

An Interview with
Teg Stokes

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

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PREFACE

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

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

Blanche Touhill: ...introduce yourself.

Teg Stokes: My name is Teg Stokes, I'm 70 years old and I live here in St. Louis...have lived here for the last 34 years.

Blanche Touhill: Would you talk about your childhood: your parents, your siblings, your grandparents, your cousins, your neighbors. Who did you play with? Did you play with boys and girls? You know, just your childhood.

Teg Stokes: I was born in Manhattan in New York City and I lived there until I was about, I think seven years old and then we moved to the suburbs. Because we lived in the city, we went away every summer for the entire summer to the Jersey shore and probably a big influence on me was, my grandmother died when I was, like, five, but it was a seamless...I didn't have a grandmother and then I did have a grandmother because my grandmother's sister who lived in the same building as we did with my grandmother, we actually lived with my grandmother because when my father left to go to Europe during the war, we moved in with her and then when he came home in 1946, there was very little housing, affordable housing in Manhattan and so my grandmother had a huge apartment and so we just lived with her. My Aunt Marion, who was my grandmother's younger sister, she was, she never divorced but she and her husband lived separately and she was a nature lover and my very first exposure to biology and science and classification was from Auntie. We would take walks in the woods and we would collect specimens and...remember shirt cardboards?

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Teg Stokes: We would mount everything on shirt cardboards and then we'd go to the library and we would label all of the shells or starfish or plants and we'd bring back plants from the woods and make terrariums and so that was my introduction to science, which stayed with me really all of my life to this day but really shaped my career because I went to public school until I was in the 8th grade and then I was...

Blanche Touhill: And this was in...

Teg Stokes: This was in New York. We moved to the suburbs...

Blanche Touhill: Suburbs of New York?

- Teg Stokes: Right, and then for high school, I went to boarding school in Garden City, New York.
- Blanche Touhill: Did you want to go?
- Teg Stokes: I was okay with it.
- Blanche Touhill: Your friends went to boarding school too?
- Teg Stokes: Many of them did, and I will say that I occasionally, like, for one semester, would be a day hop but most of the time I was a boarder and when I was a freshman in high school...I wish I could remember her name...I had the most extraordinary science teacher and I can still feel the first time I looked through a microscope and saw the paramecium and stuff swimming around. It was really an extraordinary experience and it just built on what Auntie had introduced me to as a young child, very young child, with all the collections and learning to catalogue and describe and name all of these elements in nature. So I always have had, as I said, to this day and a good half of my working life was in the sciences. I went to Chatham University...
- Blanche Touhill: Well, let's go back to high school. What did you do in high school that really made you a leader?
- Teg Stokes: I'm not sure I was a leader. I was the...actually, at graduation, I was the second smallest girl in the class. I grew a tiny bit my senior year. Ann Marie Kursten had the lead of the class but, no, I was definitely not a leader. I was kind of a science geek. I was always hanging out in the science building and doing my own little experiments and looking through the microscopes. We...I'll never forget...planarian, do you remember planarian and you cut the head in half and then it grew two heads and that was endlessly fascinating to me. I was not a leader in high school or college actually.
- Blanche Touhill: Did you get a good high school science education?
- Teg Stokes: I got an amazing high school education. The school I went to was very old-fashioned.
- Blanche Touhill: Was it only girls?
- Teg Stokes: It was all girls and we took...

Blanche Touhill: How many girls did they have about?

Teg Stokes: That is a great question. It was probably about 200 in the whole school. I think we had about 50 in each class...40.

Blanche Touhill: And most were boarders?

Teg Stokes: Most were boarders, about more than half. Because it was close to Manhattan, we had a lot of international students too, because... people at the UN and things like that so they would send their kids clothes and on Fridays we would go to the train station and we had to wear a hat and gloves to sign out of school and, of course, on the way to the train station, we were ripping everything off and putting lipstick on in the car mirrors. I used to ride home with a girl...this will show you that I was definitely not a leader...with a very mature girl, beautiful girl named Jean Strakosh and when I would get home, I'd say, "You know, I just don't understand, Mother. Jean never has to pay on the train. I have to pay" and Jean used to flirt with the conductors on this Long Island railroad and keep her money for her train fare for cigarettes or something.

Blanche Touhill: What did your mother say when you said that?

Teg Stokes: Well, she said, "Well, Jean will never have to pay on the train probably." She knew. She was a very beautiful buxom girl. But one thing that was really interesting was we had to take Latin for four years. We had languages. We studied the classics.

Blanche Touhill: You read Shakespeare.

Teg Stokes: We did and we read Chaucer and we read Beowulf and it was a very old-fashioned education in that we studied the classics

Blanche Touhill: The Classics.

Teg Stokes: ...and we had some very talented teachers who would put headdresses with horns on their head when we were studying Beowulf and all these things and at the time, I kind of resented that education, but now I realize how...

Blanche Touhill: Because you're a reader.

Teg Stokes: Well, I was always a reader.

Blanche Touhill: But, I mean, that gave you an introduction to a world-wide [inaudible 08:21].

