

An Interview with  
**Linda McKay**

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.

Linda McKay: ...Linda McKay and currently I'm working with two boards that relate to character and moral development, one here in the St. Louis area and one in Washington, D.C.

Blanche Touhill: Would you talk about your youth, your mother and father and your brothers and sisters or your cousins or grandparents or your playmates. Who really encouraged you to be what you wanted to be, to be the authentic Linda McKay, and talk about an elementary school or secondary school, was there a teacher that said something to you that really made you stop and think about yourself and what your future was going to be. How did you play? Were you a leader? You know, those kinds of things.

Linda McKay: Well, I was born in Wichita; Kansas so from the Midwest and my childhood was impacted very much. My father was killed when I was three and I had unbelievable grandparents that really were influences, especially two grandfathers and I know when I reflect back on that...many times I reflect back, it was the two grandfathers that really...what they did and one, in particular, what he said, had a lot to do with shaping me. One grandfather had an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education and had a successful construction business and was very good at putting things together, how you figured out how to do a proposal or build a building, and I still remember that when I was little, he took me down to a building that had been built and I saw this huge silver staircase and all of a sudden it started moving and it was the first escalator in our town. He just opened my eyes to vision, I think is what it was. My other grandfather was from a little tiny town in western Kansas, both he and my grandmother were there. They actually lived in a sod hut that I saw one time pictures of the front of it and he was a teacher but got his law degree by a correspondence course and became interested in politics. He was the one that really emphasized to me about the communities you live in are really shaped by the people that live there. I remember going to political events. Whoever would run for an office, Granddad went and he said, "You have to go in person and you have to hear both candidates speak and you thank everybody for running, even if you don't agree with them." So he, himself, ran for public office in this little tiny town.

Blanche Touhill: Did he win?

Linda McKay: He won. He was the county attorney of some kind. So that's what I mean. As a child, I don't remember titles as much or I don't remember what people were running for at all. I just remember going to all these events. That really leads me into the teacher that had an impact on my life. It was my high school American History/Government teacher and I had him for two years, Mr. McCaffrey, and he, again, was like my grandfather. He really imprinted on me that the communities we live in are shaped by the people that live there, especially for America. So I can still see his classroom. He had around the top of the wall, the process for a law being passed in our country, the steps, and then he had this...it was white, whatever it was, this big sort of...I want to say a star at one point and that was when the law was passed and he said when a law is passed, is when you have to really go to work. So he really taught, again, for me an interest in the steps of how to be involved in a community. So that really has been sort of the basis of the work I've done in my whole life, has been community engagement of some kind, usually in children's issues, being involved community development, is something that I've worked in a lot over my life. As for education, when I was in my first year of college...

Blanche Touhill: No, let's not get there yet. Talk about your play and your friends. Did they have that same interest?

Linda McKay: Not at all. My friends, they thought I was kind of crazy, especially in high school, some projects I would work on in high school.

Blanche Touhill: Like what?

Linda McKay: Well, we had, in our school, the school I went to, Wichita East High School, at that time we had definitely a population that was the black community and white community basically. Those were the two. We didn't have Hispanic or Asian very much.

Blanche Touhill: Was the school integrated?

Linda McKay: Well, it was integrated but it's just where you lived. I mean, that's where you went. It was before integration...

Blanche Touhill: Brown versus Board of Education.

Linda McKay: Mm-hmm, it was before that. But what I remember at the school, we all just did things together: the school events, the school dances, and then I remember once we went out to another tiny town in Kansas and our basketball players were black and I remember there was definitely not, to me...they were not being treated respectfully and I will say, again, this was one of my friends that literally just stood up to say, "We will all get on the elevator together. We will all go and eat together." She had a lot of courage. So you ask me, think about that, really, I did have a friend that was that way.

Blanche Touhill: Are you still friendly with her?

Linda McKay: She actually passed away, of cancer at a young age.

Blanche Touhill: But were you friendly with her through your life?

Linda McKay: Yes, through my life. There were five of us that were in a carpool that we have all remained friends and two have passed away. They were very good friends. So, again, we started working more to really involve more students in the school and activities, would be one thing and it just seemed normal to me.

Blanche Touhill: Are you saying that the black students went to one school and the white students...

Linda McKay: No, we were in one building.

Blanche Touhill: But were you in the same classes?

Linda McKay: We were in the same classes, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: But they sort of ate together or something? People didn't mix?

Linda McKay: You didn't mix as much as eating together but we started mixing more when we were at basketball games, athletically, at school events...

Blanche Touhill: ...dances.

Linda McKay: There wasn't this separateness as much. We were respectful to each other and kind to each other. So that was one thing, for me, that, in my life I've been transferred a lot of places and I realize that what I had in Kansas was unusual for the rest of the country as far as that point in time. This was the late '50s and early '60s so it was before a lot of the unrest

started. But at that point and that time, we as a group...I had friends that were black and white and especially in some of my classes. And back to Mr. McCaffrey, I remember him teaching us then about black children not being able to go to school and how, in Kansas, they could, that that was one of the things that we should be known for in Kansas.

