to be a page. I'm trying not to look at that with too much detail because the very smartest children in Raleigh, in elementary school were able to be pages for the legislature and so I think that's what I wanted but I really was taken in. I wanted to be on the floor.

Blanche Touhill: Isn't that wonderful.

Barbara Fraser: Isn't that interesting?

Blanche Touhill: It is fascinating, yes.

Barbara Fraser: Then I got to be. Actually, this reflection has made me realize that I leaned towards the political realm. In 7th grade, I was a cheerleader and though that's not politics, in that day it was really a leadership position because, really, it was the only thing girls could do, to be honest. In 7th grade, we didn't have majorettes. So it was one of the leadership positions. In 8th grade, I was secretary of the student council, which, in junior high, I don't know how many kids are there but it's quite a large...

Blanche Touhill: Because the boys are always the president.

Barbara Fraser: Right, of course, and then 8th and 9th grade...well, 9th grade, I guess, I was cheerleader again and then, I believe in high school, I know I was a cheerleader for at least one year and I was trying to remember whether I'd been one for two but I was business manager of the year book and head of the traffic committee and I was very active and I think I was consistently, in the three years of high school, I was consistently a student council representative. My sister who was two years older than me and I were in the same school for a short period of time and she was sort of the beauty queen person. She is very smart, she's very talented, but I realized that I, even at that point, was probably moving towards government, not beauty. It's interesting because I sort of thought, well, yeah, I kept wanting to be a mover and shaker in a different way and she was...everybody adored her.

Blanche Touhill: You know, that's very interesting because when I went to high school, I went to a very large high school; it had 2800 kids and when I came to high school, I thought, well, I can do this and I can do that and I realized in high school people were better singers than I was and dancers than I was. They didn't have athletics in those days.

Barbara Fraser: No, they didn't.

Blanche Touhill: But I realized that I was smart and that I got along with people very well and I began to focus on those two attributes that I had and that's what you're saying: you got to high school and you saw that your strength was in socialization. People trusted you?

- Barbara Fraser: Yes, they did.
- Blanche Touhill: And they had you as their representative and they felt confident that you would listen to what they had to say and that you would be efficient and I think that middle school/high school, it's very fundamental.
- Barbara Fraser: It is, and I would say that we had many student council reps because I also...
- Blanche Touhill: I know, but never...
- Barbara Fraser: ...went to a school that had...I think we had about 850 people in our class and it had only three grades so it was 2400 people.
- Blanche Touhill: So you had a comparable kind of experience.
- Barbara Fraser: And it's still a great high school. That particular school system did some brilliant things early on and in terms of integration, they also did things very, very well and I don't think we realized how talented those leaders were.
- Blanche Touhill: Was it a segregated school in those days?
- Barbara Fraser: It was a segregated school until junior high and then in junior high, there were five African American students who went to our junior high and I just went to my 50th high school reunion and one of those five people...I think three or four of them were women, and the woman who remained, she said, "I was determined to graduate from Needham Broughton High School." Her father was an NAACP, they chose five students who they thought could do it and that young woman did do it and she graduated and she recounted her story. I mean, obviously we were all, "Oh, how terrible." I mean, it was hard for her but she said when she was in high school, it got much better because there were kids who were friendly and she said...and this is true...that it seemed that most people ignored her and I would think that would be accurate. I remember thinking, oh, where is she? And we weren't in the same classes but it was a hard time and it was a time that is shameful but I would say the leaders of that school system figured it out and so the Wate County Schools evidently are, to this day, remarkable in not developing an African American high school again and a white high school, that their ratios are very...Broughton High School has 20% African American, 20% Asian and

other, and 60% Caucasian basically, students and it's one of the top high schools in the State of North Carolina and it looks no different from University City High School, built in the '30s and yet, U City's story is quite different.

Blanche Touhill: Quite different, yeah.

Barbara Fraser: In any case, so, yes, those early lessons though about...and I had a favorite teacher, I loved my history teacher, Miss Akin.

Blanche Touhill: Did she encourage you?

Barbara Fraser: Yes, she saw something there but I think I was developing also a real sort of understanding of political issues. I was from parents who were very conservative. I wrote a paper on socialized medicine which I'm sure my father would have absolutely banned from the...and I'm not so sure what position I took, quite honestly, but...I actually had a piece of legislation about healthcare...

Blanche Touhill: Later on.

Barbara Fraser: Yes, later on but I would say that the influences were contradictory. A lot was going on in 1963, '4 and '5 and I graduated in '65.

Blanche Touhill: And that's Vietnam.

Barbara Fraser: It was but I don't think we sort of realized it until I was a freshman in college.

Blanche Touhill: Where did you go to college?