Teg Stokes: Yes, exactly correct, and my mother was very well educated...and this is kind of an interesting aside...she had had a very good job. She went to Barnard and she worked at Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons. She was a research librarian and during the war, she worked on the Manhattan Project. She worked for Bob Yuri. She didn't understand what was in the papers, of course. She just went to the library and pulled the papers or the journals and brought them to him and I think later in life, she had some misgivings about it, but at the time, I mean, it was a very status job. There were tremendous thinkers and doers at the university and at Columbia. Then she had me and grandmother who was a really Martinet, she said, "You can't work. People will think your husband can't support you" and even after she died and left the scene, my mother just never went back to work and she was mad for 50 years. I mean, she was frustrated and angry and she would have been such a better mother if she had gone back to work because she would have been happy and fulfilled and instead she was just frustrated for all that time. But the one message that I got was don't ever let...her maiden name was Vegelholt so she was not exactly what you call a lovey-dovey but she made it very clear to me that nobody should ever tell me what to do and that if I wanted to work, work. If you didn't want to work, don't work.

Blanche Touhill: You make your own decisions?

Teg Stokes: You make your own decisions and be the captain of your own fate and I think that was a really important lesson that I learned from her.

Blanche Touhill: And that was an era, at the end of the war where they were saying to the women, "Go back home and give those jobs to the troops who had been overseas.

Teg Stokes: Returned, exactly.

Blanche Touhill: So there was great social pressure.

Teg Stokes: And even at six or seven years old, I remember so well, they kept calling her from the university and saying, "Oh, my goodness, don't you want to come back to work," and "We need you research librarians and everything is..." ...but by then we'd moved to the suburbs and she would

have had to take the train into Manhattan every day. And so she never did which is too bad. But I do feel that she also...both of my parents in very different ways...really valued education, they really valued tremendously knowledge, just knowing things. I mean, dinners often ended up at our house...I'm sure it's the same at your house...with stacks of encyclopedias and books because my father would say, "I'm not sure that's correct. Go get the encyclopedia."

Blanche Touhill: Actually, Barbara Fraser just did an interview and she said that her dinner table always ended up with somebody going to the encyclopedia to make sure that the other person's facts were right.

Teg Stokes: Correct, exactly correct and my father was kind of like a fact junkie. I mean, he read the New York Times, he took the T, he never drove to work. He worked for 47 or 48 years and he never drove to work a day in his life.

Blanche Touhill: How long did it take him to go one way?

Teg Stokes: Not long, 30 minutes and then he got to Manhattan and then, if it was nice weather, he just walked to the office and if it wasn't, then he took the subway or the bus. But he read the New York Times cover to cover every day and the Wall Street Journal and he could tell you who was the president or the prime minister of some obscure African country because he just absorbed all those facts. But he was not a reader like my mother was.

Blanche Touhill: He knew current affairs.

Teg Stokes: He knew current events and he loved information. He was just an information junkie and he told me once, he said, "I always, before I close my eyes and go to sleep, I try to think of something new I learned today" and I said, "Father, but what happens if you didn't learn anything?" He said, "Well then, I guess I'll have to learn two things tomorrow," because that was sort of his thing. He just loved information of any type.

Blanche Touhill: Did they want you to go to boarding school?

Teg Stokes: I think it's what people did then. I don't know whether they actually wanted me...they sent me away in 9th grade so I was able to really do okay with it. My brother went in 7th grade and I think, to be honest with

you...and he went to private school. He never went to public school. He went to Buckley Country Day and then he went to Mercersburg and I think what ended up happening, he was too young and I'm not sure he ever really was as confident as he could have been. He also didn't brush his teeth for six years and as a result, he has terrible teeth, even to this day. But I think it was just what people did.

Blanche Touhill: Are you glad you went away?

Teg Stokes: I think I was very...it was an important time. When I would come home for a semester or something, it would be a day out, I used to get antsy to get back because I didn't have anybody really except the routine of school telling me what to do. You knew you had to study in study hall; you knew all of the parameters of your day.

Blanche Touhill: Were you in clubs?

Teg Stokes: Yes. Now that I did do. I was always in the humanities club and the music club and the science club, yes, all of those kinds of things because those were what were interesting to me.

Blanche Touhill: Did your auntie work?

Teg Stokes: Auntie did not, no, and she had no children of her own so she just swept my brother and I into her...

Blanche Touhill: ...orbit.

Teg Stokes: ...orbit and even after Grandmother died, we would then go for the whole summer and stay with her.

Blanche Touhill: And that was the Jersey shore?

Teg Stokes: That was the Jersey shore. My grandmother's house was in Monnath Beach and Auntie's house was in North Long Branch.

Blanche Touhill: I bet she looked forward to having you both.