Blanche Touhill: When did Kansas integrate its schools, do you know?

Linda McKay: I do not because we moved in the '60s from Wichita so I'm not real sure. I think I can figure that out. It was probably around the '70s, is when it was, because that's when we were actually transferred to New York City at that point and I had some of my friends from the black community...again, I was involved in community issues.

Blanche Touhill: Did you go to high school in New York?

Linda McKay: No, I went to high school in Wichita, Kansas. I was married.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, I see, when you got married, you moved to New York?

Linda McKay: Uh-huh, I was married and had children and we were transferred to New York. But I had friends from the black community call me, worried about the desegregation program that was going to happen with the students being bused because they said, "We're going to lose our parents that care about our schools." And so I thought it was interesting that that was the perception and I always say that the reason for bussing, I understand, but the repercussions from it for the black communities is pretty much what these people predicted, at least for the Kansas City area it was. But I thought it was an interesting call, there was a concern and yet, the issue of better education was something we were all united on.

Blanche Touhill: Now, talk about when you decided to go to college.

Linda McKay: Well, I was graduating from high school and I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I was the era that you were not given many options as a woman: secretarial, nurse were some of the things that were mentioned, and I remember one of my good friends was the first woman in a law class at University of Kansas so, I mean, we really were at that turning cusp...and teacher, those were the things that you could look at doing. So my first year of college, I was married so I had a baby my first year of college, yes. And so my husband and I...I still look back on that, he was working full-

time. He was going to school full-time and we would switch the baby on the campus. We would have our classes that I would bring him our daughter and go to my class and then come back home and he would go to work and I always say, we did it. A lot of people said we wouldn't be able to do it but we did it.

Blanche Touhill: Was he a high school sweetheart?

Linda McKay: I met him in high school but he was older.

Blanche Touhill: He was older.

Linda McKay: Yeah, he's an older man and his parents couldn't pay for his college so he was actually on top of that, paying for his college.

Blanche Touhill: Did you work at that time or did you really keep the house and take care of the baby?

Linda McKay: I worked part-time until the baby came and then, after the baby came, I didn't. I remember my grandfather, the one that lived in Wichita, his first thing he said to me, he said, "You and Mike won't graduate from college," and he had that 8<sup>th</sup> grade education so it was really important to him and my grandparents, again, were a wonderful help. Grandmother was always coming to the door with groceries and I remember saying to him at that point, I said, "I can't promise about me but I promise Mike will." I mean, that I promised. And so that was kind of our goal then, was to get him out.

Blanche Touhill: Where did you all go to college?

Linda McKay: Wichita State University in Wichita.

Blanche Touhill: And you went because you lived in the area and he worked in the area part-time?

Linda McKay: Uh-huh, and he worked in the area.

Blanche Touhill: And so it worked out?

Linda McKay: It worked out. I had some great professors, I really did. I found high school was always hard for me, grade-wise and college, it was like someone flipped a switch and college was very much more my style of learning, I think, that you would have a lecture, you had time to really,

afterwards, process it and you weren't going to that next class and so I loved college. So anyway, when Michael graduated, he got a job in Kansas City.

Blanche Touhill: What was his major?

Linda McKay: He was in accounting so he got a job with an accounting firm and always said we were a perfect match because he's the good organized side and I'm more the creative side. But I found out that I needed to get the organized side too. Anyway, so we were transferred to Kansas City and at that point, I'd had enough of the classes that I knew I needed to declare a major and I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. Then we had a second baby and so I thought at some point I'll go back. But then what happened to me is I just started, first in my church, working at a well-baby clinic in the City of Kansas City, Missouri and would go at least once a week, sometimes three times a week and we worked out children being taken care of at the church because at this point you still really had women at home, not out working in the community very much and I really got an interest then in the inner city issues and that's truly where I've stayed, you know, with the concern about what I see, a lot of the obstacles and a lot of the needs for a lot of our families in the inner city.

Blanche Touhill: What did you do for the Kansas City poor, because that's what you're talking about?

Linda McKay: Right. At the well-baby clinic, it was a clinic where they could come and they could get their inoculations.

Blanche Touhill: For free?

Linda McKay: For free, but when we got there, we realized they needed much more than that. Number one, the children coming in, there was nothing for them as far as books or things to play with and so we all started bringing our books and really working with the mothers on reading to the children. We realized nutrition was something that was really lacking, and this is before we, as America, became more organized in providing services for the inner city as far as food and things like that. So we started working with them on nutrition and the doctors we worked with were mostly from Jamaica, Dominican Republic, one was from there, and so they very much were in that thinking: these children need to read; they

need to have better nutrition. So we, as a group of women, just started developing that and doing that when we went to the clinic.

Blanche Touhill: How did you find this baby wellness center?

Linda McKay: Through our church.

Blanche Touhill: And did you make friends with the other women?