Barbara Fraser: I went to two colleges, and I always say, around that, I have a checkered college career and my checkered college career, the first two years of my college were a junior college called St. Mary's Junior College, and at that time, women had to go to a junior college if they were going to be liberal arts majors at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and they had just changed the policy, in fact, about '65, but I was clearly not one of the 100 women who got to go as liberal arts students. Physical therapist and science people...but liberal arts, you went to a junior college and then you got in as a junior to UNC. So I went to this junior college and it was quite a bit not my thing. I'd been a leader; I'd been really in charge of so many things in high school and I sort of fell into a crack of a sort and it

was social, girls talked about who they were dating and fraternities and I wasn't there. I don't know where I was but I wasn't there and so, interestingly, I didn't do well.

Blanche Touhill: It wasn't a good fit.

Barbara Fraser: It was a terrible fit and so I kind of lost the opportunity to go to UNC and I went to Meredith College which is a women's college. It's still a great, strong women's college and I found myself and then we were active in politics and I had a professor who...Dr. Parimore really pushed and just was a tremendous influence. I had some women friends who were strong women and were clearly on the feminist and anti-Vietnam War and pro civil rights. Anyway, then after my first semester...and I did very well...my father, who would be the right person to have said this...he said, "Oh, I talked to the people at UNC. Why don't you apply now?" I didn't apply to go as a junior. He said, "You can apply now and I know you'll get in," and he did the physical, eye, ear, nose and throat exams for the other part of the system, North Carolina State and he always did it free and so he knew people. Anyway, the bottom line is, I probably would have applied and gotten in and my three sisters went to UNC and I said, "No, I'm going to stay at Meredith." I said, "I'm winning here. This is a successful accommodation. I need to be where I am," and so I did and that college did make a huge difference in my life. I mean, it inspired me. I had role models.

Blanche Touhill: Do you believe in women's colleges?

Barbara Fraser: You know, I would say that they are...

Blanche Touhill: For you it was wonderful.

Barbara Fraser: For me, it was perfect. I don't know because...you know, that's a good question. I think that, interestingly, in later life, I taught for 22 years, history to high school students and I was teaching at Mary Institute and Country Day School for about 14 years of my teaching career. Mary Institute was a women's school, it was a girls' school. I felt very fortunate to have that job and that wasn't why but I always felt that once we coordinated the boys with the girls, that it was 100% better for the boys, to be in school with girls, but it wasn't 100% better for the girls to have the boys and I still believe that. I think the girls benefitted from that single sex opportunity. But on the other hand, I do think the mixed

education is very helpful and good. So I would say I believe in co-ed education but I think it's nice that it's a valuable opportunity. I don't think we should get rid of those schools out there.

Blanche Touhill: And there are some people who really do like a single sex experience, aren't there?

Barbara Fraser: And I certainly had no trouble with social activities so I went out throughout my college career and I had no problem with that aspect and it was really probably very good that I wasn't looking over my shoulder and could concentrate on the things that really mattered to me. So for Barbara, that was the best. I made the right choice.

Blanche Touhill: So when you graduated, did you go immediately to teaching?

Barbara Fraser: I did. A long story, but the summer before my senior year, I sort of picked up my bags, I met someone at a wedding who said, "Oh, I know somebody who can get you a job in upstate New York, in Alexandria Bay, New York" and I worked there as a waitress in a resort and then that connection made me want to go up north, you know, a Southern girl goes up north and probably New York City would have been way too hard, especially for teaching but I had a friend who was from Rochester and she connected me to some folks and I taught in upstate New York for two years and so I taught there and then I got married in North Carolina and my spouse and I traveled in Europe for a year. We had saved a little money and got married and went to Europe for a year.

Blanche Touhill: And what did he do?

Barbara Fraser: He was an architect.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, well, then, he would love to go to Europe, wouldn't he?

Barbara Fraser: Yeah, and he had been many times before and so we were relatively savvy and he had family there and so we managed to do that for a year. Then ultimately I went to grad school and then he went to grad school here in St. Louis and so we landed in St. Louis. We went away for a year. He wanted to be a professor and so he did, he taught in Ohio for a year and then we were invited back to St. Louis and we were so excited. Then we realized that we had to worry about schools because we had a child by then and so it was a really shocking sort of realization, that the St.

Louis we'd enjoyed as unfettered teacher and future professor, it was a different St. Louis. But nonetheless, we managed and I moved into my current neighborhood in University Hills, University City and I really wanted to belong. I really realized that roots mattered and so I became a trustee. That was the beginning of my political career and I was teaching, I taught at Francis (Howland?) and Mary Institute but I became a trustee in my neighborhood and then school board member because when my daughter...I had two by then, but when my daughter entered 1st grade, a decision was made to increase the number of children in 1st grade, so to eliminate the over crowing in the 5th grade and I felt that that was just a terrible decision so I ran for school board and I won.

