

An Interview with
Harriet Switzer

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.

Harriet Switzer: I was born in St. Louis and I have had the privilege of working throughout the United States and in St. Louis and I'm happy to be here.

Blanche Touhill: Wonderful. Would you talk about your youth: your parents, your siblings, how you grew up, who did you play with, your elementary school, your secondary school. Who was it along the way that said to you, "Harriet, you have ability and you should decide what you want to do and then you should just go do it," you know, just in general, just ramble about your early life.

Harriet Switzer: Well, I had a lovely, wonderful, happy childhood in my early years, and I would say, as a teenager, I had a kind of bitter-sweet experience. I will tell you about my childhood first?

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Harriet Switzer: I was born in 1935 and we lived in Upper Ladue Road which, we had a beautiful home. It was a white brick house on the top of a very large hill because when you're little, you think it's very large and I had a nanny. Her name was Ogie and an older brother, two years older, who was a terror, and Ginger, the dog, and my brother and I played together. He was very rough. One time he hit me over the head with the sprinkling can when we were playing in the wagon and I walked into the garage and there in the reflection in the car, I was bleeding all the way down and I was about, not even four years old, I think. So my mother didn't like that very much but we went and had it stitched. Then, oh, yes, my brother and I ran away. We went very far away, all the way to the bottom of the big hill and hid and the result was a spanking. Then [audio glitch] one time and we went very far down the road from the yard...we really usually played in the yard, but we went down the road and he played Indian and dragged me along with one leg and put my leg in a pile of smoldering leaves and, of course, the leg was burnt and he said, "I'll give you my Roy Rogers pistol if you don't tell Dad that this happened."

Blanche Touhill: But you had to tell your father?

Harriet Switzer: I had to tell.

Blanche Touhill: You were burned. You had to have medical help.

Harriet Switzer: I had to have medical help, and at this point, a little brother was born and shortly after, my mother went to the hospital mysteriously for about three months and she must have had post-partum depression and she went to Menninger. So Dad was in charge of us and my Aunt Rose became very close to us and would pick us up, take her to her house to go spend the night and she would take us swimming to Glen Echo and she would do all these nice things. Then, when I was about six years old, Mom was still at the hospital but Dad and Rose negotiated moving to Brentmoor Park in Clayton and so the next phase of my life really was in Brentmoor Park in this beautiful colonial home, eight bedrooms, three-and-a-half bathrooms, a big, big yard and we had a really wonderful time. Fred and I went to Our Lady of Lourdes. We walked to school back and forth, except when it was raining. My grandmother would send her chauffeur to take us back and forth with my cousins. You know, we went to 1st grade and he went to 3rd grade at Our Lady of Lourdes and when we'd come home, it was rather early so we played. We played all kinds of things, like tag and hide-and-seek and we would play with our bikes. I loved bike-riding. I loved my bike and we would catch fireflies in the summer.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes. Did you put them in bottles?

Harriet Switzer: Yes, and we made snowmen in the winter and we played catch and all kinds of things like that.

Blanche Touhill: Was he not as rough when he got older?

Harriet Switzer: Right. He was more friendly but I was always with boys. Next door were boys and my brothers were only boys. So anyway, we had a very nice childhood at that point. My mom came home and she had another baby. While I was at visitation, I was moved to visitation in the 2nd grade and in the 2nd grade, the superior called me to tell me that little Georgie was born and I had to spend...oh, it was in the boarding school because while my mother was having George, my two brothers had Strep Throat and they were in the hospital and my mother was in the hospital and my poor dad was visiting all the sick, although Mom wasn't sick. Anyway, this was visitation and I was two years of visitation and then it came time for my 4th grade and Mom and Dad decided to choose between Villa and City House so I visited City House with my mom and then my dad took me to

Villa and he introduced me to Mother Scott and he had dated Mother Scott at one point.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness, yes.

Harriet Switzer: So I fell in love with Mother Scott and I fell in love with Villa.

Blanche Touhill: Wasn't she instrumental in Maryville moving out West?

Harriet Switzer: No, Mother Helmuth was, but she was part of it.

Blanche Touhill: I remember Mother Scott because she worked at Barrett Hall, I think, one time.

Harriet Switzer: Yes, and so then I started in the 4th grade and we had 10 students in our class and Mother Marharnicky had to take me personally to learn how to do script because I had not learned that at Vis.