Teg Stokes: Oh, she did. I mean, it was...and then, whenever my parents would travel or go on vacation, we always went and stayed with her. Then, the minute we'd get there...this was after we moved to the suburbs...we used to go...and I am not exaggerating...probably three times a week to the American Museum of Natural History because we lived close on the

upper west side. And so we were always at the American Museum of Natural History. We knew all the guards and they never...you weren't supposed to eat in the museum. You were supposed to only eat in the cafeteria but my aunt didn't believe in...she was very ahead of her time in terms of healthy, and my mother as well...healthy eating so you were never allowed to eat hotdogs and things like that that they claimed with the meat that was swept off the floor. And so we used to take our own lunch. I don't know if you've been in the museum, there are those deep stairwells and in between the floors, there's like a little bench.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, and you'd have your lunch on the bench.

Teg Stokes: We'd eat our own lunch on the bench and the guard would..."Oh..."...he would say, "How are you all today?" It was totally illegal but...

Blanche Touhill: Yeah, but you didn't leave a mess?

Teg Stokes: No, never.

Blanche Touhill: Did you make friends at your boarding school that you still have today?

Teg Stokes: I have a couple girls that I still stay sort of Christmas card in touch with but other than that, no, because we all scattered. So, no, I don't have any close friends from high school.

Blanche Touhill: So where did you go to college?

Teg Stokes: I went to Chatham University in Pittsburgh and the nice thing about it was that they...I took a double major, biology and psychology and you could take any classes as long as they weren't offered on campus at Carnegie-Melon which, in my day, was called the Carnie Institute of Technology or at Pitt and there was a wonderful old trolley line that took you right down there and when I went there, it didn't have a graduate school. It only was undergraduate. You can get a doctorate there now. It's a much bigger institution and offers a bigger variety of classes and stuff. So I took several classes and independent studies in my junior and senior year and we had to write what was called a tutorial and you had to do independent research for it and I worked with a Fellow at the Western Psychiatric...it was part of University of Pittsburg, and I did research at a VA hospital on drug interactions and rats and stuff like that. It was very formative for me.

- Blanche Touhill: What were you going to do with your degree?
- Teg Stokes: Well, I really didn't know.
- Blanche Touhill: Were you going to go to graduate school?
- Teg Stokes: At first I thought that's what I wanted to do. Then a girlfriend and I, we went to Europe...you know, everybody did that...and that was an interesting...again, very formative. I travelled all around Europe and I ended up in Copenhagen and I had a ticket on Pan Am from London but I didn't have enough money left to get to London. My daughter would have just e-mailed or picked up the phone, "Please send me the money" but I wouldn't do that. I did not want to admit to my parents that I had mismanaged...because I had a finite amount of money to last me, so I ended up living in Copenhagen. I got a job.
- Blanche Touhill: You were able to get a job?
- Teg Stokes: I was able to get a job at the University of Copenhagen cafeteria, bussing tables.
- Blanche Touhill: But you could, yeah.
- Teg Stokes: And most Danes speak almost perfect English and they always want to practice and if they didn't speak English, I would just, "Are you finished," and clear the table.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, did your girlfriend go home and you stayed?
- Teg Stokes: My girlfriend...even more dramatic...who I still am very much in touch with, she went back to Florence because she met this fellow and I traveled on my own the last part and probably Nancy would have been better at managing than I was and she's still there.
- Blanche Touhill: She married the boy?
- Teg Stokes: I don't know if she ever married him but she lived with him for years and years and years and she still lives in Florence. She never came home. She still refers to herself as Nancy Lipman. Now, whether or not she actually ever married or not, I don't know. If she didn't marry, she now lives with the love of her life, which she describes as the love of her life.
- Blanche Touhill: Have you seen her in Europe?

- Teg Stokes: No, I've never seen her.
- Blanche Touhill: Has she ever come back to the States?
- Teg Stokes: Oh, yes, she did while her parents were still alive. She used to come back often and we tried always to find a place. She would come through New York and so I would see her. A couple of times I went to Pittsburgh where her parents lived, in Pittsburgh and both of her parents are dead now so she hasn't been back. The last time we were in Florence, we didn't see her because we were with Delta and it was just not a convenient time. I talked to her two or three times on the phone but I never actually got to see her.
- Blanche Touhill: But she didn't have children?
- Teg Stokes: She never had children, no. She never did.
- Blanche Touhill: And how does she support herself?
- Teg Stokes: She works.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, it's so interesting that you could get jobs in Europe because today it's very hard to go to Europe and get a job...
- Teg Stokes: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: ...unless you have some nationality relationship where some countries will allow you to have a citizenship kind of thing.
- Teg Stokes: I don't think she ever has taken out Italian citizenship but she has lived there for almost 50 years. She works for an international Jewish organization that promotes understanding in Europe and stuff like that. I don't think she got that job immediately. I think she taught English at a college or university in Florence for a while and then she worked for a big company, in HR because they hired a lot of foreigners and she would interview them and do the training and stuff like that. Then I think she's now worked for this international Jewish group for about 15 years.
- Blanche Touhill: So how long did you bus tables in Copenhagen?
- Teg Stokes: Until January of 1968, so let's see, September, October, November, December, I was there four-and-a-half months and then I managed to pull together enough cash and I came back home. Of course, then what

