

An Interview with  
**Sister Jane Hassett**

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

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interviewed by Dr. Blanche Touhill  
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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: ...and I remember the two classes in one room.
- Sister Jane Hassett: Right. We practically had private tutoring, really.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, we did, yes.
- Sister Jane Hassett: And we had the French sister who came to teach French and we had the art sister who came in to teach art and they all lived up in the upper reaches of this building.
- Blanche Touhill: And I remember the music, everybody...well, I think most people took music because that was one of the reasons we went. We all took the music lessons.
- Sister Jane Hassett: Oh, yes, it was in that house that was connected to the academy buildings and, if you recall Sister Sophie Marie Hunley...
- Blanche Touhill: Yes.
- Sister Jane Hassett: And there were about three or four of those women who were sisters of (Loretto?) and they had that big music store downtown.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, and I always assumed the brothers gave the free music instruments and the sheet music, or at least at a greatly reduced price.
- Sister Jane Hassett: Probably. But, you know, it was a great education. The thing it was really short on was physical education. Other people that I ended up going to college with, they came from these kind of athletic type schools where you played field hockey or (other?) sports.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, the Sacred Heart were very much into that.
- Sister Jane Hassett: Oh, yes. They had basketball and so on.
- Blanche Touhill: But the St. Joseph order in those days was not.
- Sister Jane Hassett: No, but you know, I never had the Sisters of St. Joseph as teachers.
- Blanche Touhill: I had the St. Joseph nuns and the Sacred Heart and the Loretto. I moved around and I also went to the public schools so I had a view of education...

Sister Jane Hassett: You went to school with the publicans.

Blanche Touhill: I did.

Sister Jane Hassett: I remember your aunt, Miss Wallace.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, my aunt, yes, she taught at the school I went to.

Sister Jane Hassett: Right. But in high school even, I stayed there at the academy, I was there 12 years. People say, "It took you 12 years to finish school?" and I say...I was not really dumb. They have the academy, the four years of high school at the same place.

Blanche Touhill: Did they have larger high school classes?

Sister Jane Hassett: Certainly they were larger. I think I had, like, 25 or 30 in my high school class. Then, after being in high school, I really didn't know what I wanted to do. There was a period when I said to my parents, "I don't really want to go to college." My sister then was at Maryville and my father said, "You're going to college and you're going to go to four years of college and you're going to graduate if it has to be over my dead body or yours," and I said, "Yes, Daddy." So, as it got closer to graduation, I was down at Maryville for a number of things, at the Daisy Chain and commencement and so on and I thought, well, this doesn't look too bad. I could probably survive this. And by then I kind of thought that I was interested in history and I had had a very good history teacher in high school. That was her field. She was also the principal of the school. So I went to Maryville and I was so impressed with the Sacred Heart nuns. They were so...though they were newly cloistered and remote, they shook hands with you and I was not accustomed to that and my mother's youngest sister...my mother was the oldest of three. The middle one was a nurse and my mother's youngest sister was a Sister of St. Joseph and I was used to visiting the big convent over there.

Blanche Touhill: On Minnesota?

Sister Jane Hassett: No, the one on...the Cathedral School [inaudible 04:08] lives with the Rosati-Kain people and we'd go to visit once in a while, on Sundays. I was so impressed with this great big old house and you

could slide on the polished floors and so on. So anyway, I enjoyed being at Maryville and we actually went to and from on the Blue Bullet, the school bus. Can you imagine a college with a school bus?

Blanche Touhill: No, I can't, and all you had to do was walk up to Grand Avenue...

Sister Jane Hassett: Not to go all the way down to Maryville, though, but I could have taken a streetcar.

Blanche Touhill: A streetcar, I'm sorry, yes, you could...

Sister Jane Hassett: A streetcar, Grand Avenue streetcar.

Blanche Touhill: Grand Avenue streetcar because we used to take the Grand Avenue streetcar to Loretto from North St. Louis.

Sister Jane Hassett: Right. Transportation was not a problem.

Blanche Touhill: It was easy. No, no, it wasn't, but I didn't know they had a bus.

Sister Jane Hassett: We had a bus and our driver was Lindsay.

Blanche Touhill: Did you go up to Grand or did he come to the house?

Sister Jane Hassett: He came to our door. We would look out our door and look down toward 39<sup>th</sup> Street and when we saw the bus coming, either Mary Ruth or I ran to the phone and called Jackie Windler because they lived on Flora Court and they could not turn the bus around on this tight loop and so we'd call, "Jackie, bus is coming."

Blanche Touhill: And she'd come out?

Sister Jane Hassett: She came down to Grand. She had to cross the street. She was down at Grand and Flora and then we would pick her up and buzz off. We were picked up at twenty minutes of 9:00. No class began before 9:00 o'clock and we left Maryville at twenty after 4:00. Nothing ran past 4:00 o'clock. They used to have Glutei but it was during the war so they cut that out. What a loss.

Blanche Touhill: I loved the Glutei.