Blanche Touhill: And did they go all day in those days?

Harriet Switzer: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Did they start at 9:00 or 8:30...

Harriet Switzer: The school bus picked me up at 8:30 and I got home at 5:00. I just loved school. I loved every minute of it and I was impressed by the nuns about their deeply spiritual and reflective and happy, energetic, intellectual lives and my mom was not a really loving, happy woman and so my tendency was to kind of hook onto the nuns as sort of the loving mothers in my life. So anyway, I loved all the Sacred Heart traditions. Let's see, we had conjays and gutays.

Blanche Touhill: Now, what were conjays and gutays?

Harriet Switzer: Conjays were a feast, holidays, where we could play all over the school grounds and they would have treasure hunts and it was just a total free day at school.

Blanche Touhill: So you came to school that day thinking it was a work day and then you would find out it was a festival?

Harriet Switzer: It was conajay.

Blanche Touhill: And how many times a year did they do that, once or twice?

Harriet Switzer: I think once or twice.

Blanche Touhill: And what was the gutay?

Harriet Switzer: The gutay was muffins with icing on top and cookies and brownies.

Blanche Touhill: I guess milk?

Harriet Switzer: I guess milk. I can't remember.

Blanche Touhill: Or cocoa or something.

Harriet Switzer: During the war years, I'm not sure what it was.

Blanche Touhill: At that was at 3:00 o'clock or 2:30?

Harriet Switzer: Yes, uh-huh.

Blanche Touhill: And then you played after that or you studied?

Harriet Switzer: We studied probably. When we were a little older, we had all of our sports after 3:30. So the bus didn't take us home until about 4:30 or 5:00 so I didn't get home until about 5:30.

Blanche Touhill: But you had a little snack. That was the gutay?

Harriet Switzer: That was the gutay.

Blanche Touhill: What other traditions did they have?

Harriet Switzer: Oh, my goodness, preems where each week...

Blanche Touhill: What was preems?

Harriet Switzer: Each week, we would all go to the auditorium and each of our classes would line up in a little semi-circle in front of Reverend Mother and the head mistress and the mistress of studies and our names would be read out and we would either be given blue notes, which were good, or something other notes...I can't remember now...and we were given no notes, which was really bad and at the end of a month or two, we were given ribbons if we were very good. We had blue ribbons in the senior years.

Blanche Touhill: For excellence?

- Harriet Switzer: For excellence, and we had green ribbons in the middle school and red ribbons in the primary school.
- Blanche Touhill: And how long did you wear the ribbons, for the day or for the month?
- Harriet Switzer: For the month until the next month. I mean, permanently unless you've lost it which I did once. Do you want me to tell you why I lost it?
- Blanche Touhill: Well, it's up to you.
- Harriet Switzer: We were having an algebra class and Mother Webster came in and said to the class, "Someone has cheated in this class," and silence..."Will the person who cheated in this class please raise your hand," silence, and then she said, "Our Lord said he would vomit out the mouth...the hypocrites out of his mouth" and I burst out laughing. And so she told me to leave, I came back after a got myself together, opened the door and burst out laughing again. It happened three times and I lost my green ribbon.
- Blanche Touhill: Did the culprit ever confess?
- Harriet Switzer: I don't think so. But I loved classes; I loved study hall; I loved sports, and I took piano lessons.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, there?
- Harriet Switzer: Yes, there.
- Blanche Touhill: Was it taught by a nun or by somebody else?
- Harriet Switzer: No, Miss Christiansen. Miss Christiansen was my teacher. There were two teachers and she had me. Anyway, I just loved everything about school.
- Blanche Touhill: Now, did your parents say to you, "Harriet, you have ability" or "You have this quality about you which is going to take you far" or...
- Harriet Switzer: They were always pleased with my report cards.
- Blanche Touhill: So they appreciated your study?
- Harriet Switzer: They appreciated my studying and what happened is, when I got home at 5:30, I went upstairs in my room, I got a desk when we started doing homework that Mom bought me for my bedroom and I would do homework and then when Mom and Dad were finished with cocktails

and dinner was announced, I would come down to dinner and then I would go back upstairs and study and then I would go to bed.

Blanche Touhill: So you took it seriously?

Harriet Switzer: Very, yeah, I did. There was one French teacher who was Madame DeMette who was a former opera star who evidently, I made some kind of..."Oh," in the back row. She said, "Who was that? You have the ability to be a soloist."

Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness.

Harriet Switzer: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: So she turned it into a positive?

Harriet Switzer: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: And so did you take up singing?

Harriet Switzer: I loved singing, yes, and we had singing class and then later on in college, I was part of the madrigals. I'll get to that. At home, when I say I had a bitter-sweet teenage experience, my mom wasn't diagnosed but she was manic-depressive and so she was really mean to me and it was very difficult.

Blanche Touhill: Was she mean to the boys?

Harriet Switzer: Yeah, uh-huh, but they fought back but the thing is that school was like a relief; it was a sweet relief from the stress of Mom. But I loved Mom because she was beautiful and I loved to watch her dress for parties. She loved music and she would bring home from New York City, when she traveled with Dad, all the musicals on record and we would sit in the library and sing and she was from a very musical family. Her sister was in the chorus of the Metropolitan Opera. And Mom loved to sing and dance. So there was this love that I had for her.

Blanche Touhill: Did you know she was ill?

Harriet Switzer: No, we just thought she was mean. She would be angry and she would be crying a lot because her family had a lot of financial problems, her sisters and brothers and she would be crying a lot. But, no, we weren't aware of the fact that she was suffering from this.

Blanche Touhill: What teachers as school really said, "Harriet, you have ability"?

Harriet Switzer: Well, in my sophomore year, Mother Gresidick who was teaching us English, had to go to a meeting in the cloister with all the other nuns and she had to leave our class on its honor and she said, "Harriet, would you please teach the class while I'm gone" and so I did and I loved it. From that moment on, I knew that I wanted to be a teacher and probably unconsciously I was thinking of being a religious...a nun teacher.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, but at that moment, it was teaching?

Harriet Switzer: It was teaching. I think that my English teacher, Mother Townsend, gave me an A- once for an essay and I went to her and asked her why it was an A- and she showed me the word "separate" and I had misspelled it, "s-e-p-e-r-a-t-e," and she had put a little curlique on the "e," I'll never forget it, to make it an "a" and she told me that I had a real ability to write and that she didn't want me to get by with anything that was not perfect. So I was encouraged by getting blue ribbons and green ribbons in all the things that motivated us to do well.

Blanche Touhill: What did you do in the summers?

Harriet Switzer: Oh, from the time I was 12 to 21, before that, we went to various ranches in Charlevoix, Michigan just for a while but then we bought a home in, Wequetonsing, Michigan and from the time I was 12 to 21, this was my day: I would get up and go to mass because I was a child of Mary at Villa, and I would go to the choir loft and sing the Requiem Mass every morning with Sister Benedictess who was the organist. Then I would ride my bike home, eat breakfast and then ride my bike back to the little Harbor Club and play tennis all day and form friendships that have now become life-long friendships.

Blanche Touhill: Isn't that nice?

Harriet Switzer: Oh, I loved it. Oh, we lived right on Little Travers Bay and my brothers, fortunately, were either at camp or they sailed all day. So I forgot to tell you that I had become a babysitter through the years because of all the children and even though we had nannies all the time, my mother never trusted them totally so I was always told to be in charge. So anyway, was Weque just heaven. We just had a wonderful time and my mother loved it

and she was a lot happier there. But we were there from the middle of June to Labor Day.

Blanche Touhill: How long of a drive was it for your father if he came up on the weekends?

Harriet Switzer: Thirteen hours, or something like that.

Blanche Touhill: Did he drive or did he fly?

Harriet Switzer: He drove and that was hard.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I knew a lot of people from St. Louis did go to Michigan in the summer and I've heard the stories: they left on Friday and then started back on Sunday afternoon or something, that it was a regular...

Harriet Switzer: Well, he had the kind of job that he was able to take, like, a month off.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, okay. So he'd go to Michigan then for that month?

Harriet Switzer: For that month, yeah, and even longer maybe. He was an attorney and he was the vice president/general counsel of Wine Spirits Wholesalers of America.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, he wasn't in the candy company?

Harriet Switzer: No, no, he launched out on his own and he actually formed the Wine Spirits Wholesalers of America lobbying organization and he was the vice president/general counsel.

Blanche Touhill: And they were headquartered in St. Louis?

Harriet Switzer: He kept them there. He should have gone to Washington, D.C. which they did after he retired when he was 72 but, no, he kept it in St. Louis for my family.

Blanche Touhill: Well, then, it's time to go to college so...