was I going to do? And I went for an interview at Rockefeller University and I got a job as a lab technician because obviously with my tutorial and all the experience that I'd had doing lab work, I got a job as a lab technician. Then I guess it must have been '70, 1970, there was a big shake-up at the university. There was a man named George Pollotti. When I was there in the late '60s and '70s, Rockefeller University was like the elephant's burial ground for Nobel Laureates. I think we had something like eight Nobel Laureates at Rockefeller. It's only a graduate institution and it's focused 99% on research. Initially it was all funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. Then in the '60s they began applying for grants and things to keep things going when the cost of maintaining the campus in Manhattan got really...and they had a joint program with Columbia Medical School which is there at New York Hospital right across the street. So I took a number of classes at the med school and when George Pollotti came, his wife, Marilyn Farquhar was also a Ph.D. and a very well respected biochemist, the university decided not to give her full professor with tenure. So George Pollotti said, "You know, I know a lot of places that will give her full professor with tenure" and he took his lab and all his grant money and all his graduate students and went to Yale, which was a major shake-up at the university. So I actually think that it was an advantage for those of us in sort of lower positions, to be women at the university at that time because they were looking around, "Well, who can we move up in the ranks?" and the woman that I worked for, Christiana Leonard, [inaudible 26:29], she did have a doctorate and she was moved up and then I got moved up. Then I started working with another researcher and it would have been unheard of in early days to be able to publish under your own name

Blanche Touhill: Oh, Yes...

Teg Stokes: ...if you weren't...

Blanche Touhill: Male...

Teg Stokes: Male or...

Blanche Touhill: a Ph.D...

Teg Stokes: have a Ph.D. but I did a lot of my own research.

Blanche Touhill: So you got published in your own name?

Teg Stokes: Oh, yeah, in Journal of Comparative Neurology and I did a very big...the department that I was working on was looking at the relationship between speech and hearing and humans, we constantly correct so if you become deaf, speech breaks down in the human and the same thing happens in the bird. The bird learns to speak through an auditory feedback loop and if a bird becomes deaf, their speech breaks down. If they're deaf from birth, they never learn to sing. They never learn the songs specific of their species. And so we worked in the bird and we were tracing the neurological path between the big giant cells in the reticular formation that come out and enervate the throat in the human and the syrinx in the bird and in the bird, an area called Field L which is very similar to (bronchus?) area.

Blanche Touhill: Can birds survive without knowing how to speak?

Teg Stokes: They do not...we didn't look at that. We were just looking at the path but we also had Peter Marlar was there who is a big animal behavior guy and we weren't in his lab but I would suspect that they would be, because they couldn't interact with song, with call or song...birds have a call and then they have a song. The song is learned. The call is just...like, a Blue Jay goes kee kee kee kee. That's a call and they all do that and they use it to communicate within the group but the song is actually learned and the birds that are deaf, they sing but it's mixed up song. It doesn't sound like the rest of the species and they are very dependent on hearing in order to learn and to maintain. We're monitoring constantly. I'm embarrassed to tell you that I probably couldn't read my own papers. I mean, I've forgotten a lot. I probably wouldn't be able to read my own papers today.

Blanche Touhill: What I'm really getting at is can you make the call to procreate?

Teg Stokes: That's a good question. I think it's very important for males to attract females to have the right lingo, yes, absolutely, and if you don't have the right lingo, you're definitely not going to attract a mate, but not all birds sing, only passerborns, only the passerborns learn to sing. Other birds sing but they don't learn it from their group or their parents.

Blanche Touhill: But when they sing if they're deaf...

Teg Stokes: It just sounds like gibberish. We worked with canaries largely because they sing; they learn to sing passerborns. They were very readily available.

Blanche Touhill: Did you feel that you could move up as high as you wanted to or did you feel you had to stop and get a Master's or a Ph.D.?

Teg Stokes: I took a lot of classes towards a Master's Degree. Then, in 1975, Frank took a job in Washington, D.C. and I fully intended...I took a hiatus in my career. I stayed in New York all by myself, pregnant and I moved to Washington three weeks before Delta was born. I said hello to the obstetrician in the labor room and that kind of set me...no, I met him and that kind of set me back. I did work part-time at NIH and I worked with another...back to Auntie and the nature stuff...I worked for Montgomery County Department of Parks and we did environmental surveys in some of the parks.

Blanche Touhill: Did you live in Montgomery County?

Teg Stokes: Yeah, yeah. Well, for the first year we were there, we lived in the district and then we moved out to Bethesda and as development came in, a lot of...

Blanche Touhill: Oh, that area just boomed.

Teg Stokes: Yeah, and so the Parks Department wanted to know what was in the parks so that they could monitor whether or not the pressure from development and stuff was going to...we had rural begonia orchids and all kinds of really exotic plants and I'll bet they're not there now. I'll bet they're gone.

Blanche Touhill: And what was Frank doing in D.C.?