- Sister Jane Hassett: Oh, yes, it was fun and people that didn't know anything about Sacred Heart School say, "You're going to what?" I'd say, "It's a little afternoon snack." It's a substitute for afternoon tea.
- Blanche Touhill: So this day I love an afternoon little snack. You stop. Only today I have tea. I have tea and a piece of fruit or a little cookie.
- Sister Jane Hassett: It's so civilized.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, it is, it is.
- Sister Jane Hassett: So civilized. When I was in high school, you're thinking about leadership or that kind of thing. In my neighborhood, I was not a leader in the games because there was only my sister. Then a couple of houses away there were the Williams kids, four boys, one girl. So I played with these boys all the time and I have told people that one of the things we used to do is eat tar off the street.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, I remember that. They would chew it like gum.
- Sister Jane Hassett: Chew it like gum, yes, but you didn't swallow it. My mother thought it was one of the most disgusting things she could think of and said, "Absolutely don't do that." That's when people in dairies milk wagons were pulled by horses. There was good enough reason not to eat tar off the street. It's just disgusting. But, you know, the boys usually led and I kind of followed along and we did stuff like stickball. They had a swing in their back yard so we'd use their swing...and this is when it was preferred that I come to them because she thought she was better [inaudible 07:52] boys than my mother was.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, she was used to it.
- Sister Jane Hassett: She was used to it and we used to play school on the front steps where you moved up and down. I don't remember the rules today.
- Blanche Touhill: I remember though, the steps.
- Sister Jane Hassett: Yes, and we had good front steps for that.
- Blanche Touhill: Did you sit on the front porch at night?

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Sister Jane Hassett: Yes, until our back porch fell off almost so he had it replaced with a screened in downstairs porch which was really nice.

Blanche Touhill: And then did you use that in the evening?

Sister Jane Hassett: Yes, because it was nice in the summer and we'd eat out there and what not. But the other thing is, we also, living in South St. Louis, we had our front steps leading to the porch scrubbed every Saturday.

Blanche Touhill: Were they granite?

Sister Jane Hassett: Stone, they were white stone.

Blanche Touhill: And they used to come down, the scrub man...we had a scrub man too and he would go through the neighborhood and he'd say, "I'm coming on..."...whatever the day was and the women were all home so it didn't really matter. You paid him fifty cents or whatever it was but he would come down the steps and then he would sort of clean the street right in front of your house. He wouldn't scrub it...

Sister Jane Hassett: Sweep it away.

Blanche Touhill: ...sweep it away so that it was really...the steps sparkled and then he came down. Then there were generally other steps that weren't...

Sister Jane Hassett: Yeah. We had...what do they call it...granite [inaudible 09:25] or something, [inaudible 09:26].

Blanche Touhill: Yes, and then it came to the sidewalk and then it came down to the gutter.

Sister Jane Hassett: A little slab to the curb and we had a driveway because we had a garage in the back.

Blanche Touhill: Yes. Well, your father was a doctor.

Sister Jane Hassett: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: It was the war and the Depression but he had to get there.

Sister Jane Hassett: Right, and they made house calls.



- Blanche Touhill: Because they made house calls, that's right.
- Sister Jane Hassett: What is that? Your plumber makes the house calls.
- Blanche Touhill: Not anymore.
- Sister Jane Hassett: Unless you belong to a boutique medical practice.
- Blanche Touhill: I'm not sure they come, I'm not sure.
- Sister Jane Hassett: They're probably a [inaudible 09:59]. But it was a great time to be alive and we did things that now would be considered dangerous. They'd call children or family services. We'd say to my mother, "We're going to bike riding in the park," which meant Tower Grove Park. We'd peddle on over, in the street or on the sidewalk or whatever and we'd ride around in the park and visit the lagoons or ponds, whatever they had over there and in the wintertime, the dangerous thing about the Reservoir Park up the street, there was a pond, it had lilies in it during the good weather and it froze over in the wintertime and you'd take your sled and you went up to the top of the Reservoir hill and come down at that hill and across the park and down into that pond and pray to the good Lord that nothing happened that put you out into Grand Avenue in the traffic.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, you know, we lived in North St. Louis and we used to go to O'Fallon Park to those hills. I wondered if they weren't Indian mounds and we would come down and I remember one time my sister came down, she went across Broadway.
- Sister Jane Hassett: Oh, my God.
- Blanche Touhill: And at that point we packed up our sleds and went home because we were all terrified. My brother was terrified, I was terrified, my sister was terrified.
- Sister Jane Hassett: And you were probably terrified your mother would find out.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, yeah, that's true too but it was just, it was one of those icy days. We never went on Broadway. I mean, you'd come down the hill. Well, now the highway is there so you don't even think about it but every time I'm on that road, I think, oh, I remember the day

that Eileen came down the hill and we did ride the bikes all over the neighborhoods.

Sister Jane Hassett: Sure. People would say you never take any money from a stranger or something like that.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes...no, no, and don't take candy...

Sister Jane Hassett: Yeah, don't take candy or that kind of thing. But it was a simpler time in which to be growing up and it was good. But you know, when you ask me about leadership, when I was in high school, I boldly said...we talked about having a school newspaper...

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes.

Sister Jane Hassett: I said, "Oh, that would be kind of fun. I'd like to be the editor." So there I was.

Blanche Touhill: Were you editor?

Sister Jane Hassett: I became the editor of the paper.

Blanche Touhill: So you were a writer?

Sister Jane Hassett: Yes, I still am. I still write.

Blanche Touhill: At what age did you know you could write?