Harriet Switzer: Well, the only college to go to was the best Catholic girls' college in the United States and that, of course, was Manhattanville.

Blanche Touhill: And that's where the University of New York is today?

Harriet Switzer: Yes, in Harlem.

Blanche Touhill: Overlooking the Hudson?

Harriet Switzer: Yes. When I went, it had moved out to Purchase, New York.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, it had moved by then?

Harriet Switzer: Yes, there had been one year before.

Blanche Touhill: And I heard it was a beautiful campus.

Harriet Switzer: It was a beautiful campus, it really was. I applied myself to my studies. I wanted to stay home after the first semester. The East was different from the South, or the nuns who were from the South and Mother Townsend would pat you on the back and hug you. The nuns in New York were very much more disciplined. Anyway, I thought, for some reason, that I had to please my parents and so I would go to mass every morning and I would beg God that I would do well to please my parents. I don't know who brainwashed me into that but that's what it was and I studied and studied and studied and I made a mistake. As a freshman, Mother Clark was our mentor. They called her a warden and she had to interview each of the freshmen, 140 of us. I naively told her in my interview that I was thinking of being a nun...oh, I forgot to tell you, when I was at Villa, as a junior, I went to a retreat and the retreat director said to the group, "The religious life is the highest calling that one could respond to," so guess what? Harriet has to respond to the highest call. So I went to Mother McNally and said, "I want to be an RSVJ" and she said, "Well, Harriet, you have to graduate from college" so I did. So anyway, I went to Manhattanville and Mother Clark, whom I had interviewed with, was the chairman of the Philosophy Department and she was an excellent teacher and I really liked philosophy so I majored in philosophy. Well, I took a lot of philosophy. It came sophomore year and I had decide on what to major in. I loved music and I was a member of the madrigals, the small group, madrigals, the glee club, I took piano lessons, I loved singing and so I was tempted to major in music so I couldn't decide. So I called home and Mom answered the phone and I said to Mom, "I can't decide," and she said, "Harriet, what in the world would you do with music?" and so I majored in philosophy. So the years went by and I was invited to go to Princeton, on a date to Princeton by a St. Louis young man and I had to call home for permission and my dad said no. In retrospect, I found out that he was the son of an Episcopal minister and, by the way,

Wequetonsing was a totally WASP territory so the mothers there really discouraged their sons from dating a Catholic girl. Anyway, so then, in my senior year, I was invited to Yale and by that time you didn't have to ask permission and I went with a classmate of mine and on the way up on the train, I confided to her that I was entering the noviceship and she said, "Harriet, so am I" and I said, "And you know I'm going with the madrigals to Kenwood to sing for the clothing ceremony and the novices" and Carol said, "Oh, I'd love to do that. I want to be a madrigal." So we practiced Silent Night all the way up to Yale.

Blanche Touhill: So she could do that?

Harriet Switzer: So she could do that and she came back and she auditioned and she became a member and we went to the clothing ceremony and it was so romantic. I mean the brides of Christ coming in and all.

Blanche Touhill: Did she join the Sacred Heart nuns?

Harriet Switzer: Yes, she was a Mistress of Novices, in fact, and left during that time.

Blanche Touhill: She left. So on graduation, you both go off to the noviceship.

Harriet Switzer: Kenwood, and I remember, the day I entered, my angel showed me around and told me where my locker was and where my cot was and where my alcove was and the alcove had a cot, a stand, a water pitcher, a basin and a water bucket and I was thrilled.

Blanche Touhill: Well, that's what you wanted to do.

Harriet Switzer: Yeah, and so I went through the noviceship and made my first vows and I was two years at Kenwood and during the second year I began my Master's in philosophy. Then I was sent on my first mission to New Orleans to the Rosary. I was in charge of the little girls boarding area and I taught English, Latin, Religion, and Psychology and played the organ. Then two years after that, I was sent to Villa and I was head of the boarding school and I taught English and Religion. Then I think it was in April that I got a call from the Superior, Mother Mulqueen, to come to her office. I came and she said, "Harriet, we have decided that you're going to get a doctorate at Fordham University and you will be living at Manhattanville. Now, you can do this either in philosophy or theology. Which would you like to do?" Here I am, kneeling at her feet and I said,

“Well, you know, I guess I should go on in philosophy and get my doctorate and I can always do theology later.”

Blanche Touhill:

So you did.