Linda McKay: Uh-huh. I was new to Kansas City and that kind of became a nucleus of friends. One of them turned out to be the wife of the doctor we went to and we are still friends with them. We still talk about the well-baby clinic. And I did that for quite a few years. Then, I think kind of for two reasons, one, the community became a little bit more organized with providing services, and then I became involved with an organization called The Junior League and I remember that when I got the invitation to it, I thought, well, I don't think I want this because the concept I had of it was social parties and I found out a huge piece of it was community involvement. And Kansas City, it's a community that you have Kansas City, Missouri and Kansas City, Kansas and you have a river between the two and Kansas City, Kansas was the more depressed area and that's the league I was in and that's where my husband worked at that time. And we lived in another area that's called Johnson County but the reason I'm going through that explanation is that the feeling in Kansas City, Kansas is if you were from Johnson County, you were an outsider. So it took a lot of sort of break in to working in that community. So we did a lot of work in the area that related to community planning and working with the community. Some of the first big federal grants then were coming down that you had to get community groups to say they would work together and provide some of the funding in the future. And so I worked on some initiatives like that. We did a Ronald MacDonald House that was actually in the Kansas City, Kansas side connected to the University of Kansas.

Blanche Touhill: To their medical center?

Linda McKay: Uh-huh, and so that was a project. By this time, I was president of the league. We did a project that looked at...it was a course, actually, a whole year course that I took on how to facilitate community engagement, community involvement.

Blanche Touhill: And who sponsored it, the Junior League?

Linda McKay: It was the Junior League of Kansas City, Missouri at that point. Anyway, it was a year-long course taught by a woman who actually became the mayor of Kansas City, Missouri but she really had skills on how to involve the community and the things you really needed to know about how to create communities that were financially stable, about fiscal responsibility, about how to get the community to be the leader in doing it and getting the workers to join with you. I mean, it was real nuts and bolts and you would have a whole day that you would be with her and then over the week you would actually go out and do or implement what you had as far as that day of the course and that went from September till May.

Blanche Touhill: How many were in the class?

Linda McKay: There were probably at least 30. It was a good-sized class and it was people from the community so you had men and women.

Blanche Touhill: Did the corporations recommend people to take the course?

Linda McKay: I don't remember that but I know you had people from non-profit organizations; you had people from corporations, but the issue though, more and the focus was non-profit and community activity. It wasn't how to make your corporation better, no.

Blanche Touhill: No, I understand. But the corporations were beginning to adopt a social responsibility aspect to their business about that time and that could have been that they sent somebody who would eventually organize that realm of the corporation. That was the beginning, I think, of a lot of those foundations that began to give money away.

Linda McKay: Yeah, and another thing I did...and this wasn't connected to the League...was when Sesame Street started in the '60s, it was really through the schools, they really tried to start and so through my children's school, I got a notice, "If you'd like to work with the local public television station in support of Sesame Street," here was an opportunity. I was so grateful to have something for children to watch that I thought was educational that I called them. We have four daughters so my girls will say, "Big Bird grew up in our house," because we had the Big Bird at our house that went all around the city. And so you worked with the stations for the educational material and then you got it out to schools. And so I did that for quite a while. Well, then, from that, there was a

federal requirement in the '60s, '70s, that you had to do community ascertainment and so the communities had to show through newspapers, radio, television, at that point, that's what you had, that they were getting input from the community for community problems and then they had to show how they were providing that information back to the community. So either that's where the public affairs television program started, that's where those public service announcements started. That was the requirement that was done federally. So they asked me at the television station if I would be in charge of that. So I did that for quite a few years.

Blanche Touhill: Did you write the grants?

Linda McKay: No, I didn't write the grants. It didn't require grants. It required meeting a federal requirement.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, and you had to report what was accomplished?

Linda McKay: You had to report, yeah. So what I did and Kansas City did was they brought the different aspects of the community together that related to community information and then you brought in people from the community so you heard it as a group. So I would be at a table with someone from all the television stations, from the newspapers, at that point we had to, from the radio stations and then somebody would come from a community organization and give the information to all of us. So I was the research gatherer of information and then I would go back to the station and actually then write up what the top concerns were. Then there was somebody else that actually then documented the programming. So I didn't do that piece.

Blanche Touhill: You were the bridge?

Linda McKay: I was the bridge, so I was the information gatherer and then there were someone at the station that did the documentation and that was a volunteer, I did that as a volunteer. Then the other thing that started happening is I realized I needed to learn about non-profit financial budgeting and management so, again to the Junior League, I took some courses in that. I've always said education was something that when I needed it for what I was doing, I found a viable way to get it, to learn it, and to fit the task I was working on then.

Blanche Touhill: So you were a life-long learner?

Linda McKay: I am still a life-long learner.

Blanche Touhill: So then where did you go?