Sister Jane Hassett: I'm not really sure. I think I was terrifically challenged in 1995 when I was at Fontbonne when they were doing the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, history of Fontbonne and one of the sisters who was an English doctorate and all of that, she said, "Jane, I put in your name to write the history" and I said, "Are you kidding?" I said, "I've written a few articles and I know how to write letters and things like that. I've never written a book" but she said, "There's always a first time" and she said, "You know, you are supposedly in an historian" and so she said, "Why not?" So I said, "Well, if you think I can do it," and what she had in mind...because she was more a philosopher, really, than an English teacher. She liked grammar and rhetoric and things and philosophy. She had in mind what Father Reinert wrote about higher education which was totally philosophical and Jesuit-based and I said, "If that's what you have in mind, that's not for me." I said, "I do history and I deal

with facts and times and progression” and she said, “Fine.” So I did it and I had another one of our English people who read it for me and the one who asked me to write it, she wrote the drafts as I went along and when I write I write everything by hand. It goes from the brain into the hand onto the paper.

Blanche Touhill: And the speed is the same?

Sister Jane Hassett: Oh, yes, and you can go back to scribbles. It’s too annoying to do that on a computer. Cut and paste is fine if you know precisely where you want this cut and where you want it to be pasted. But when you don’t like a phrase or a word, who’s going to go back? Well, maybe some people do but I go back with my ballpoint pen and scratch out.

Blanche Touhill: You know, I write the same way.

Sister Jane Hassett: Do you? Good...two great minds.

Blanche Touhill: Well, that’s the way we learned, I guess, really when you think about it because I can type and I can take shorthand. I’m pretty good but when I go to write...and I think it’s the timing. I think my brain is in sync with the hand and then I go back and...

Sister Jane Hassett: ...re-read it, you say, I can’t believe I said that. That sounds so dumb.

Blanche Touhill: So you did the 75-year history?

Sister Jane Hassett: I did and then I wrote a little follow-up, when...whatever they call it...North Central now...I did a 10-year follow-up, just to bring it up to date. So I had those two to write, credit and when I was in college...

Blanche Touhill: Going back to the writing, I think writing starts in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, when you’re 10.

Sister Jane Hassett: Okay.

Blanche Touhill: At least it did for me. When I was in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, the nun said, “Let’s write little stories,” and you put paragraphs together and I began to write little stories and I thought, well, what I do today is just an outreach of that.

- Sister Jane Hassett: It's an evolved...
- Blanche Touhill: Yeah, you have to have the main thought and then you have to break it into...you have an outline and then you have the paragraphs.
- Sister Jane Hassett: Blanche, hardly any young people know how to do that.
- Blanche Touhill: I know, today, but it was the diagramming of sentences, learn to diagram and then you'd learn the topic sentence. I think it's mechanical but you have to have a thought with it too.
- Sister Jane Hassett: You're following a pattern which may be on paper, may be in your head and...well, anyway, we can't [inaudible 6:42] of English.
- Blanche Touhill: So you were the editor of the paper...
- Sister Jane Hassett: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: And was it a success?
- Sister Jane Hassett: Well, it continued. It's called the Lorian and somebody from my class actually has a collection of copies. I can't believe it but she probably would qualify for one of those hoarders.
- Blanche Touhill: I hope she gives it the archives.
- Sister Jane Hassett: Nerinx has the archives from Loretto Academy out there.
- Blanche Touhill: Do they?
- Sister Jane Hassett: Yes. They may have moved them to Loretto down in Kentucky by now but as long as Nerinx is in business, maybe they have space to keep them.
- Blanche Touhill: And they have them at the grade school too?
- Sister Jane Hassett: I think so. I could be wrong.
- Blanche Touhill: I may call out there. I've been looking for records recently so I may do that.
- Sister Jane Hassett: Okay. What were we talking about?

- Blanche Touhill: We were talking about leadership and you said, well, you'd volunteered yourself for the school newspaper and then you became the editor and what was an important article that you thought was important?
- Sister Jane Hassett: Oh, I have no idea, absolutely none, and anybody who wanted to be on the newspaper staff, everybody had an idea that, "I can do this; I can do that."
- Blanche Touhill: Were you athletic?
- Sister Jane Hassett: Sort of. I used to play tennis with your brother.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, we all played tennis.
- Sister Jane Hassett: And he was great.
- Blanche Touhill: Yeah, he was a pretty good athlete. So were we all. We all ran together.
- Sister Jane Hassett: While I was in high school, I played mostly volleyball and running and all that was not in style then but in college, we had to do physical education three times a week as freshmen, twice as sophomores, once as juniors and if you did all that, you didn't have to do it in your senior year. So I played field hockey and volleyball. While I was in high school, for a while we went bowling out at Granite Park where Cardinal Glennon Hospital is now.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, indeed.
- Sister Jane Hassett: There was a bowling alley and we used to play at twenty-five cents a game, I think, to bowl and the two Lindsay sisters were great bowlers.
- Blanche Touhill: Where did you play tennis with my brother?
- Sister Jane Hassett: I think we went over to Tower Grove Park.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, that could be.
- Sister Jane Hassett: And the Reservoir Park had a couple of playing courts.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, they did. Well, you know, we used to play over at Beaumont High School. We lived near Beaumont and they had those tennis

courts and in the summer we had a net and so the kids in the neighborhood would all go over and put the net up and eventually the custodians would come out and chase us off.

Sister Jane Hassett: Catch you, yeah. That's okay.

Blanche Touhill: Basically that was our country club. We played golf on their front lawn.