Harriet Switzer:

So that's what I did, but when I left her office, my heart sank because I loved teaching and I loved the students and it was really hard, but that's what I did. And my years at Manhattanville as a graduate student and getting my doctorate, they were very lonely. It was a lonely kind of existence because we went to evening classes. Sister Thro went with me. She was getting her Master's in Physics. We drove down the Merritt Parkway to Fordham around 4:00 o'clock and came back and we had second supper and second recreation, which was talking to the Superior. We had to observe...of course, doing the studies and the exams and the papers and all that we had to do, we had to do all of the religious duties of mass and three offices a day, we sang office three times a day and we had adoration and spiritual reading and all the things that were part of the community life.

Blanche Touhill:

Now, when you got your doctorate, did you go into administration or did you go back to teaching?

Harriet Switzer:

I got my doctorate and the minute I got my doctorate, after three-and-a-half years, I came back and the Superior said, “Sister Switzer, Mother Frasier is going to the missions and she's the head of Villa so we would like you to take the position of Head Mistress of Villa.”

Blanche Touhill:

So you ran Villa?

Harriet Switzer:

Yes. I mean, I just put one foot in front of the other. I had had no training in administration or finance and it was the years when the church was changing. Nuns were taking off their habit, the altar was being changed around and the parents were upset. The students were testing authority to the limit and I remember one commencement, the first commencement, the speaker was from Burroughs and he was a political scientist and he was criticizing the manufacturing of weapons and planes and most of the parents who were with McDonnell Douglas, they started to boo. They booed him and then at the reception, no one would talk to him and I sat down later and wrote a letter to all the parents saying that this was absolutely uncalled for and had no relationship at all to the values of Sacred Heart education.

Blanche Touhill: Did you hear back from any of the parents?

Harriet Switzer: No. The next year, the Superior called me to the Provincial and said, "Harriet, Mother McNally is sick and is not going to be able to continue on at Maryville so I want you, if you would, please...would you please become president of Maryville, in July. Now, there are two other RSCJs who have applied but I think you would be the right person so would you please apply," and I said, "Mother Cavanaugh, I am really concerned about my vocation. I really don't feel comfortable with the changes that are taking place in religious life and I just don't...I don't know," and she said, "Harriet, what you need is a mission," and so guess what? I took the mission. The mission was Maryville and the mission was saving Maryville.

Blanche Touhill: But you couldn't save it?

Harriet Switzer: Yes, I saved it.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, you saved it, but I thought your orders were to sort of fold it up.

Harriet Switzer: Yes, but I didn't do it.

Blanche Touhill: No, I know you didn't. So why did you not do it?

Harriet Switzer: Because the faculty and the staff and the alumni at Maryville were so loyal to Maryville. They didn't want to close it, the alumni didn't want to close it, the faculty didn't want to close it, the nuns there didn't want to close it, and I asked for help from Dennis Spellman who was a consultant from Burroughs. He was at John Burroughs and we did a review. We had a review committee that went on for about a half year or more and it turned out that the only thing missing was money and the order was going to pull out \$300,000 gradually over three years and there was just no hope because we were in a situation where we needed \$150,000 that year and that must have been 1972 or '3, and Sister Webster who was vice president for Academic Affairs, said, "There's one constituency that does not want Maryville to close and that is the Sisters of Mercy" because the year before, they had moved their nursing school to Maryville. Sister McNally had engineered that and so when I came to Maryville, that was the first year that the nursing school was at Maryville and she said, "Harriet, I think you ought to go to speak to Sister Mary Rock Rockledge," so I went with the finance director, I went to St. John's Mercy and Sister Mary Rock Rockledge was there at one side of the

conference table and I was over here and her finance person was there and Dennis Spellman, our finance person was there and I said, "Sister Mary Rock, we're going to have to close Maryville if I can't find \$150,000. The order is telling me I have to close." She went out with her finance person, came back and said, "We will grant Maryville \$150,000 if you will cooperate with us in designing Allied Health courses at Maryville. I said, "It's a deal." Dennis and I went back to the college, called the Provincial and said, "Sister Cavanaugh, I have a \$150,000 grant. We'll be able to balance our budget. May we go on?" She said, "I'll give you three years to make a turn-around."

Blanche Touhill: So they were going to withdraw the money but if you could replace those dollars, then you could continue?

Harriet Switzer: Right.

Blanche Touhill: And how much, totally, did you have to raise roughly, unless this is private information?