Teg Stokes: He was working for the Small Business Administration. Well, first he worked for federal commission and then he worked for the Small SBA and then, just when I was kind of thinking, okay, Delta's two years old and I've kind of taken enough time off, Frank took a job in Canada working for the Ministry of Industry Trade and Commerce and that was a really tough time in our lives because I wanted to go back to work but I had this little kid and he was gone from Sunday afternoon until Friday night week after week after week. We did move to Canada. Delta and I lived there for...he was there for 29 months; we were there for about 9 or 10 months out of that, in two different things. Then, when he came back to the U.S., he got offered the job in St. Louis.

Blanche Touhill: For Monsanto?

Teg Stokes: For Monsanto and the rest is history.

Blanche Touhill: Did he get the job that he had when I first met him working for whoever was the president at that time?

Teg Stokes: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: So he always came in as a presidential assistant or something?

Teg Stokes: Correct. He worked first for Jack Hanley and then he worked for Dick Mahoney with whom he is still very good friends. They see each other from time to time and then for Bob Shapiro who left and moved to Chicago. So he does not see Bob at all. He's maybe seen him once in the last five or ten years.

Blanche Touhill: How many years did he work for Monsanto?

Teg Stokes: Just about 20.

Blanche Touhill: So you moved to St. Louis. Was it hard to move to St. Louis?

Teg Stokes: It was terrible. It was absolutely terrible. I left everything behind but it ended up being really...so after...

Blanche Touhill: But I meant this first move, the adjustment?

Teg Stokes: It was terrible. The one advantage that I think that we did is that we tried to maximize our success here. You want to talk about negative, I mean, I just hated it here for the first six months I was here. On Highway 70, I was, like, crying all the way out here because I was leaving behind this really nice life and my friends and a beautiful house.

Blanche Touhill: Well, you had a support system.

Teg Stokes: Right, and I was closer to both of our families, Frank's in Philadelphia and mine in New York.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, that's right.

Teg Stokes: Coming out here was much more difficult to see them on any kind of a more regular basis but what we did, we had this incredible house. It wasn't a very nice house. It was just a shoebox contemporary built in the

'60s but it backed out to four miles of Montgomery County Parkland but it was eight miles from the White House so we had our cake and eat it too. You had this Sylvan environment and you had close parks in proximity for the cultural and everything.

Blanche Touhill: But when you came to St. Louis...

Teg Stokes: I asked them to show me houses on parks and so they took me to, like, Tillie's Park with a baseball diamond in the back yard. I said, "No, no, no, no, no" so then they said, "Oh, that's not a problem, you know, we'll just go to Chesterfield." I said, "I don't want to live 20 miles outside of the city. I need the city." We were homesteaders. We moved into the Central West End into an apartment. We banked the rest of the money and believe me, when we moved into the central west end in 1981, it was definitely not gentrified. It is now. It's beautiful now and you know where the McFerrin's are, in that Cortex area and they were homesteaders down there also and now, of course, it's just...

Blanche Touhill: Well, now, did you move into the Oxford at that point?

Teg Stokes: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: So you've been at the Oxford...

Teg Stokes: ...since 1981.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness.

Teg Stokes: The building across the street from us was boarded up when we moved in and we thought, "Oh, well, they'll fix it up in a year or so." It was, like, six years.

Blanche Touhill: Where did you send your daughter to school?

Teg Stokes: Mary Institute, Country Day School. I'm liberal, very liberal but I wasn't about to take a chance with my kid's education and send her to the public schools. So she went there for 12 years. She was a lifer, that's what they called them.

Blanche Touhill: And did she like it?

Teg Stokes: She liked it well enough and she values, just like I did, the classical education. She is really well educated and then she went to Wheaton

College in Norton, Massachusetts...Stephanie Mendelssohn, do you know the Mendelssohn's?

Blanche Touhill: No.

Teg Stokes: Anyways, said, "I've known you, Delta, since you were six years old. You need to apply to Wheaton," and she wasn't even that interested in it and then she ended up loving it, absolutely loving it and she is very well educated and she's a reader and she's really...well, you'll love this...she was going to be a math major when she went to college and then she got there and took this art history class and she called me up and she said, "Oh, I'm changing my major. I'm going to major in art history." I was like, "Ahhh, how can you possibly support yourself with a degree in art history?" and now she works for Bank of America and she's pushing numbers and spreadsheets all day long and she is doing math again but she claims that she learned so much from the art history and not just about...but how to write, how to analyze. I mean, she'd started that at Mary Institute and now she has a team and she says, "These people, I mean, they are so smart, Mother. They can do things even I can't do," but when they go to submit their report, she has to write the cover letter for them because they can't write...

Blanche Touhill: No, no.

Teg Stokes: And she said, "At first, I really resented it. I thought, you know, why can't you write your own cover letter" and then she realized, "You know, I have skills; they have skills. Their skills are wonderful and so what? It takes me 10 minutes to write the cover letter for their report and then they'll get the recognition that they deserve for the fine work that they've done."

Blanche Touhill: You said the first six months were very difficult. How did you get acclimated to St. Louis?