Sister Jane Hassett: Smart. I was not a golfer.

Blanche Touhill: Well, we took my father's clubs and played.

Sister Jane Hassett: My one unfortunate episode of my childhood, my father played golf. I thought all doctors played golf...they still do, I think.

Blanche Touhill: I think they do.

Sister Jane Hassett: Well, you're less likely to be injured, although I know a doctor whose hobby is woodwork and I said, "Aren't you afraid you'll hurt your hands?" He said no. But when my mother and other doctors' wives they would like to take up golf and they would go to Norwood with their husbands and probably would not play in a foursome with the men because they were better. So my father was showing my mother a few lessons out of the back yard and my sister and I were supposed to be over there, away from Father and Mother with golf clubs and I was not. I somehow or other got behind my mother over at the other side of the yard...

Blanche Touhill: Were you hit with the club?

Sister Jane Hassett: She hit me on the upswing, fortunately. My father, the calm, cool, collected surgeon got in a car and drove away. He thought she'd put my eye out because my face was bleeding furiously from my forehead where she had hit me. My mother is distraught. She rushes me into the kitchen where we had a black woman who worked for us and she said, "There, there, Miss Jeanette, don't worry" and she takes a clean dish towel, holding it, and my father came back in a few minutes. He took it around the block and I guess when he composed himself, he brought in his bag and we're all fluttering around in the kitchen...not my father, he'd never fluttered...and so put little strips to hold it together, never put

stitches in a woman's face. Okay, so I was sent to the eye doctor the next day and everything was okay, fine. My father was going off to play golf that afternoon and another doctor came to pick him up and he always called me "little gal" and he said, "Little gal, what happened to you?" I was supposed to say, oh, I had a fall. I said, "Daddy hit me in the head with a golf club," in my childish peppy voice. Anyway, I got over it but it still has a slight scar. But let's be serious about life and development. While I was at college...

Blanche Touhill: Did your mother support you in going to college too?

Sister Jane Hassett: Oh, my goodness, yes.

Blanche Touhill: So your father and mother were both great advocates of that?

Sister Jane Hassett: Oh, goodness, yes.

Blanche Touhill: And did they tell you you should major in this or that?

Sister Jane Hassett: No, no. It was up to you. My sister majored in history and she minored in English. I majored in history and I minored in...what did I minor in? I guess in English and I, because my sister is now deceased, I can say this out loud, I was a better student than my sister. She was probably much more social than I was and when she started to work after college, she would say things like, "Well, Daddy, what is money for except to spend it?" and she was out and about. She was always putting up her hair, doing her nails and all that kind of thing. I was interested in history and I think because I was sociable, I liked people and they kept telling me, history is the story of people, their peculiarities, their good qualities and so on and I thought, well, that sounded like a good deal. So I was asked to join the Great Books Program, the honors program at Maryville and the summer before my junior year, I was supposed to be reading the required books ahead of time...no, before my senior year...and it was summertime. I didn't do it and I didn't do it. I was not working, I was playing. I mean, what's summer for? And my parents were in Chicago for a long weekend or something, the weekend before. I was supposed to go on a Monday and I said, "Mom, I haven't finished" and she called up and said...wished me luck and I said, "Mom, I haven't

finished reading the books. I don't think I'll be able to take the exam." She said, "Oh, yes, you will. Finish the books"; "Yes, mom," and one or two nights I sat on that screened in porch with the dog beside me because I didn't want to sit there. It's like you're sitting in your back yard with screens around you and I think I was there until, like, 1:00 or 2:00 o'clock in the morning getting these things read and so on. So I must have passed the exam because they took me on a Great Books Program. We did the Great Books of Antiquity.

Blanche Touhill: Actually, I taught that one time. That's a wonderful course. It was a year-long course. It was wonderful, taught in the freshman year at Queens College and I learned more probably than the students. It was just a wonderful, wonderful course.

Sister Jane Hassett: It's amazing. We had great teachers who were doing it. Mother Kernigan, I think she was the first Ph.D. in physics, a woman from a religious community.

Blanche Touhill: Well, the Sacred Heart nuns were like that.

Sister Jane Hassett: Extremely well educated.

Blanche Touhill: Who was the famous nun at Maryville that was the historian, McNally?

Sister Jane Hassett: Curtain.

Blanche Touhill: Curtain.

Sister Jane Hassett: Catherine Curtain.

Blanche Touhill: Everybody loved her.

Sister Jane Hassett: She was from St. Joe, Missouri and went to the academy there and McNally taught...I don't know, I think we had laywomen that were teaching American but I had Mother [inaudible 25:37] for Latin and Curtain for...

Blanche Touhill: Well, when you graduated from college, did you go to work or did you go into the convent?