Blanche Touhill: Were you able to change it?

Barbara Fraser: Oh, yes, primary grades in U City have to have, I think it's 22 to 1 and we worked together, all the elementary schools got on board and, really, I attribute all to the PTO chairman who really did that.

Blanche Touhill: What was considered elementary school, kindergarten through 5th grade or what?

Barbara Fraser: Yes, because there became a 6th grade center and then middle school, 7th and 8th grade, so yes.

Blanche Touhill: So you really got to know the neighborhood?

Barbara Fraser: I did. You know, you look back and you see the line of trustee of neighborhood so you have connections there and then school board member and your connections are broader and then I really had stopped being involved in politics and concentrating on other things and then I had the opportunity to run for state representative.

Blanche Touhill: How did that come about?

Barbara Fraser: Well, thanks for asking. I love this story. I was single by then, I was divorced...

Blanche Touhill: And you had how many children?

Barbara Fraser: And I had two children and I think my daughters were about 13 and 17, I guess it would be. Actually, they were a little older than that, come to think of it, but, yeah, I was single for quite a while because it was...it

doesn't matter but five or six years because it was 1997 and so the point is, I was single and this guy friend of mine asked me...he really leans Republican but he knew that Bill Clinton was coming, President Clinton was coming to endorse Jay Nixon, our current governor, who was running for U.S. Senate and so I was invited by Joe who knew I loved politics, to go to that event. It was, like, \$500 a person. I mean, there's no way, had I been married, that I would have ever been in the situation, but I saw Bill Clinton, shook his hand, had my picture taken, but more importantly, I saw my current representative who was Sue (Shearer?) and I bumped into Sue and I said...I knew her from the school board days but only as Representative Shearer. I didn't really know her first name...anyway, Representative Shearer, "What are you doing next year?" and it had turned out she had decided not to run again and she said, "Oh, well, why don't you run?" and so we agreed to talk with one another and then the joke was, of course, that she said that to probably dozens of people but I took it seriously. I thought, yes, I've always wanted to do this. And so I took her up on it. I called her and I met with four women who grilled me about my politics several weeks later and I called them the "wise old women" and then I realized that some of those women were younger than me, so I had to change it to the "wise women." But those four women became my mentors.

Blanche Touhill: And who were the four women?

Barbara Fraser: Well, I think it's fair enough to say. One was Betty Van Uum and Margaret Donnelly and Harriet Woods and Vivian Eveloff and they four really helped me become a candidate for state representative with their advice and good words.

Blanche Touhill: Isn't it hard to really build a support group?

Barbara Fraser: It is but I had my connections already. I had their support and I also had...

Blanche Touhill: Because they had fostered Sue.

Barbara Fraser: Yes, and so some more than others. I mean, some really were very subtle in their support but I got a lot of good advice and they were very helpful and it was quite a different campaign from running for school board but I'd run for school board four times so I had some political...I thought I knew what I was doing. Well, I really had a lot to learn and did.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah, but you had a base of knowledge.

Barbara Fraser: I did.

Blanche Touhill: So you go up to replace Sue, which was quite a job.

Barbara Fraser: It was, and she later endorsed me and so that was very helpful. There was a three-way primary. I won it by 80 votes and it was really a great...and I laughed because I thought...you know, you take what you've got and the Republican woman running against me was very, very wealthy. She was connected to owner of the Cardinals and so she had lots of money personally and her friend had lots of money personally as well and I had none of those connections. I had just been a hard working teacher and I joined maybe one or two other volunteer organizations but they were nothing...I mean, they were good organizations but she had a whole long list of Woman of the Year and all sorts of things. But it was interesting because I had about four or five guy friends and friends in every sense of the word and one of them was from Overland; one of them was from Clayton and knew every single person in Clayton. I mean, he still lives in Clayton and still is Mr. Chamber of Commerce; and one of them was from all of that area, and so I had a connection with the voters and they knew people. They were kind of like Mrs. Smith: "This is my friend, Barbara and she's running for office" and I worked hard. I worked really, really hard.

Blanche Touhill: Did you go door-to-door?

Barbara Fraser: Oh, absolutely, door-to-door and often these guys, who were single guys as well, had nothing to do on Monday night or Tuesday, whichever night it was they were assigned to me, they helped me out and it was kind of fun. So you take what you've got. And so I was very fortunate. It was a great time.

Blanche Touhill: Did you have to borrow money to run?

Barbara Fraser: No, but I didn't give much of my own money. I raised, I think it was, \$100,000 ultimately and that was a huge amount of money; it was a huge amount of money at the time.