Harriet Switzer: No. I think that we probably raised about \$500,000, maybe less, maybe more, I don't know.

Blanche Touhill: But then, you could keep all the fees and be able to run the place?

Harriet Switzer: Right and I hired people on our administrative team who were fantastic and who made it happen.

Blanche Touhill: Now, did you have a lay board at that time?

Harriet Switzer: No, I had to plan...

Blanche Touhill: You had to take it from being a religious institution to being a lay board?

Harriet Switzer: Right, I had to plan and implement the transfer of ownership to an independent lay board of trustees with lay and religious representation, yeah, and so that was a major, major thing.

Blanche Touhill: And so the spirit of the Sacred Heart order would go on but the reality was, you were looking forward to the day when there would be no nuns...

Harriet Switzer: Right and the advisory board said it would not go on and fundraise for the college if we didn't form an independent board of trustees so that

the nuns couldn't take the money away and close the college. So then, I was there for seven years.

Blanche Touhill: You made the transition?

Harriet Switzer: We made the transition. We initiated career-oriented liberal arts curriculum. We started co-education and we bought the property, 150 acres next to...when I first became president, I signed a document that signed over...of the 300 acres, 150 to the order and 150 to the college and so it came as a surprise to us that the order was going to sell that 150 acres to a housing development. Dennis, the finance man, came in and said, "Are you going to allow that to happen?" and I said, "Well, we don't have any money"; he said, "Sister, Switzer, you're sitting on money," so we went to the Mark Twain Bank and got a loan and bought the property from the order.

Blanche Touhill: Isn't that wonderful!

Harriet Switzer: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: And then slowly you paid off that money...

Harriet Switzer: Right, and became the endowment.

Blanche Touhill: You leased that property and all kinds of buildings are out there.

Harriet Switzer: Well, now, yeah. Some of it was sold; some of it was leased, and gradually all is sold.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, but you were able to take those profits and put them into the school.

Harriet Switzer: Into the endowment. He said, "Harriet, you're..." ...he called me Sister Switzer, but "you're sitting on the endowment."

Blanche Touhill: So I know you've gotten credit for making that transition and then also for building the endowment from that extra land. I knew that that was...

Harriet Switzer: You knew that? Oh, my goodness.

Blanche Touhill: I did know that, yes. I think everybody in St. Louis knows that. So you finished that and after seven years, what did you do?

Harriet Switzer: I felt that I needed to resign from being president so that I could figure out about religious life. I just was not comfortable.

Blanche Touhill: It wasn't your mission?

Harriet Switzer: No, and so I had three difficult years. First of all, I went around the Orient. We had given an honorary degree to Une Yong Kim who was the World Federation president of the World Federation of Tai Quan Do Martial Arts and he asked me at the reception if I would come and visit his family in Sol and I said, "Well, the next time I'm there, I'd be happy to." He sent me a round-trip ticket which I couldn't use; I put in the vault and when I resigned from Maryville as president, I asked the Superior if I could use that and route myself around the Orient and visit our communities in the Orient with the idea of kind of assessing the role of women in the various Asian countries. So I came back and I still didn't know what I wanted to do. I went to Boston and I had a temporary position as an associate dean for Admissions at Boston College. Then I decided to do an internship at Radcliffe and worked in the Development office with Matina Horner, the president, and then finally I decided, this is it, I need to leave religious life. So I came back to St. Louis and I interviewed at Lindenwood, St. Louis U and Washington U and Chancellor Danforth said, "Harriet, we'd love to have you here but I don't see any opening but feel free to interview anybody," and Lindenwood did offer me the deanship but I was in therapy at the time and my therapist said, "Harriet, if there's any chance that you could work at Washington University, don't take that deanship at Lindenwood," and I didn't and in the spring, I got a call from Bill Danforth. His treasurer was retiring early. He said, "Harriet, I'm going to separate the treasury from the secretary." The predecessor was secretary/treasurer. He said, "I'm going to separate the two and I would like you to accept the position of secretary and assistant to the chancellor for external affairs," and I said, "Yes."

Blanche Touhill: And so you came to work for Bill Danforth at Washington University and you stayed 27 years?

Harriet Switzer: So lucky, I stayed 27 years and besides being board secretary, I was university coordinator of the Women's Society which turned into a 500-member...

Blanche Touhill: So you built that too?