- Sister Jane Hassett: I had thought about religious life and you know how you get together with your girlfriends, at each other's house and talk and so on and Mary Blish was going to the Sacred Heart nuns. Mary Jane Thompson was going to the Gray nuns, the Sacred Heart. Carol Bioloch was going to the Sacred Heart nuns and Rose Bark was intending to go to the St. Joseph nuns but she never said anything about that. I said, "You know, I'm almost finished with my education and my parents don't need me at all," and I said, "I think I'm average intelligence. I'm just not interested in going to any convent." My father gave me the same instructions he gave my older sister, when I graduated, both of us: "Do whatever you want during the summer. Just lay around. October 1<sup>st</sup>, you have to be doing something. You can go back to school, you do another degree, I'll pay; go to work, something; volunteer, whatever, but you have to be doing something." So my mother and I went to Chicago for a wedding. My sister was expecting a meeting and could not travel. It was her classmate and that happened to be the 1<sup>st</sup> of October that we were away so on Monday morning I said, "I'm going to business school." So I had no job prospects. I had no credentials to teach. I didn't want to teach. So I never did any of that student teaching, precious teaching. My friends were doing it, fine. So I went to Miss Vanderschmidt's...
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, she was famous.
- Sister Jane Hassett: Yes, and I went there, I took...
- Blanche Touhill: Did you take the year course?
- Sister Jane Hassett: Sort of.
- Blanche Touhill: Six months or something or a semester?
- Sister Jane Hassett: Yeah. We went five days a week and I knew how to type. My mother sent me to Rubicon when I was in high school. She said everyone should know how to type. So I did that and I took shorthand from Alice Cochrane, remember Alice Cochrane?
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, I do remember Alice Cochrane, yes.

Sister Jane Hassett:

And then, when I thought, I can't respectable go here any longer, I have to start looking for a job, so I looked for jobs and I was very picky. My father asked me not to go to work for a brewery place and at that time Washington U was considered a hot bed of communist whatever. He said, "Don't go to work at Washington U." I interviewed at Federal Reserve and a couple of other places and I thought, this is really...so I went to work for a large downtown St. Louis bank. I went to Old Mississippi Valley and I worked there a little over a year and when I was leaving there, they had to merge with Mercantile to stay afloat and...it was so funny...I loved working downtown and I was getting more interested in looking at Sisters of St. Joseph and so, when I got to the point where I thought, this is the right thing for me to do, and I called up my aunt and I said, "Will you go with me down to the Mother house?" and she said, "Sure, glad to." So I picked her up and we went to the Mother house and I was interviewed. My aunt was the most surprised woman in the world. She never thought I would ever be interested in entering the community and she never talked about it. I think she was afraid if I did, I'd embarrass her or something. She was very respected. So I went down there and got a list and an application and all this stuff and I went home and put it in a dresser drawer and I thought, how am I going to...what am I going to tell my parents? I never said a word to my parents. So I told my mother first. She immediately burst into tears and said, "What did your father say?" I said, "I haven't told him." He was out watering the grass in the back yard. She said, "You just march right out there and tell your father." So I did. He did not think I would stay.

Blanche Touhill:

Did he say why?

Sister Jane Hassett:

I think he thought I was too determined and too independent to be able to do it. And the day that I entered, he was going to let my mother take me down to Carondelet. You just don't do that. Your parents take you. I said, "I'm going to tell Daddy if he doesn't come, I'm not going." I mean, that's the kind of person he knew I was. So he took me down and my father said to the postulate mistress, "Sister, look out for Jane or she will run the place." She was a little bit of a woman. She was probably maybe five feet tall

and about a size 4 and she said, "We'll see," like, "Uh-huh." So, for two-and-a-half years I was down at Carondelet and one does not exhibit leadership in the officiate period of a religious community. They might put you in charge of the dishwashers, even the dining room that kind of thing, or you might be the oldest novice so that means that you're the head of the group to scrub the bake house floor. But other than that, no. But anyhow, I think that I probably had an unwarranted sense of my ability to do things and even now, I can look at Interstate 64 and say, "If I had been working for MODOT, we would have done this."

Blanche Touhill: Well, see, I always thought of you as a leader. When I was young, I would watch you and your sister and I always thought you were both very social but I thought you were more social than she was.

Sister Jane Hassett: No, she was more the...

Blanche Touhill: And you always had something to say.

Sister Jane Hassett: People think I'm funny.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, they do. I thought you were funny, too.

Sister Jane Hassett: Yes, even now.

Blanche Touhill: That you could relay an incident and it was funny.

Sister Jane Hassett: Yes, it would be funny. I told someone yesterday...three women that I really don't know at all, I see them at mass at St. Mary's Hospital chapel and we were talking about, oh, the reading for mass and I said, "You know, that reading, all you had to be able to say was 'chariots' and 'charioteers' in Egyptian, you had it made. You just kept saying those words and so on" and they said, "Well, you know, sometimes you can get caught up in the sense and lose your place." I said, "Well, you know, I look upon some things as funny that aren't really." I said it was a tragic situation. The police officer who was being shot at while he was doing security duty in the Central West End and I said, "The newspaper the following morning had a headline that said, 'Officer shot in the West End,'" and I said, "All I could think of was, what part of your anatomy is

the West End?" and they just hooted. I said, "But, you know, this is a serious situation," but I find something...

Blanche Touhill: Well, I think humor is...

Sister Jane Hassett: ...entertaining in it.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah. I think humor is sort of a sadness or out of the ordinary and the person who has humor sees that and that's a good use of words. Well, let me go on: When you became a nun, where were you sent? What did you do as a nun?