Teg Stokes: Well, I went back to work. I went to work at Jewish Hospital. We needed the money then and I'm a lab technician. I had the skills. I knew how to do [inaudible 40:16] and how to do [inaudible 40:18] and all those things and I got a job at Jewish as a lab technician and it paid very well. They also allowed me to work on flex time. I mean, from our kitchen window, we could see Jewish Hospital...well, what was Jewish Hospital; it's gone now. So, if I didn't finish during the day, I would leave, go pick Delta up

from school...this was in the days before they had the extended day; they now have extended day...and then I'd wait until Frank got home and then I'd go back and finish my work because it took me four minutes to get over there and it was the ideal job. I had flexibility time. As long as I got my work done, they didn't care and it was the perfect job at that time. But then what happened was, I'd been doing my own work at Rockefeller and I started getting...I remember one day I got really frustrated. I went to the Wash U Med School library and I got out the journals, "Well, here I am in print, you can never take that away from me." And I had a neighbor in the West End...she actually lived on Portland Place...and she actually had a Master's in Special Education and speech and hearing. She'd worked at the Central Institute for the Deaf and she was getting a divorce and she wanted to change her career so she said to me, "I'm going to Kansas City to a conference on small business ownership for women. Do you want to go with me so we can drive together?" I said, "Sure, I can't think of anything else I'm doing this weekend," and we drove back from Kansas City just fired up about the idea of owning our own business and we did a lot of market research and people say, "How could you go from the lab to a..." ...

Blanche Touhill: ...to the toys.

Teg Stokes: Well, we...

Blanche Touhill: Oh, you had another business.

Teg Stokes: We targeted two areas: services for the elderly or toys and at that time there wasn't a high quality toy store in the entire city. There had been something called the Record Bar in Clayton and that closed and you could get a few things like Brio Toys...I forgot, maybe at Brentano's but that wasn't the right...we didn't have Brentano's here. There were very few places to get really good quality educational kinds of toys back in 1985. The store just celebrated its 30th anniversary. It's still going strong, 30 years. So we decided on...we did some market research and then people couldn't understand how I could make that transition. Well, Marge was the people person and it's exactly what you do in a lab: come in in the morning; you decide what you're going to do and then at the end of the day, you write it all down in a big book. So the transition from the lab to running a small business was not that dramatic.

- Blanche Touhill: Well, who decided what you were going to put in the store?
- Teg Stokes: We did that together to some extent.
- Blanche Touhill: And did you have to toy fairs?
- Teg Stokes: We did.
- Blanche Touhill: And how did you know what to buy?
- Teg Stokes: We actually hired a consultant who helped us. He was very successful. He owned several stores in the Midwest including a quality, high end toy store in Louisville, Kentucky and he went with us the first time. Well, he was going for himself but he took us around and said, "Buy this; don't buy that," and he helped us put together our initial inventory. So once we then got a feel for our own market, then we could...
- Blanche Touhill: How did you decide where to put your shop?
- Teg Stokes: By the per capita income. We wanted to be in Ladue because that's where people have the highest income and we probably figured they also had higher education.
- Blanche Touhill: So they look for educational toys.
- Teg Stokes: Right.
- Blanche Touhill: And books.
- Teg Stokes: And books. We had books and it was very hard. It was actually harder finding a retail space than it was getting a loan.
- Blanche Touhill: I was going to ask you about the loan. Did you have difficulty because you were a woman getting a loan?
- Teg Stokes: No, we gave them a business plan. We had done a formal business plan. We had figures projected out for three years. We did everything by the book.
- Blanche Touhill: How long did it take you to put the idea together?
- Teg Stokes: About a year it took, from the time that we decided what we were going to do, to get the retail space to build it out, to get the inventory, to hire John Rulehetter. It was about a year.

Blanche Touhill: And how did Frank react when you came home and said, "I'm going to go into business"?

Teg Stokes: Well, he did the same thing I did when Delta told me that she wanted to major in art history. He was like, "Are you kidding?" But we got the loan without any trouble at all but do you remember Bakewell...

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Teg Stokes: ...Corporation.

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Teg Stokes: Papa Bakewell, the older guy, when we went to interview to get into that building, he was harder than the bank. I mean, we showed them to the bank and they said, "Okay, sure, we'll give you a loan." We paid it back in four years on time and we never...we had letters of credit for seasonal inventory but we had A+ Dunn & Bradstreet rating and we never really had much debt at all with the business. But getting into that building was a killer. I mean, we were in there for half an hour answering questions about how we were going to run the business and what it was going to look like and what our projected sales were going to be.

Blanche Touhill: Is that Sarah's father?

Teg Stokes: No.

Blanche Touhill: It was her grandfather?

Teg Stokes: No.

Blanche Touhill: It was a different Bakewell?

Teg Stokes: Well, they were brothers.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, I know they were.

Teg Stokes: Sarah's father and Ted Bakewell were brothers, I think.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I say that because Sarah said to me one day that her...she worked for the father...

Teg Stokes: Sure, she did, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: And she said he was a very demanding business person but she learned the business.