Linda McKay: Well, then, my husband and I, we built a house on the outskirts of Kansas City in a small community that was kind of joining the city and it had been farmers, huge farms that have been there for generations, and we built this house because I loved growing up in Kansas like I did and my grandparents had farms and I wanted to have that feeling. What I didn't realize, though, is when that happens and a city starts emerging, there were no zoning laws; there were no sign laws, and so all of a sudden we had businesses being built with no curbs, no entrance, no exits, no green areas and it turns out that where we moved, a lot of people from Hallmark Cards who were building these shopping centers all over the country moved in the same area so we had landscape architects and engineers that moved in and a group of us formed, we called it the Civics Arts Commission for this little tiny town to try and get zoning laws and sign laws and I did that from the late '60s until 1974. I was the only woman. Everybody was a man. They were all men. They all worked in the daytime. I was home with my four kids and I remember that one day...it was from Sears that they wanted to put a store in, and so we had to send a letter to them and we signed it. We consciously made a decision to sign it "L.J. McKay" so that they wouldn't know if it was a man or a woman because I really had a lot of trouble with that at that time and I remember we got a call finally, this man calls me from Sears and he wanted to talk to Mr. McKay and I said, "Well, it's Mrs. McKay" and he said, "You mean, you're a woman?" and I said, "Yeah, I'm a woman." And so anyway, it ended up we could work together fine but it was definitely a male-dominated field for construction and curbs and entrances and exits and so the mayor truly wanted to get rid of our group. We said, "As soon as there is a city planning person that's hired and a sign ordinance that's developed and some zoning laws, we'll leave." And that was our goal. And so we accomplished that goal.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness!

Linda McKay: We did, and so I learned about sign ordinances and I learned that by calling all over the country and Boston turned out to be sort of our model

that we went after and I find the city planners want to talk to you because they love creating communities that are safe and beautiful. And so I did that for quite a while and it was a perfect time in my life to do it. I could still be home for my kids afterwards, and my husband traveled all the time so it kept me growing and it was something I cared about and learning.

Blanche Touhill: Did that affect your children?

Linda McKay: Very much. My third daughter one day, I remember she was little. She could talk though into her little play phone and she picks up her phone and she says, "Hello, City Hall, do you need me?" and my husband was home then and he says, "I think possibly you need to be here a little bit more." I was taking the kids with me, you know; they just went with me. But I also learned then to deal with criticism a lot because you really had people very upset and I learned how cruel people can be, that are just really nice people. That was my first experience with that personally, and again, my husband said to me one time, he said, "If you're going to do this, you've got to be like a duck and water going off your back." He said, "You've just got to learn to work your way through it" and so that really was another training I got from that. That's when we were transferred to New York City for a year and probably that was one of the most magical experiences I had and it turned out Robert McNeil of the McNeil Lehrer Report was our neighbor and so we met them and his wife at the time and his wife said, "What are you going to do this year?" and I said, "Well, I'm going to research television viewing because I'm worried about the impact" and I said, "It's just a year for me to go do it" and she said, "Well, why don't you work for Robin." It turned out, Robin was fine with that and it was in 1975/'76, Congress passed the family viewing hour that, in the evening...it was more than an hour, I think it was two hours in the evening but was family viewing time and during that time, at that point, you had NBC, ABC, CBS, you had to show programming that was appropriate for the family to watch. And so I became his researcher for a year, part-time. I could do a lot of it from my home but I would go into the station and when you did have a show is when you really had to be there on that topic and those were in the evening, but most of it was in the daytime, gathering information and writing it up again. So I did that for a year and then we were transferred again.

- Blanche Touhill: Where did you live in New York?
- Linda McKay: We lived in a little town called Bronxville, New York, so it was 28 minutes straight into the city.
- Blanche Touhill: And your husband took the train?
- Linda McKay: He took the train and I actually drove in most of the time.
- Blanche Touhill: Was it in upper New York?
- Linda McKay: Westchester County, it's 28 minutes out of Grand Central out to Westchester. So anyway, I did that and we were transferred back to Kansas City.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, my!
- Linda McKay: Yeah.
- Blanche Touhill: You sold your house?
- Linda McKay: We actually rented the house but when we moved back, a story about schools actually...by that time our oldest daughter was in middle school and I'd been a little concerned about the school system and whenever we moved, we looked at schools and then we bought a house. That's how we did all our moves.
- Blanche Touhill: Did you go in the school and look at the school or did you just do it by reputation?
- Linda McKay: They started in elementary school so I went to the elementary school and it was great. I always say you walk in a door and you know it. People look at me like I'm crazy but no, you walk in a door and you know it. But the middle school, what happened is they were going to sort of a new experimental thing to try and I don't remember what they called it but Kimberley, our oldest daughter was supposedly in advanced classes and she had an appendectomy in April of that year and I went up to get her work and I was informed she was done for the year and I said, "Well, what is Kimberley doing then?" and they said, "Well, we have the students that get done with what we planned start work with the students that aren't there to reinforce what they've learned." So I was kind of dubious of that and so we were transferred to New York and Kimberley came home from school and said, "I'm flunking math," and to

make a long story short, we just felt like, for her, for our kids...and this is the same system...we needed to get to another school. So we made a conscious decision to move to another school district when we came back. So we did and then did fine. When we came back, again, I was still involved in the community and different initiatives that really continued some of the ones I said, the public television was one, and community projects, but I found I would be asked to be an executive director, to come in for an interim, so if we started a new project, I would be the director and set it up until we hired the director. So the goal was, I'd leave.