Sister Jane Hassett: The first mission I had was St. Teresa's Academy in Kansas City. I had...oh, my goodness, at a sophomore homeroom. Can you imagine putting that on a brand new teacher? I had done my student teaching at Rosati-Kain with an excellent Notre Dame sister who was an historian herself and so on. So anyway, there I am with all these Kansas City girls. So I taught them...I taught English; I taught history; I taught typing and shorthand, about which I knew nothing, and I took care of the boarders dining room and stuff like that. I was at St. Teresa's Academy, I went to Waco, Texas where we had a junior/senior high school but the senior class had not been added on and it was the closest thing to living in, almost like the desert, Waco. We were across the road from a U.S. air force installation. It was called "Flying Training" and something, something, and we had an air base down there. Students, all of them were U.S. citizens but they had lived all over the world, most of them because they were air force kids and so on. It was an interesting place to be and we closed up the house in the summertime because it was so unbelievably hot down there.

Blanche Touhill: And where did you go then? You came up to St. Louis?

Sister Jane Hassett: Yeah, I came to St. Louis and I went up to the upper peninsula of Michigan after Waco...talk about a change, from hot to cold and snow. And I was always going to summer school to do other stuff. I had no teaching credential so I would do that and so on. And then, very soon, I got a call that said, "We want you to go on for another degree since you already have your Bachelor's" and so on. So I started at St. Louis U, in history, under Mother John

Francis Baron's benevolent despotism as we say, and so I got my Master's in Modern Europe.

Blanche Touhill: And then you got the Ph.D?

Sister Jane Hassett: Yes, at St. Louis U also.

Blanche Touhill: What year did you get your Ph.D?

Sister Jane Hassett: Oh, my goodness, 1950...I should have brought my...oh, isn't that terrible? '50...

Blanche Touhill: But it was the '50s?

Sister Jane Hassett: Oh, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: The last part of the '50s probably.

Sister Jane Hassett: Yes, because I was between my Master's and my doctorate and I was sent...I had to accompany another one of our sisters to live in Paris for a year because she had a Fulbright Scholarship in organ music and, of course, you didn't send somebody to Europe all alone. So I got a phone call when I was up in Michigan which said, "We want you to go to Paris in the fall."

Blanche Touhill: For a year?

Sister Jane Hassett: Yeah, school year. I said, "Oh, what do you want me to do?" and they said, "Oh, you could get the material for your dissertation." I had not done five minutes of course work. You usually get an idea about what you want to do.

Blanche Touhill: So you did your research in France?

Sister Jane Hassett: Well, when I came to St. Louis, I was working on the history of our congregation with a group of sisters representing the different provinces and obviously I was working with another sister or two in the St. Louis province stuff. So Sister Mary and I went to a French teacher that had a little tutoring branch and then I would go back to Fontbonne because that's where we were working and work on ... It was a crazy summer beside getting ready to go to Paris. I said to the powers that be, "Now, wait a minute. You know, before you write a dissertation, you should have gotten an

idea of what you want to do and I have none of the coursework”;  
“Well, who’s your man down there?” and I said, “Dr. Neil so I  
went to Neil and I said, “I have to go to Paris or a year” and he  
said, “That’s my idea of ‘have to,’” and so he said, “When you get  
there,” he said, “get in touch with John Panberg. He’s over there.”

Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness, yes.

Sister Jane Hassett: “He’s staying at the Jesuit House out of (Chantier?) and he’s  
working...” ...he was getting his doctorate at Harvard in The History  
of Ideas and I thought History of Ideas?...

Blanche Touhill: And that was Neil’s...

Sister Jane Hassett: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: So that became your topic then?

Sister Jane Hassett: I didn’t know how to get in touch with Father Panberg. We get  
there, it’s August. We went over by ship because all Fulbright  
people were sent and we arrived and, of course, like most  
European countries, France is totally almost shut down in August.  
It’s vacation time. So anyway, I called up the Jesuit House and I  
asked for Father Hall, who is an American Jesuit one of our sisters  
knew and I said who I was and what I was trying...and I said, “Do  
you know where I could find Father Panberg?” He said, “I was  
talking to him on the phone this morning,” so Father Panberg  
came to my house where I was staying and I told him my problem  
and sort of my background, my Master’s. He came with a list of  
possible topics.

Blanche Touhill: Wonderful.

Sister Jane Hassett: So I ended up doing...you ready?

Blanche Touhill: Yeah.

Sister Jane Hassett: Hang onto the chair. You may want to just levitate. I did Bishop  
Dupont Lieu and the Roman question – Church History, the  
temporal sovereignty of the Pope.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, it’s a good topic.

- Sister Jane Hassett: Yes, and it had a St. Louis connection like everything else. Archbishop Kendrick left the Vatican council rather than stick around to see the Pope declared infallible.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh.
- Sister Jane Hassett: But anyway, what I was doing was...
- Blanche Touhill: How interesting.
- Sister Jane Hassett: Should the Pope have like a Vatican City and it was all the European history, the Italian revolutions and at one point I said, "By putting arms in the hands of the revolutionaries, Father Panberg almost died." He said, "I can't believe you've written that down...arms in the hands of the revolutionaries?" I said, "Oh, I never even thought about that. It sounded fine to me," and he used purple pen... But anyway, I was working on my doctorate. I was belonging to the community. I was working on the history of the congregation and so on.
- Blanche Touhill: So you were busy.
- Sister Jane Hassett: Yes, I was, and I was living at Fontbonne, I was teaching at Fontbonne, and you know, but you did it.
- Blanche Touhill: By the end of the year, had you most of the dissertation outlined and written?
- Sister Jane Hassett: I did an awful lot of reading. While I was in Paris, I did a ton of background reading at the Biblio Technazionale where, of course you can't take a book out.
- Blanche Touhill: I know, and you can't get a seat unless you go early in the morning.
- Sister Jane Hassett: Well, I found out that if I got there shortly after breakfast...and I could walk there from where we lived...and so I'd get my big green plastic pack and my assigned seat and I used to think it was so funny and I had to buy the little webbing belt to put around my books so I could keep them overnight and they wouldn't re-shelve them while I was gone and I thought, this is so funny. I'm sitting in that immense reading room and I'm looking around and I swear,