Teg Stokes: Yeah, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: And she's a better person because she learned the business.

Teg Stokes: I think that her father was more private and Ted Bakewell was more commercial. He managed the commercial end of it.

Blanche Touhill: Was he worried that you wouldn't be able to pay it off?

Teg Stokes: He was worried that we weren't going to be a success. He didn't want a body coming in, whether they paid the rent or not and not being a success and I think it was a lot about image.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, and he wanted a high level toy store...

Teg Stokes: Exactly.

Blanche Touhill: He didn't want...

Teg Stokes: ...a chain or anything, no. And that building still is very...

Blanche Touhill: Oh, it's very nice, very nice.

Teg Stokes: Very nice.

Blanche Touhill: And people walk and...

Teg Stokes: Yeah, yeah. We started out in 1300 square feet. Then we moved to the other side of the building to 2600 square feet and then we moved into the space next to us. So in the end, we had a really big store and she still has it.

Blanche Touhill: Weren't you worried that you might not succeed?

Teg Stokes: I guess we were concerned that we had what it took to be successful but we made money almost from the first day. Now, we only paid ourselves the first year we were in business, like, \$4,000, I think was our income for the entire year. But we always paid ourselves because we felt that our labor was not free. We were worth something so even in that very first year where we made nothing; we felt to have it on the books that we were valuable enough to be paid.

Blanche Touhill: Were you one of the few women owners of business in those days?

Teg Stokes: Yes. There were about four women-owned businesses in that strip. Maryanne Presaco owns Ladue Florist. I don't know if she still owns it. The Provence Boutique, I've forgotten her name. She was a woman-owned business, and there was one other one. Oh, there was a linen shop that was owned by two women that was a little bit further west and actually, that's something interesting: the women on that strip all were very supportive of one another and the women that owned the linen shop, I remember we were agonizing over something as you do when you're a new business and she said, "Listen, if you never have to put anything on sale, you're not taking enough risks," and she said, "The only time you're going to really make money is if you take risks and succeed," and she said, "If it doesn't sell, we just figure we learned something from that experience and then next time we would take a risk and we would make money." And that happened with us frequently. We did have very clear standards that were in our business plan about what we would and wouldn't carry. We never, ever carried guns in our store, from 1985. She may have them now but it's her store now.

Blanche Touhill: When did you get out of that business?

Teg Stokes: I sold in 2001 because my mother got sick.

Blanche Touhill: So you were there 16 years?

Teg Stokes: Well, I probably didn't leave until 2002 so I was there 17 years.

Blanche Touhill: And then it took a year to make the business plan and everything so...

Teg Stokes: So it was really an 18-year project, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: How did your daughter react to it?

Teg Stokes: Oh, she loved the idea. Are you kidding? I mean a seven-year-old whose mother owns a toy store? She thought she'd died and gone to heaven and she worked at the holidays, through the whole time and Marge's girls did too. They wrapped for us at the holidays. Marge's girls and Delta used to say, "We're having a wrap session."

Blanche Touhill: Tell me, did the toys change for girls in those days?

Teg Stokes: I think we always carried dolls and we always carried dress-up clothes, so I would say that our inventory was well balanced, for girls and for boys.

Blanche Touhill: Were you in business when the American Girl came in?

Teg Stokes: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: What was the change of the people who bought the Barbie and bought the American Girl?

Teg Stokes: We didn't sell Barbie.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, you didn't sell Barbie.

Teg Stokes: No. I told you, we had very clearly defined. The only weapon we ever did sell is that we sold these plastic...these were for boys; we had dress-up clothes for boys too...was a plastic crusader thing with a sword that went with it and a little helmet but other than that, we never sold a weapon from our store.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I always thought the coming of the American Girl really was a reflection that the culture was beginning to change.

Teg Stokes: Yes, I would agree. We never sold the doll. We couldn't sell the doll because those are only sold through the company but we did carry a couple of lines of clothing that fit the dolls.

Blanche Touhill: And the books?

Teg Stokes: And the books, always, always carried the books. We tried very hard to gear our inventory to family activities too. I mean, obviously an infant toy is not a family activity. We always had a big infant and pre-school inventory but our two biggest categories were games and puzzles and arts and crafts. We sold arts and crafts projects. Probably 20% of our inventory was arts and crafts and games and puzzles. And interestingly enough, we were kind of a high-end store but during the recessions, we always did better because people wanted to be at home and not spend money going out to the movies or something so they would buy games or puzzles to play with their kids at home instead of taking them out.

Blanche Touhill: And I remember when people began to have game night.

Teg Stokes: Yup.

Blanche Touhill: Let me change the subject a little bit and then we'll come back to your life, but if you had been born 50 years earlier, what would your life have been like?

Teg Stokes: That's a really good question. I probably might have been like my mother, sort of frustrated.

Blanche Touhill: Are you very proud of some award that you've received or honor or something of that nature?