Blanche Touhill: How was it when you went to the state legislature for the first time?

Barbara Fraser: It was fabulous. I loved it, I absolutely loved being a state representative. I think that the issues...and interestingly, Blanche, when I was a state representative, the Democrats were in control in the House, Senate and governor and then the next two years, we lost the Senate and then two years later, we lost the House, and then two years later, it was Matt Blunt and the House and Senate were both Republican and so I got to see a huge change. Had it been my dream, it would have gone in reverse because I was a much better legislator the last four years, when we barely had any power, than I was the first four because you learn so much.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, you learn, but you were term limited.

Barbara Fraser: I was term limited, yes.

Blanche Touhill: I know that you worked on a higher education commission to see about inequities in education. I know you were the chair of that group and it was an interesting experience for us all, wasn't it?

Barbara Fraser: Yes, and I had no idea of the depth of the repercussions that would follow but I will say, I attribute people like you for educating me and, of course, the university here, for educating me about the incredible inequity in funding among the colleges of the University of Missouri and there was a man from southern...

Blanche Touhill: ...or southern, he was from Joplin...

Barbara Fraser: Yeah, it was Joplin, but he had realized...and he's a Republican...that Joplin was getting almost no money in comparison with others. I mean, some were getting \$10,000, some were getting \$5,000 but these were all University of Missouri systems, public universities in Missouri and it was a very bipartisan effort. In any case, we went around the state, we listened to testimony. It was fascinating and yet, when we got to the University of Missouri-St. Louis, it was the last one and I didn't realize how angry the university president would be over the fact that it was coming to light that UMSL was not funded. I had no idea and we asked very pointed questions but they were not...they were the right questions, like, "Why is this happening? Why are you averaging the amount that the different universities are getting? It's not an average. One school is getting \$5,000 and another is getting \$12,000 per student" and so...

Blanche Touhill: Yes, that was the key question.

Barbara Fraser: That was the key question and it was horrendous, the answers. So we grilled you and you answered honestly and the rest was not necessarily the consequence but it came out and then Senator Wayne Goode had the power and the connections in the Senate to really change that. But our report, amazingly, was banned by the education committee leader. It was an interim committee. I was the chair of that but, amazingly, the report, once finished, was supposedly tossed. Well, of course, we made all kinds of copies and it was probably the best read interim report ever. I was on many interim committees...

Blanche Touhill: You know what? You're right because it became famous, didn't it?

Barbara Fraser: Yes, it did and every chancellor after that, and even the president, I have managed to find a copy to give them.

Blanche Touhill: But, you know, I think everything in that document...not maybe everything...but most things were eventually passed by the legislature.

Barbara Fraser: Yes, most things were taken care of. It became equitable.

Blanche Touhill: What that document did was change the attitude of the people in the legislature.

Barbara Fraser: Yes, and it was Republican and Democratic. They realized that some of these smaller schools out state had every right, if they're universities, have every right to be funded. So that was a good thing.

Blanche Touhill: What else did you do when you were in the legislature that you're very proud of?

Barbara Fraser: Thank you. There are several things I did, I will say. Probably the most significant thing was the children's health insurance program...bill, and we reauthorized that and it is a program, of course, that provided health insurance for children just beyond the level of poverty. It was a Clinton issue and Missouri was into it and we reauthorized it which made it available for literally thousands of children and it's a wonderful piece of legislation. In any case, I have to say several things about it, but most importantly, I led that. I was given the bill by the governor so it was my issue and we wanted it to go through the House of Representatives clean because we knew that the anti-abortion advocates would be ready. Any

time you say the word "child," you can add stuff. So we had to keep it clean. I had my votes. I was okay on that but then in the Senate. There was a Republican guy who we really had to make sure would support the bill and he did. It's so funny because his name actually was Marvin Singleton and he was sort of a moderate Republican and had hoped to be involved in the Bush White House and ultimately, after he retired, and of course they didn't want a moderate. So I don't know what he's doing now but much to his dismay, I thought of him as sort of a father figure. He was a doctor and he was older and I don't know how much older but I think that when I lobbied him, my feminine wiles were what he was probably more interested in. I took him to dinner...I mean, he was married. I won't say there wasn't...anyway, but I will say that...

Blanche Touhill: You smiled at him.

Barbara Fraser: I smiled at him and he was a very kind old gentleman. And so we went to dinner and he promised that he would get it through the Senate without the amendments and he was relatively pro-choice...

Blanche Touhill: And he lived up to his...