half of those people were in their 90's and they were pursuing their own particular interest in the history of France or whatever. It was so crazy. Then, I would go home and my partner...I mean, I was her companion...she was writing florid counterpoint, writing music and she would be writing away, we were in this double room and I'd say, "Mary, it's never going to make the Hit Parade," and she said, "It's all right for you to say that because you're sitting here reading Dr. Zhivago while I'm doing my homework because you can't take any books home."

Blanche Touhill: Yes, that's true.

Sister Jane Hassett: But anyway, when I came back I did all the coursework and started writing and you know how the day comes and you say, I have to put words on paper...

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, it's discipline.

Sister Jane Hassett: You can't read anymore.

Blanche Touhill: No, no, but that's a hard time to come to that conclusion. It's hard making that decision: I've got to stop and I've now got to analyze

Sister Jane Hassett: It's like affecting...well, it is a life affecting decision. When I finished up and turned in the dissertation, I thought, what will I do now?

Blanche Touhill: But you became the head of Fontbonne.

Sister Jane Hassett: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Were you in academic administration before then?

Sister Jane Hassett: Yeah, I was chairman of my department, the History Department, for a year or two.

Blanche Touhill: And then they had a search or they anointed you?

Sister Jane Hassett: They had a search. They didn't go to a big search...

Blanche Touhill: No, but they searched?

Sister Jane Hassett: They looked around...



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Blanche Touhill: Did they want a nun?

Sister Jane Hassett: Yes, at that time, they did. I was the last nun.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, okay. Well, Manieve...

Sister Jane Hassett: She was a former nun.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah, former nun, that's right. Did she follow you?

Sister Jane Hassett: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: How long were you in office?

Sister Jane Hassett: Thirteen years.

Blanche Touhill: I was in almost 13 years.

Sister Jane Hassett: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: You'd need that time to do it.

Sister Jane Hassett: Well, I'd say the first year you're learning your way around. I knew the campus, that was about it but you have to learn the politics, the culture and...you know.

Blanche Touhill: What did you do for Fontbonne that nobody else had done?

Sister Jane Hassett: I think that I always said the greatest thing each year was commencement. When I looked at students whose families had never gone to college before, I thought that was the best day of the year. We could all get off to a start at September or August or whenever it started but I think one of the things I did was alert people, everyone, to the necessity of fundraising.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, the time had come.

Sister Jane Hassett: Yes. One of the former presidents said, she actually said the words, "Well, we don't ask our alums for money," and I said, "Well, we don't?" and I gathered together a couple of women alums, some of the older alums and it was like, why didn't anybody tell us this before? And she organized a group of women, we met at her house a couple of blocks down the street from Fontbonne and this woman, the organizer, had a daughter who

was at Fontbonne and the daughter said, "Mother, I can't imagine that nobody has talked to you or to me about significant money." People were giving five dollars a year and thought that was fine. And the first time I saw the budget for utilities for the campus, at that time it was \$120,000 to pay the electricity and the gas, whatever, which is nothing these days.

Blanche Touhill: But in those days, that was a lot of money.

Sister Jane Hassett: I was astounded and we had an academic dean who said to me...and I was the first one to be hired by a board of trustees [inaudible 46:52]...

Blanche Touhill: So you had a lay board?

Sister Jane Hassett: Yes. The previous president, that was one of the things that had taken place during her tenure in office and we had six-year terms almost because very often, up to her time, my predecessor, the president of the college was also the superior of the religious community and they had six-year terms as superiors so you were in and you were out and when you look at the list of former presidents, you say, well, gosh, that was only six...oh, she was only six. Well, one died in office. She was only president for two years, I think. But I was hired by the board with a contract and so on. The hardest thing I tried to do, get them to evaluate me. "We don't evaluate sisters," and at board meetings sometimes, the question would be, "Well, what do the sisters say?" and politely you try to say, "The sisters on the faculty and the lay people on the faculty are all equal. It's not what the sisters say; it's, do you want to know what the faculty, as a whole, say."

Blanche Touhill: Now, is the result of Vatican Two?

Sister Jane Hassett: Vatican Two was one of probably the most earth-changing, life-changing event, I think, in the Catholic church. I'm no church historian but I think the total...it hasn't all taken place yet, obviously...

Blanche Touhill: I understand that, yeah.