Blanche Touhill: You would work yourself out of a job?

Linda McKay: I would work myself out of a job.

Blanche Touhill: And what were some of the projects that you did when you were working yourself out of a job?

Linda McKay: One was, "Keep America Beautiful." That was an initiative under the Johnson Administration that we started. So we started an initiative for that in Kansas City and then hired the director. Another one wasn't that way, it was the director of the Girl Scouts was having a baby so I went in during the maternity leave but she brought me in because they were doing a three-year future plan and one of the things that needed to happen was to sell the sacred camps and so they wanted someone that was from the outside to lead that process.

Blanche Touhill: What do you mean, sell the...

Linda McKay: They had Girl Scout camps that people had gone to for generations, for years, and financially they couldn't sustain them. So the director knew what had to happen and yet, you needed to have...the board went through a process and someone developed the financial information, the options, other camps they could go to, what could be done, and present it to the board.

Blanche Touhill: And that's what you did?

Linda McKay: That's what I did. So I did that. Then we were transferred again. So this time it was St. Louis, Missouri, and I was still doing community ascertainment for the public television station and that's when I noticed

that it had always been education and it had always been something to do with business about a community, but in education, what was changing, instead of a concern for good education, was a concern more about the students. The drop-out rate started; the suicide rate started, the climb in the suicide rate for young people; the teenage pregnancy rate; the use of drugs rate, all of these were increasing. But what I could see is it wasn't just the inner city; it was just as much in the suburban communities for a lot of the young people we were losing. So when we moved to St. Louis, that's one of the things I really had wanted to focus on and right after we moved here is when, again, at my church, there was an Ethics Day about ethics in the business world and it was presented by McDonnell Douglas and a man named Sandy McDonald and a member of our church. That was kind of my light bulb. I sat there and I thought, you know, what they are doing at McDonnell Douglas we could do in high schools, to talk about ethics and how ethics impacts your life and values and connecting it to the workforce because that's why McDonnell Douglas had started it. So I approached the member of our church afterwards to see if he would work with me, and approached our high school and we ended up developing a course about ethical decisions.

Blanche Touhill: And what was the high school?

Linda McKay: Clayton High School.

Blanche Touhill: So you moved to Clayton?

Linda McKay: Moved to Clayton, again, and this time we had two daughters left. The other two were in college. We had them tour the schools. We brought them.

Blanche Touhill: And they said yes.

Linda McKay: And they picked Clayton and then we couldn't find a house forever. But one of our daughters was a senior so we knew that was important and so we took them to different high schools and they picked Clayton High School. So then our goal was to get a house in Clayton which we were very fortunate to do that and it was Clayton High School that I went to the principal and said, "Here's my concerns about young people today and about their disconnect right now and how important personal decisions and values are in their life" and he said to me...it was instant...he said, "Not only will we, we must do something like this."

- Blanche Touhill: Who was that?
- Linda McKay: Al Burr.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, I remember him.
- Linda McKay: He's wonderful.
- Blanche Touhill: And so he bought in right away?
- Linda McKay: It was like two seconds.
- Blanche Touhill: And who gave the course?
- Linda McKay: Well, we worked with a Social Studies teacher there and we worked with Human Resource staff at McDonnell Douglas that had developed their course and then, since it was business, I had always...one of the things I worked with a lot through the years was the Chamber of Commerce in different towns because that's just a natural connection, if you're going to do something community-wise for involvement. So anyway, I always knew that the Chamber of Commerce had been interested in education and so I called the Missouri Chamber of Commerce and the head of their education at that time, David Langford was his name, he joined with us.
- Blanche Touhill: And so they bought in right away too?
- Linda McKay: They bought in right away too. The Social Studies teacher bought in right away and we brought parents to the table and we brought students to the table.
- Blanche Touhill: And they endorsed it?
- Linda McKay: They endorsed it, and one of the things I learned in that facilitator course is that you always bring together...if you're developing something...you bring together who's going to be involved and being impacted, implementing it, needing their support and have them part of the planning.
- Blanche Touhill: Weren't there people that said they gave the children values and that the school should not do this?
- Linda McKay: Not at the high school course we did, uh-uh, no, because, a, we connected it to the workforce and what we developed was a course that

we brought in...students signed up by a profession they would maybe like to be. We brought in a person from that profession and then they had a day they spent together and the first part of the day is what are values and how are they acquired. Then there was sort of a little short questionnaire that students did to kind of check the values and it would come up with what were their values.

Blanche Touhill: So it was a pre-test?

Linda McKay: It was a pre-test, post-test, yeah, and it pretty much always came up the same, once you got done, and once you checked this list, because you were told you can just check as many as you want, you needed to narrow it to five and say that normally there's about five values that really guide your life daily.

Blanche Touhill: Do you remember what the five were?