Barbara Fraser: ...and he lived up to it, so good for him because he had some obviously Republican flash about him, negative, but we got that through and that's when...in fact, it almost works because you have a Republican Senate and a Democratic House and so we all had to work with each other. We all had to sometimes make compromises but we all had to work. Now, the way I got that legislation, because this was a really big deal piece of legislation, is because I had had...basically getting rid of the statute of limitations on rape cases piece of legislation. The Eastern District courts were not consistent with the Western District court. The Western District had had a rape case that they could go and pick up other cases. Well, the boys took over my bill. It was my bill. Nobody had ever thought of this bill until...I mean, I say that but it was a unique bill and I had filed it, I had pushed it, it was moving fast and there were lawyers from Kansas City and probably St. Louis as well who were like, "Oh, this is a great piece of legislation." Of course it was. And so they grabbed it from me basically. It was my legislation. I still get credit for it but the bottom line is, they carried it through and so when I protested, the governor said, "Oh, well, you're a strong leader. You take this one," and so I did and I think it passed partly because of me, the CHIP Bill and the other one passed as

well. So we were in good shape. Another thing that I did and I'm very proud of in the legislature is Domestic Violence Prevention Legislation. I did another interim committee and it was an extremely well run interim committee. I wasn't the chair of that one and I learned so much about the issues of domestic violence and how backward the courts were in regard to that. So we changed many, many laws, didn't get everything passed but a huge change in what would be considered a safer net for victims of domestic violence.

Blanche Touhill: So you accomplished what you wanted to?

Barbara Fraser: Oh, no. I would have loved to have gone on and on and worked hard on many issues. There were many things that I...corporal punishment in schools, we still have half the schools in the state can spank kids and there are lots of other issues I would have been happy to work on.

Blanche Touhill: But you accomplished what...

Barbara Fraser: But I accomplished things that I think I did make a difference. I do feel very proud of that and I worked with the Republicans when I had to and I got things done and I had other legislation that passed but basically those are the highlights. And then after I was out of the legislature, I ran for County Council in St. Louis County.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, and you won.

Barbara Fraser: And I won and that was a tough race. All my races were tough. I mean, someone asked me, I think it was my daughter, said, "Could you just run once and not have any opposition?" Anyway, but as it turned out, I actually did have a free go a couple of times in the legislature. But I ran and won, close race, very well loved Republican I was running against and his big issue was smoking ban legislation.

Blanche Touhill: He wanted it?

Barbara Fraser: And he wanted it, yes, and so when I ran...

Blanche Touhill: But you ran...

Barbara Fraser: I ran on it because I realized that...and it just shows you, I mean, remember, Blanche, I grew up in North Carolina, tobacco state. I mean, my great grandfather had a tobacco farm so there's no doubt that

this...quite honestly, until you become educated about issues, you really don't know the dangers. So nonetheless...anyway, so I took his issue too. I thought, I agree with you. I learned a little bit about it as a state legislator. I certainly wasn't out in front of it though until I realized, I have to take this...if I'm going to do this, I'm going to do it. And so I said, "I will pass smoking ban legislation" and upon winning that particular election, I knew that...I mean, I've never made a promise because who knows what your legislative other people are going to do. But I knew I had to do that and about a year passed by and I thought, okay, it's time to start working. Clayton had been working on their own little ban in the town of Clayton. Well, that's completely ineffective when you have an entire metropolitan area that needs to be consistent. I mean, it's a series of just coincidences, but of all the legislation I have passed, I will say that one piece was a piece that needed me and it doesn't sound modest and it's probably not but that legislation I handled and had the right connections that made it work and I don't think it would have passed without me.

Blanche Touhill: The man you ran against, did he help you in that at all?

Barbara Fraser: After we wrote the legislation, I called him up and said, "What do you think?"...I mean, after it was basically we were working on some final amendment and he gave me his opinion but he actually wanted...we had left the airport, because it's owned by the city, really, we'd sort of left that out of our county legislation and he wanted it in because the county and the city have an interesting relationship with the airport. So ultimately he was super supportive except for that and that sort of colored his approach to it. But ultimately, he certainly didn't fight me but I did not include him. He would not have wanted to be included.

Blanche Touhill: Okay, he would not have wanted to.

Barbara Fraser: No.

Blanche Touhill: It was his issue then?

Barbara Fraser: It was his issue but, quite frankly, he went on to a very lucrative judgeship and so I think he was really happy but I think he wanted to just sort of stay out of politics.

Blanche Touhill: And there's truth to that. They are supposed to stay out of politics.