- Sister Jane Hassett: But I think the fact of it and the opening up to the world and giving women...we're still a little behind. We're pushing but I think that the idea, part of it though, was federal government. When you start talking about student loans in the State of Missouri, the academic dean and I had to go down to Jefferson City at one point and testify when that sort of anti-sectarian school clerk citation they should not be getting, Missouri funds or federal funds or anything else because they have crucifixes in their classrooms. So we even had to take down the crucifixes which was rather foolish but that's the way it was.
- Blanche Touhill: So you had to take down the crucifixes?
- Sister Jane Hassett: That did not fly in Missouri because we believe in separation of church and state. But I think fundraising as an issue...
- Blanche Touhill: But what I'm saying...yes, well, even that, it forced you to really go out into the public community and say "We're here. You have supported us in the past. You have to understand. Do you support us now and to what extent?"
- Sister Jane Hassett: Yes, and that we provide an enormous service to the St. Louis community. We have a large resident student population. Those people go out to other states and....
- Blanche Touhill: I'm going to change the subject a little bit: Would you talk about some award or awards that you've received or some event that really was very important to you and meant something to you.
- Sister Jane Hassett: I think the two awards that I place a very...well, on one, not a really high value because it has a lot of political overtones but it was fun doing it, that was the Globe Democrat Women of Achievement and mingling with a group of outstanding women leaders. I never considered myself a woman leader in the area until then and that's when (Bucken?) was running the Globe Democrat. The other one was, two years ago I received Fontbonne Heritage Award, whatever we call it now, Founders Award and I had been on a committee choosing recipients for Founders Awards all these years and I said one time at a meeting, "You know, I'm getting a little tired of getting this award for other people," and they said, "Well, you didn't graduate from here." I

said, "Look at the people who did not graduate from here, including Bill Danforth," and they said, "Oh," and when I stood before those people...we had it at the Missouri History Museum which I thought was so fitting...I looked around and I thought, you know, Jane, you've not done too badly for just a plain old girl from South St. Louis and I gave a very excellent thank you speech and I was pretty pleased with myself but I thought, my goodness, I've waited all these years for something like that and it was so...I mean, it was really touching personally to see the number of people who came, outside of my family, because it was me. I still find...I belong to this group called the Fontbonne Community Connection and there are all these women, they're all grown up. They were harem-scarem crazy girls when they were in college and they said, "Oh, Sister Jane, it's so good to see you" and I just bask in that adulation. I'm a simple humble sister of St. Joseph loving the spotlight. You were going to ask me...

Blanche Touhill: Then I asked: If you had been born 50 years earlier, what would your life be like?

Sister Jane Hassett: I might have died of some dreaded communicable disease or, if it had been possible in my lifetime, even in the community, I wanted to be an attorney and I would like to be a trial lawyer. And the other thing was, except for Joan Rivers, I always looked upon being a stand-up comedian as a real outlet for my black sense of humor. I don't know if I could have gone to law school 50 years earlier. Would that have...yeah, it probably would have been a possibility.

Blanche Touhill: I had a cousin who went to law school or read for the law or whatever it was. She had the license but all she was able to do is she was in the back room writing the briefs for the men to go to court. So I'm not saying you wouldn't have gone to court but I think the odds were not particularly good.

Sister Jane Hassett: I probably would have had to practice family law.

Blanche Touhill: But you really wanted to be in the trials?

Sister Jane Hassett: Yes. People say, "Why, you talk all the time [inaudible 54:28] and facing a jury is talking" ...it is.

Blanche Touhill: Well, let me then ask you: Is there anything final you want to say before we close up?

Sister Jane Hassett: I think that's tremendously flattered that you asked me to come and do this and I look forward to, on the CD, getting to see it and hear the other people that you're interviewing for this project.

Blanche Touhill: And you can give it to your nieces and nephews.

Sister Jane Hassett: And say, "This is your Aunt Jane."

Blanche Touhill: That's right.

Sister Jane Hassett: And they're the nieces and nephews who have said to me for years and years, "Aunt Jane, what do you want to be when you grow up?" I say, "Old, very old" but I'm happy in my life.

Blanche Touhill: Well, thank you very much for coming today.

Sister Jane Hassett: Thank you for asking me, to have the opportunity to see you on your home turf.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, indeed.

Sister Jane Hassett: You've made a great career for yourself here.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, thank you. Well, you made a great career for yourself.

Sister Jane Hassett: And the kind of recognition you received indicated that they not only loved you, they respected you for your ability.

Blanche Touhill: I worked at it. I worked hard at it.

Sister Jane Hassett: Isn't that what we're expected to do if we want to...if you want to accomplish something, work.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah.

Sister Jane Hassett: And I'm talking like a very old person but I think it's difficult for young people to realize that. I think they look at the generation ahead of them and think, "I want to begin there, where they are after all the work they put in," and it doesn't happen that way. I read something on whatever they have, Yahoo or something or other, those news clips, a girl who spent her way through the

\$90,000 fund that her grandparents had established for her college and now she's, "Ah, my parents couldn't pay. What am I going to do?" They said, "Well, you should have thought about that. What were you doing?"; "Well, playing around."

Blanche Touhill: Well, you had a wonderful career, you did. Well, you have a wonderful career and I'm sure you're doing something right now.

Sister Jane Hassett: I belong to a group known as the Catherine Curtain Readers Group at Maryville.

Blanche Touhill: Wonderful. So you're still at it?

Sister Jane Hassett: I'm still at it and I belong to a writers' group, five sisters of St. Joseph, we meet once a month and we write off-the-cuff. If you're in charge for the next gathering, you come in with three topics. We have not seen them. We take one topic, whoever watches the clock, we spend 20 minutes writing and then we read to each other and criticize, ask, compliment. It is so much fun.

Blanche Touhill: Yes. Well, with that, let's say au revoir.

Sister Jane Hassett: Au revoir, amen.

Blanche Touhill: Amen.