Linda McKay: Well, almost always honesty came up which, to me, is interesting because when you really delve into honesty, it's one of the harder ones, about sometimes being honest, really. When I talk about the work I did in values and ethics in public schools, there was an elementary child that said if the policeman came to your house and you were hiding Anne Frank, would you tell the policeman, and she didn't say Gestapo or, you know, but in her mind, and I thought, look at the level that child went to for honesty. But still, honesty is usually always one; respect is one; responsibility will come up. After that, they kind of start...something related to kindness, caring, compassion will usually be on the list, something like that. But then it's not as consistent as respect, responsibility, honesty.

Blanche Touhill: You're talking about what was raised was when if you lived in a society where the police weren't your friends, like Nazi Germany and Anne Frank and that. Well, did Sandy McDonald know what you were doing?

Linda McKay: Well, actually, when we had our first symposium, one of the things you do is have a speaker and Sandy came to that and that's how I met him.

Blanche Touhill: And he was aware that you were using the materials from the Human Resources Department at McDonnell Douglas?

Linda McKay: Yes.

- Blanche Touhill: And I'll bet he was pleased.
- Linda McKay: Well, two weeks after the course, the head of his foundation at McDonnell Douglas called and asked if I'd be interested in being the director of a project he was starting in the city and that's how I became involved in what is now known as "Character Plus." So I think he must have liked it.
- Blanche Touhill: Did you accept right away?
- Linda McKay: Well, no. Then it was sort of made clear that I had to go through a large interview process. So I was interviewed by representatives of the school district and I was part of an organization so I was interviewed by staff there and then had a community advisory board and I was interviewed by staff there. Then I was offered the actual job.
- Blanche Touhill: Where was that housed?
- Linda McKay: At that point, it was Fontbonne College and Gay [inaudible 40:11] Network for Educational Development, was who I really worked with.
- Blanche Touhill: Who was the president of Fontbonne at that time? Was that a Jane Hassett or...
- Linda McKay: I do not know that at all.
- Blanche Touhill: Monique Dunham or somebody like that, no?
- Linda McKay: I never met that person or anything like that.
- Blanche Touhill: Your contact was...
- Linda McKay: Was Gay, yeah, and then we were moved to Fern Ridge Road out on Olive and went into a school there and then we actually were moved over here by University of Missouri-St. Louis.
- Blanche Touhill: And you were in the School of Education?
- Linda McKay: It was in a separate building. It wasn't even the School of Education; it was a building that the university took that different offices were rented out... on Florissant Road.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, okay. You were in the Regional Center for Workers...

- Linda McKay: The state one, yeah.
- Blanche Touhill: The state, which brought in the cooperating school districts...
- Linda McKay: Right.
- Blanche Touhill: And the state...some of the [inaudible 41:18] departments and then they also had some of the endowed professors over there, I think, and then they had "Character Plus."
- Linda McKay: They did, uh-huh. That's where we were.
- Blanche Touhill: That was Charlie Schmitz.
- Linda McKay: It was Charlie Schmitz.
- Blanche Touhill: Who was the dean and who had that idea that you bring these outside educational institutions together to cooperate with the faculty of UMSL, yeah.
- Linda McKay: Correct, and, to me, it was a great way to do it. There was wonderful connected resources there.
- Blanche Touhill: So you probably dealt with Tom Schnell?
- Linda McKay: I did.
- Blanche Touhill: Because he was really the link between the College of Education and these various groups that were in there.
- Linda McKay: Yeah, he was great.
- Blanche Touhill: Tell me about "Character Plus."
- Linda McKay: Well, what happened after that was that...I did that job for 15 years and that's the first time I really took what turned into be a full-time job. It was supposed to be part-time. I remember when I started, it had commitment from three corporations and one foundation, there were seven school districts that had signed on and the goal was, again, to bring people together to figure out how to develop character education in our school. They didn't even call it that. Personal Responsibility Education Process is what it was called. And, from the very beginning, it was a process. I give the credit to the teachers and the principals for that, that it's not a curriculum or a binder on the shelf. It has to be, how do we operate this

building and what do we do collaboratively for young people to understand the values essential for their lives. And so training was developed then for teachers, again, teachers helped me develop what they thought would be the best and then we brought in people to do the training. Our goal was really training people here to do the training. We had a representative from the districts. We went quickly from seven to fourteen districts that they actually planned what they thought their districts needed.

Blanche Touhill: So you mean the program could be different in different districts?

Linda McKay: It was different in different districts. But what was consistent in the districts is it had to be a process that permeated the schools, so what are you doing to involve the parents, what are you doing to train the teachers, what are you doing to have the whole building involved. Back to your question about whose values do you teach? The choice was district by district, they would bring people together to decide so you'd have different values in different districts. Some chose nine, some had four, some had twenty.

Blanche Touhill: Did they identify problems too?

Linda McKay: Well, you identified operation programs and 10 years down the road, we did a huge sort of assessment of the project and it was a donation from one of our corporations here with a strategic planning, so Merritz donated that and so actually we did questionnaires down to parents. We did parents, teachers, counselors, principals, superintendents, and from that, what came is we needed to train principals, that the principal was the key and the principal then would make sure that the support was there for the rest of the building. If it was that person's vision and that person's belief, it would be the best for it to permeate a building.