Barbara Fraser: Yeah, but we had four people on the County Council...well, we had seven people but four of us were Democrats and then a fifth Democrat was elected after the second...I was in for two years and it was great because the two Republicans were mildly in favor of no smoking. One of them had said, "Oh, it has to be a referendum. We have to have everybody vote on it" and someone had died and so that Republican, Greg Quinn and I, were at this funeral and he was bragging to me that Ballwin had a smoking ban and I said, "Well, Greg, we could do this." There's an election...I don't know the date now but it was November, let's say 7th, "and there's an election that's already paid for by the county so we could put that on the ballot without any cost to the anti-smoking people." So it turned out, I got it through the County Council and it was four votes, two Democrats and two Republicans. It was completely bipartisan. The fourth vote was the current county executive and he felt very tied to the small bars in South County and so we made that exception. It was not a problem, 98% of the restaurants and places that one would eat or drink in St. Louis County are smoke-free. Now, I certainly hope we pick up that extra little batch but...

Blanche Touhill: Well, I think in time you will.

Barbara Fraser: I think we will too. I think they'll go no-smoking on their own and, frankly, what was so cool is then we did the referendum and the referendum in the county, the City of St. Louis said if St. Louis County passes it, St. Louis City, they made their vote contingent on us. So by doing this, which was brilliant, by doing this, everybody in the St. Louis County/City region is smoke-free and that I do believe...I know that I had the right pieces and connected them and we fought really against that current county executive because he was trying very hard to get his two votes sort of to knock it out of the park but we literally...I mean, I had three lawyers...I'm not a lawyer but the other three people were and they all saw the health and validity of it. I learned so much.

Blanche Touhill: Was your father alive at that time?

Barbara Fraser: No, and maybe just as well. I mean, he did smoke all his life. It's partly...

Blanche Touhill: Yes, but I think a lot of doctors smoked but they knew...

Barbara Fraser: Yeah, that it wasn't healthy. Well, in fact, it's a funny story but I'll tell it: My daughter got married. She got married in August so I'm thinking

now...anyway, there was a lot going on in the press about the smoking ban...

Blanche Touhill: There was, yes.

Barbara Fraser: ...and I had signs all over my house so that I would have the talking points in case I picked up the phone in one room or the other and so after my daughter's wedding, my North Carolina, the sister who's two years older than me, came in and, you know, if you have sisters, you know that there's a sort of one-upmanship that can occur, not often but it's there. And, of course, I'm thinking, my sisters are all from the tobacco state. That particular sister still lives there. So, I had taken down all the signs because she was spending the night after she had stayed in a hotel after the wedding. And so I had everything, of course, immaculate anyway but definitely all this smoking...well, at some point, I looked up in the breakfast room and there is a sign that goes, "Smoking is unhealthy and here's the data" and I'm like, oh, no, and I said, "We're working on the smoking legislation" and she said, "Well, North Carolina's had a piece of legislation against smoking for years." And I was so worried and she one upped me, "We've already got that." So I thought, that's great. I just thought, there we go. So it was good. It is.

Blanche Touhill: So then what did you do?

Barbara Fraser: Well, that's interesting. I ran for the Missouri State Senate and I was unsuccessful in that quest by literally, I will say, 126 votes out of 60,000 so it was .03%, I think. And so it was really, like, 3,000% in terms of the voting. I love it. My daughter said, "Well, you know, nobody's died" and that's true. I mean, somebody's got to win; somebody's got to lose and I won that first election by 80 votes, quite different, it was out of about 6,000. It was a bigger margin, but truthfully, you lose, you lose. So then I took a year off and really did some traveling with my current spouse and just really kind of enjoyed life. And then I taught, in 2012, I got a job teaching in the city schools for a semester and I absolutely loved it and I would have continued but I think I realized that...I mean, I loved doing it and I was very happy to do it. The quantity of time I spent preparing classes and really doing all of the correct work...I mean, I feel that I'm a good teacher and I couldn't compromise that but I was getting about six hours of sleep. That was just a few years ago. I was not a young chicken and I just realized that I was better off not doing that. And so now, a few

years later, I was very supportive of Mr. Stinger and his effort to win the county executive position and I am his education liaison to the county executive.

Blanche Touhill: Now, what do you do?

Barbara Fraser: I basically am his connection to all the school districts in St. Louis County. What I have done since I've had the job for a very short time, I've inventoried every county department and determined what they do for education. So I now know that the spirit of St. Louis Airport has a STEM Fair to which they invite all the county schools and it's a day, basically science fair and every department. I mean, who knew that every department has an education piece. Some of it's just an intern and so I know what the county does and now I'm going to the different school districts and interviewing and observing, speaking with the superintendents about what we can do, how we can help. Our connections in St. Louis County are not strong with education but a lot of the human services and the health and the parks...many, many, many aspects of our county are involved in education.

Blanche Touhill: Now, I know in the city, the mayor does not control the schools.

Barbara Fraser: And we don't either.