Teg Stokes: I'm very proud of two things: one, the tremendous success of my business. I mean, we started with this tiny little store and we had sales of 1.2 million dollars. That's a lot of money for a toy store. So I'm very proud of that. And I'm also proud of my publications in the Journal of Comparative Neurology and while I was at Rockefeller University. I think I was doing very high caliber work to get into JCN and it was really a thrill, publishing under my own name when there were people there with multiple Ph.D.'s, MD Ph.D.'s and things. So I think those two things I would be very proud of in my life, having done.

Blanche Touhill: Well then, what did you do between the time that you sold your business and today?

Teg Stokes: I still love reading and promoting reading for kids and so when I first retired...well, when I first retired, I mostly was taking care of my mother who died in 2007 and so for those five years, I was really very involved in her care.

Blanche Touhill: So she moved here?

Teg Stokes: She moved here. She moved here in September of '98 but her health didn't begin to fail until later. I mean, her health never really failed. She enjoyed life right up to the end, but she needed more help. So, I had a friend, a new gal. Actually, her husband was our veterinarian, our large animal vet and they were trying to encourage more reading at a rural school in Washington County, Missouri called Richwoods School. About 87% of those kids are on the free breakfast and lunch program and nobody reads and so I went and I would read to the kids and it was K-8. I read to the 8th graders and they loved it because nobody had ever read to them before. Then, unfortunately, the school failed their state accreditation and so they had to focus on teaching to the test. So now I

work in Union which is Franklin County, not Washington County. Washington County is the second poorest county in the State of Missouri and it's very rural. There are no jobs, a lot of drugs and we didn't have a black kid in the school. It was 100% rural white poverty and these kids were really bad off. I mean, it's awful. But I loved it. I really felt I was making a difference there. Now I work in Union which is the county seat of Franklin County and I do my reading program and book buffets with Dudley that I've been doing with her for 10 or 15 years and I do my own book buffet out there now.

Blanche Touhill: What is a book buffet?

Teg Stokes: Well, we get donated books from churches and from schools and from Kirkwood Library and we just put the books out and the kids can take two or three books for their own, for their very own and we've done it for years in the city schools and then about four years ago, I started a book buffet at Union.

Blanche Touhill: And do you still read to them?

Teg Stokes: Yes. The school I work in is 4, 5 and 6 only and I mostly with the 4th graders, but I have over 200 kids. I have eight classes of 4th graders and then I have about three classes of 5th graders and I just read and then we talk about books.

Blanche Touhill: If you had to say what's the theme of your life, what is it?

Teg Stokes: Reading. I mean, I love education and reading. I think those are the theme that's gone through my childhood. I always had my head in a book and Delta. She's 40 years old...

Blanche Touhill: She just had a baby.

Teg Stokes: She just had a baby and she's, like, nursing and reading at the same time.

Blanche Touhill: And what's the baby's name?

Teg Stokes: She's named after Frank's mother, Charlotte Caldwell Stokes and so she's Charlotte and then she's named after Chris' grandmother, Mary Boyd Seaward. Her married name is Seaward and she's Charlotte Mary Seaward, after her two great grandmothers. So she's doing okay but I think Delta's frustrated...

Blanche Touhill: Well, is she now going to go back to work?

Teg Stokes: Oh, yeah. She worked for Bank of America in Business Operations and they get 12 weeks of paid...three months. Her 401K, all of her benefits and a full salary for three months, which is, in this country, in the Vanguard. In Europe they've been doing that for 20 years. We are catching up little by little and Bank of America also pays paternity leave for three months, which is extraordinary.

Blanche Touhill: Is he taking it at the same time she is or he's going to take it afterwards?

Teg Stokes: No, unfortunately, he doesn't work for the bank and his company is privately held and so he has had to take vacation and he travels a lot on business. He's going to Argentina and Brazil this week, this next week. So, no, it's much harder.

Blanche Touhill: Have you bumped into the glass ceiling?

Teg Stokes: Did I?

Blanche Touhill: Yeah...not really?

Teg Stokes: No, not really.

Blanche Touhill: Has she bumped into the glass ceiling?

Teg Stokes: Bank of America, again, is a very forward-looking company. Most of her senior managers are women and this one woman that she reports to here in St. Louis, her big boss is in Dallas and she's a woman and then her big, big boss is in...

Blanche Touhill: Well, thank you for coming today.

Teg Stokes: Well, thank you. It was much more fun than I thought. It was great.

Blanche Touhill: Yes. Well, it's interesting when you talk about your mother and yourself and your daughter. So it was very enjoyable and you get a picture over really almost 100 years don't you?

Teg Stokes: My mother was born in 1915. It is exactly 100 years.

Blanche Touhill: It's 100 years.

Teg Stokes: She would be 100 years old.

Blanche Touhill: So we'll see what happens to Charlotte.

Teg Stokes: Well, it's very interesting. I always worked because I needed to work for me, because of the indoctrination that I got from my mother. I think Delta works for a completely different reason. She works because it's fun, because she really likes working.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I think with that, we'll say thank you again and that's a wonderful perspective.

Teg Stokes: You're welcome.

Blanche Touhill: Thank you very much.