Blanche Touhill: Were the five ethical goals, were those part of this?

Linda McKay: Ethical decision-making?

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Linda McKay: That actually took a separate sort of path. What I realized is for the districts to be able to do that, we had to have a way of funding the resources plus we ended up having some articles in the newspapers and

people were kind of calling about it. So my goal was to get it housed in a national place somewhere and to raise the money to get it funded to get it going and then they could charge for it but St. Louis could always not have to pay. And so, from doing research again, National Association of Secondary School Principals in Washington, D.C. is what I was kind of directed toward, and again, at this point I was working with, at that point, PREP, then it became Character Plus and so Sandy and myself and the head of the U.S. Chamber made a presentation to them. We got money from Pizza Hut to underwrite it and Emerson to underwrite the costs. So it became a national program and, as far as I know, it's still there. But again, they decide...when they have that day-long seminar, that group comes up with the values. It's not the same. But that was basically the process that we put in for the districts here.

Blanche Touhill: You were the executive director?

Linda McKay: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: To whom did you report?

Linda McKay: I reported to two people: I reported to the corporation community side through Sandy McDonald who was then retired from McDonnell Douglas, and then through cooperating school districted, I reported to the director of cooperating school districts. So I had two bosses in a way.

Blanche Touhill: So he was the link to the superintendents who was the link to the principals?

Linda McKay: To the principals.

Blanche Touhill: And the principals were the link to the culture of the school?

Linda McKay: To the school, and I had Superintendents Council Committee...I had a small task force that I relied on heavily for helping in development those first 15 years.

Blanche Touhill: So you were executive director for 15 years?

Linda McKay: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Now, when you left, how many people were involved in this program?

- Linda McKay: By that point, we had been very fortunate that we had gotten a million dollars in the Missouri budget for a year so we were working across the State of Missouri. We had 35 districts here in St. Louis area, plus districts across the state. We received two federal grants and when I left, we got two more federal grants, one was for across the State of Missouri and one was for the St. Louis area. We had 35 districts, as I said, here in the metropolitan area when I left.
- Blanche Touhill: Do you know how many individuals were touched by that?
- Linda McKay: Well, I used to know that number and I could find it out for you.
- Blanche Touhill: If you got that number, that would be very nice, from an annual report...
- Linda McKay: Yeah, I have it from there.
- Blanche Touhill: [Inaudible 48:02] after 15 years.
- Linda McKay: Yeah, I'd hate to say it and not be right.
- Blanche Touhill: No, I understand.
- Linda McKay: Yeah, but I used to have that number.
- Blanche Touhill: So then you decided to leave. Why did you decide to leave?
- Linda McKay: Well, at the election of Gore and Bush, something else I worked on during the year was trying to get federal legislation for Character Ed and I found out there were a group of us interested across the country so we started in late '80s and early '90s.
- Blanche Touhill: And you said Gore and Bush so you don't mean Gore and Bush?
- Linda McKay: Yeah, I meant Senator Gore and George W. Bush were running for office, yeah, so there was that national presidential election and Character Education was in both their platforms.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, wonderful.
- Linda McKay: And I was part of a group, I was like a tiny part of a group that we worked to get federal legislation passed that was passed in the Clinton Administration for grants in Character Education to states and Missouri got one of those grants eventually. And so in the Gore/Bush platforms, Character Education was not only mentioned but the goal was to expand

it and so I thought, well, if I could do that nationally, I'd like to. I still remember going to my husband saying, "You know, this is something I'd really like to do," and he always said if it hadn't snowed on that Sunday, probably I wouldn't...I was snowed in. I called the Bush headquarters in Texas, because by this point he had been elected, and asked how I applied for a job. So I decided if I could work on this nationally, I wanted to. So I called the Bush/Cheney headquarters in Texas...at that point you could still call Information and get a phone number...and I had not been politically involved for a long time because I felt for the project I was working on, that was better and worked with all parties. So I called Bush/Cheney headquarters and asked how you applied for a position and they said, you can just do it online. So at that point, you could, you could go online and fill out this form about your life from when you were born and then the hard work really started. So I just started talking to people, "How do I get a political position?" and I just had a lot of angels along the way that helped me and it took two years, but I got it.

Blanche Touhill: What was your title?

Linda McKay: I was Senior Advisor for Character Education and Civil Engagement at the United States Department of Education.

Blanche Touhill: So you moved to Washington?

Linda McKay: I moved to Washington.

Blanche Touhill: But your family stayed here?

Linda McKay: And my husband stayed here working.

Blanche Touhill: And your children were gone?

Linda McKay: Well, the younger two were in college, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, they were rooming somewhere; they were not living at home?

Linda McKay: Yeah, they weren't at home, yeah. He didn't have to get them to school. But I remember he said to me...when I got the position finally...and I had kind of thought he was maybe ready for a change and he was going to go with me, then he became involved in something he really wanted to do and so he said to me, "I've traveled our whole married life. Why can't

you?” so we did. So I became a community marriage and I was at the Department for six years and really part of some wonderful things.