Blanche Touhill: And you don't either?

Barbara Fraser: We have nothing, control-wise, to do but we offer many services.

Blanche Touhill: Okay. Well, is that normal, where the local political leader doesn't have any board or influence in the schools?

Barbara Fraser: I don't know. I know it's typical here in Missouri and I think that often there are two political subdivisions that are different, but I would imagine that some states have it better organized than others. We, of course, haven't really...terrible situation in terms of 22 different school districts and so we've allowed four or five of those school districts to fall, I would say, and they're on their own. They have their own school board; they have their own everything. I will give you the contrasting example, which I've just observed in my home city and by having the whole county, you have the poor schools and the rich schools and those poor schools and rich schools are still there but by the time you get them in high school,

you can manipulate systems to make it so that there's not an all poor high school and an all wealthy high school.

Blanche Touhill: I know you have two girls. Do you want to talk about your children?

Barbara Fraser: I'm delighted to talk about them. They are wonderful young women. My younger daughter, we all have to make fun of her but we say she's a corporate exec in New York City.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, that is a fast track.

Barbara Fraser: Yes, and she's very fast track but interestingly, she is married and they live in St. Louis. They moved here for a variety of reasons but obviously living in the middle of New York City with twins originally, and then she's just recently had the third child, was extremely hard and the cool thing, though, is that she has figured out a way to have the most fabulous nanny in the whole wide world and the nanny comes at 7:30 and leaves about 5:30 though. She's a woman from St. Louis and Madeline goes to New York on Tuesday morning and returns on Thursday evening and so she probably does about 60 hours of work because we have this tendency, we all say it's a Wahl trait and it is a Wahl trait but, in fact, we work hard a lot. And so she is very dynamic and her husband is absolutely wonderful because, of course, he is responsible Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings to get the twins and the baby to bed. But she's managing. But I'm going to talk about childcare in just a minute. The other daughter is a social worker. She's my older daughter. She graduated from George Warren Brown, fabulous school, she has wonderful credentials. She had a child four years ago and decided not to return to work because, as a social worker, she figured out she'd make about ten cents after getting there, going to work and not being able to be in charge of her child's life. So both children have fabulous childcare for their children. But interestingly, I am now on a task force with my job in the education liaison ship. One thing I've done when I've interviewed these school districts is ask about early childhood education and I get to say I learned about early childhood education and hear how those little pieces connect and you don't even know it.

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Barbara Fraser: But, first of all, I worked for about a year when my second child was born. I worked when my first one...when I was in St. Louis at Francis Hall School

District and then I took time off when number two was born, for nine months, went back to work at nine months and then worked for nine months and realized that my life was crazy. I was commuting 25 miles to St. Charles County and back. I was never seeing the older child. I just felt like...there would be 75 balls in the air. So I stopped working but I volunteered at the Clayton Early Childhood Center and was sort of like a lifeguard for open times. It's a big room that all these toys and things were in and parents could come and just be with their children. Well, I did that and I ultimately became a volunteer and then Clayton Early Childhood Center, the Clayton School District, hired me as an aide and so I made \$4 an hour for eight hours, every two weeks, \$32 and yet they treated me as a full-time staff member so I had to go to faculty meetings of the early childhood crowd on Fridays and, of course, the big faculty meetings once or twice a year for Clayton. And power to them that they treated the least of them as an equal. Anyway, I learned. They indoctrinated me on early childhood education. So when I was a school board member in University City, guess what? I advocated for early childhood education and we got the Julia Goldstein Center shortly after I had left the board. But that was something I fought for that we actually...they realized was important and we got it in U City. So I certainly had a piece in that scene. But all the way around, here I am in the county, I'm on an early childhood task force and I've collected this information from the different school districts and I'm also very well aware that we have a childcare crisis in this country, and finally, business is realizing that early childhood education is the best thing you can do for the future of our nation, really, and it's a \$1 to \$7 advantage and just as a quick example, Quebec, Canada has taken the lessons of the United States which we have not followed through and have realized that they are doing...early childhood education, they have the lowest unemployment in Canada, their province, because women don't have to worry about childcare because they have the early childhood opportunities. Those children are now 16 and business is studying this model but there's less unemployment and, of course, these 16-year-old children, statistically, they finish school, they go to college, there's less crime, less smoking, less pregnancy. There's this huge result from early childhood education. So I'm hoping, in my county tax force activity, I can push this county to working towards helping school districts with the early childhood piece, making it free. Hancock Place School District, a

little tiny school district in South County has free early childhood education. So in 17 years, it will be very interesting to see how those children compare to children of poverty in other districts. So there.

Blanche Touhill: Why did Hancock implement it?

Barbara Fraser: I think they realized the advantage of it. I haven't delved into that question but I would say they understand that that keeps children in school and it keeps children focused. They learn social skills; they learn how to communicate, what business is now calling the soft skills. And I'm going to go back because you asked me earlier what do I want to also add, but I think it is those soft skills that I learned perhaps as a member of a four-children family and maybe at the dinner table conversations. But I think I've learned not only communication opportunities, but also socialization skills and I think that's been very helpful throughout my life.

Blanche Touhill: But there's another aspect to your personality and that is you're an activist. A lot of people are dedicated to education and they teach and you've done that, but the other quality that you have, if it's not right, you become an activist to change it.

Barbara Fraser: Thank you. I believe that, I do believe that we, as human beings, can make a difference. It's funny because I was sort of thinking of my basic attitude about life. I mean, I had a very unfettered childhood. I certainly would say my adulthood has been more fettered, more problems up and down, but, hands down, that wonderful, strong childhood, I think, gave me the strength to be...and even now, I have a very positive attitude about people. I do believe that most people are trying to do their best and trying to do good and I think we want good things to happen and consequently, I want to be their advocate, if they're not doing anything, so that we can move forward and really make a difference and make things better. I mean, sometimes making things better might mean keeping it the same but...

Blanche Touhill: No, I understand that.

Barbara Fraser: ...but I do believe that we can make change, that we, as human beings, can influence an outcome.

Blanche Touhill: As an adult, who has been so supportive of you?

- Barbara Fraser: Those four women, I would say, and of course, Harriet Woods is deceased but they've always been supportive in political ways.
- Blanche Touhill: And they were activists, weren't they?
- Barbara Fraser: They were activists, yes, long before I was involved in their lives but I would say also I have a very strong spiritual core that I'm very glad to have. In my adult life, my children, in spite of themselves...because they are still kids in many ways...but I think they have been very positive and very supportive and I guess good friends.
- Blanche Touhill: If you had been born 50 years earlier, where would...
- Barbara Fraser: Well, I would have been 68 in 1965 because I just went to my...and so 68 now, I'm 68 now so I thought about that because we thought the world was our oyster in 1965, as 18-year-olds and it was, the American century and...
- Blanche Touhill: But not if you were 68 years old.
- Barbara Fraser: But not if I was 68 because I would have been through the World War and I would have also gone through the Depression, so 50 years ago...and it's amazing to think what 50 years from now will be like...but 50 years ago as a 68-year-old, the role model in my head would be my Aunt Audrey...my sister is also Audrey, but Aunt Audrey was in the Women's Waves. She was in the Navy. She's a brilliant lady and I had five aunts. They were all employed. My mother was the only one who, though she worked before she met my father, she then became a housewife in every sense. Well, maybe one other one did too, but basically, out of six women, four of them were working women all their lives and they traveled. And so, I want to be them. They weren't 68 in 1965 but they were old. They were a lot older than...
- Blanche Touhill: They were ahead of their time.
- Barbara Fraser: They were way ahead of their time, but you know what? I think, because they were women of the 1900's, they may have been with their time but just not put down by the return from war, make women go back to their home movement because there was a movement in the '50s to put women back in their home so they wouldn't compete. So these women

were single women, for the most part. I mean, three of my aunts never got married.

Blanche Touhill: Did they go to college?

Barbara Fraser: Oh, yes.

Blanche Touhill: Where did they go to college?

Barbara Fraser: Well, the one that I know of went to Newcomb, Tulane.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, of course. I didn't realize it was that old but it is old. Newcomb is an old women's college...I mean...a traditional women's college.

Barbara Fraser: It's a women's college and it's old.

Blanche Touhill: A traditional women's college, yes.

Barbara Fraser: Yeah. So I had role models of strong women throughout my life.

Blanche Touhill: Did they teach?

Barbara Fraser: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: They taught school?

Barbara Fraser: Some did. One worked for the water board.

Blanche Touhill: Can you mention any award that you're very proud of?

Barbara Fraser: I am. I will mention three awards, maybe more, but one of them was the Hero Award from the University of Missouri-St. Louis for standing up for UMSL in the equity funding scene. Another one was because of the CHIPs Bill, I received an award from a very conservative Cardinal Glennon Hospital Association and it was a huge step for them, to give me that. And then the one that I will mention also is the Pro-vote Award which is sort of an overwhelming award for all the progressive legislation that I'd stood for and fought for and so I'm very proud of that. And then I did get a lot of other awards for education advocacy and I'm proud of those but the top three would be those. So thank you.

Blanche Touhill: Well, thank you very much. It was a wonderful interview and I hope you had an enjoyable hour.

Barbara Fraser: I did, thank you.