Blanche Touhill: Like what?

Linda McKay: The grants, after I came in, I had the first requirement ever for randomized control or quasi-experimental evaluations which school districts had not done, so let alone in math and science, it was in Character Ed, and I’m not a researcher and so I began working with the Institute of Education Science which is the federal arm for research evaluation and just worked with some wonderful people and with some school districts really, really committed to try and do it and we all learned together. The other thing I learned at the Department is that...I mean, you’re in a building with about 3,000 people...to try and figure out how to do something, I would just get up and start walking through that building and find the person that should be able to help me. And because of that, I think Character Education, when I first came in, was like, “Who is this woman? Is she from the left; is she from the right; is it religious,” I had a lot of questions that I could tell people were concerned, but they found out it was society values. We’re talking about what it is to make a society what it should be. And so I worked with that. We ended up that we established the first Technical Assistance Center for Research in Character Education and for support to schools across the country. We ended up...we had a lot of calls internationally, of people...they called it “Ethics Education” or what are you doing to develop the morals and values of your young people. We ended up having two international summits. Character Education was a foreign word to them but what we had that we all agreed upon is what we are doing to help develop our young people to be the citizens we want them to be. And so that was very informative on that.

Blanche Touhill: Do those laws still exist in that program?

Linda McKay: No, the funding was cut the week after I left the department so that took me on another journey. It was when the cuts started in Congress.

Blanche Touhill: Was that 2008?

Linda McKay: That was 2008.

Blanche Touhill: So the recession really affected the program?

Linda McKay: It affected...a lot of things started getting cut but it cut it in the middle of those big federal grants. I mean, some of these were two million dollar grants which is big to a school district and they had made a commitment for this research. And so it was February 4<sup>th</sup>, I remember, they got cut and so I called the attorneys at the Department because my plan had been to move back to St. Louis and I called the attorneys at the Department and said, "What can I do?" because you have real strict requirements about any activity after you leave an office that you're trying to do personal gain. And so the attorney said, "As long as no one pays you, no one sends you, you can talk to anybody you want to." So for a year-and-a-half I worked with lobbying...

Blanche Touhill: And you paid your own way?

Linda McKay: I paid my own way.

Blanche Touhill: Did you get it back?

Linda McKay: I got it back...well, with help from a lot of people.

Blanche Touhill: Linda, I'm going to change the subject a little bit: Would you tell me, what would your life have been like if you had been born 50 years earlier?

Linda McKay: I hope it would have been like a Carrie Nation. I hope I would have been doing something to help the world. But I think 50 years ago, any woman in that time, it would have been a much harder time to do the things that I care about today and it would have been much more of a role of probably doing the daily needs for my family at the time, if I had that, or I could have maybe been a teacher at that time but it would have been a very different type of life than what I've had.

Blanche Touhill: And is there some award or awards that you particularly treasure?

Linda McKay: Yes. When I was in Kansas City, Kansas and working in that community, as I said, you were really an outsider and people treated you that way. When we were getting ready to be transferred to Kansas City, I was asked to come to a community event and the mayor was going to be there and it was to acknowledge one of the projects that we'd been working on, but it was really to give me a key to the city.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, my!

- Linda McKay: And I was truly shocked and it is truly something I treasure.
- Blanche Touhill: And what are you doing now?
- Linda McKay: I'm working as a volunteer for two boards and one is the Character Plus here in St. Louis and one is the National Character Education Partnership in Washington, D.C. and my goal is just to get people in place to carry on the work I love.
- Blanche Touhill: And what happened to your daughters?
- Linda McKay: Daughter number one became a medical doctor and she practiced for about 20 years and then, because of insurance, left...insurance premiums...went to culinary school. She has four children. My second daughter lives in Newport Beach, California, has three children and she is kind of like her mom, she's out in the community and has done more for schools, her focus has been schools and helping (fund?) schools out there. My third daughter is a city planner and does feasibility impact studies for communities for development and lives in Washington, D.C. with two children, and my youngest daughter lives near St. Louis, has six children and also has her own business in the retail area and we have 15 grandchildren.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness!
- Linda McKay: I know.
- Blanche Touhill: And you and your husband are now in retirement, sort of?
- Linda McKay: He says I'm not retired. He's wondering when I'm going to retire and he is and we hope to travel. We travel to all our kids but we hope to do some fun traveling which we're trying to get that in the agenda.
- Blanche Touhill: Have you published any of these events that you've gone through in your life?
- Linda McKay: No, I haven't. I've had people ask me to write a book and I keep saying, who would read it, but, no, I haven't, but I've done publishing. I've published collaboratively. Again, if I saw a need to have something written, like integrating Character Education into Standards.
- Blanche Touhill: Is your name on those documents?

Linda McKay: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Well, thank you very much. It was a wonderful trip through your life and I know that the communities have profited from your service. Thank you.

Linda McKay: Well, I thank you. I'm honored you asked me.