Harriet Switzer: Built that and the Elizabeth Gray Danforth Endowment allows two graduates from junior colleges to have full scholarships for two years at

Washington University. That is one of the biggest efforts and joys, really, of the work of the Women's Society.

Blanche Touhill: How was it to move from sort of a Catholic network into the secular world?

Harriet Switzer: Well, you know, being president, as you know, of Maryville, being a president means you do lots of social things and I loved social things. I always had loved social things. So that part was easy and the fact that I was able to find a support position at a major university, major research university was so fortunate because I would not have been able to take the leadership position of an institution without being a nun. I mean, as a nun, I had the support of the community, it was, belonged to the community, it was part of our family and I had no desire, really, to lead or take the leadership of a major institution as a single woman. So the support position was perfect because Bill Danforth was so religious himself in a humanist way but a saint that he is, and George Kapps was the chairman of the board who was a parent at Villa and it just made it very easy for me to move in...

Blanche Touhill: So you didn't feel the tension in moving from one world to the next?

Harriet Switzer: No, no, not at all and I guess that I felt the support of my family being here.

Blanche Touhill: So talk to me about finding a husband.

Harriet Switzer: Oh, my gosh, about 1983, the chancellor was looking at his watch and saying, "I have to go to a wake. A faculty member's wife died. Will you come with me? It's in North County. I've never been there." So we got in his green pea Chevrolet and we made our way out through Kinlock and all the depressed areas. I thought, where is he taking me? To Spanish Lake area and it was David's wife's wake. I met David there. I prayed next to his wife's coffin. I met his children who were 17, 19 and 21 and we paid our respects and we went back to the university. Two weeks later, David calls me and says, "Would you please thank the chancellor for coming all that way out to pay his respects?" and I said, "Oh, yes, I'd be happy to" and he said, "And I'd like to take you to lunch to thank you." So we went to the Cheshire. Oh, the poor guy, his eyes were glazed over. It was only two weeks since his wife had died and it came time to pay the bill and he went, "I forgot my credit card."

Blanche Touhill: So you had to pay the bill?

Harriet Switzer: I had to pay the bill. I thought what a nerd. I was going out with all these la-de-doo people. So that was that. He kept his mourning period for maybe two years and then I had to work with him on renovating a room, Brown lounge in the School of Social Work. He was the associate dean of the School of Social Work. So we had to go out and find swatches of carpet and all that kind of stuff and we came back to the university and I was standing on a window seat with a swatch of draperies and I said, "David, how do these look?" and he said, "I think it looks great. I think they look great." So then he asked me out and he told me he meant my legs. So, we went out for six years. We broke up for three months at one point.

Blanche Touhill: Then you got back together?

Harriet Switzer: Then we got back together.

Blanche Touhill: Then you were married?

Harriet Switzer: We were married and it is the most...

Blanche Touhill: And his children were raised by then.

Harriet Switzer: Yes, yes, and they've been so good to me. It is the most fortunate thing. I am so fortunate.

Blanche Touhill: How many years have you been married to David?

Harriet Switzer: Twenty-two.

Blanche Touhill: Twenty-two years.

Harriet Switzer: Twenty-two.

Blanche Touhill: How many years were you a nun?

Harriet Switzer: Twenty-three.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness. So I'm almost half and half but I'm so grateful, so grateful for finding David, for Bill Danforth, for his hiring me. I'm so grateful to the Religious of the Sacred Heart. I really learned how to love as a Religious of the Sacred Heart.

- Blanche Touhill: Let me ask you: Did you get any award at some point that you really think is very, very important in your life?
- Harriet Switzer: I got the St. Louis Woman of Achievement Award in '88, I think...no, no, no, in '70. Before that, I got the Cardinal Spellman Award for highest academic achievement in Manhattanville.
- Blanche Touhill: Do they give one per year or one per study body?
- Harriet Switzer: One for the graduating class and I got the honorary degree from Maryville in '88 and, let's see, the Dean's Award with David from the School of Social Work and the Dean's Award from the School of Arts & Sciences when I retired. I think those are the highlights.
- Blanche Touhill: If you had been born 50 years earlier, would your life have been different?
- Harriet Switzer: Fifty years earlier?
- Blanche Touhill: Than you were born. So if you were born in '35 or thereabouts, how would your life be different?
- Harriet Switzer: If I were born 50 years earlier?
- Blanche Touhill: Than 1935.
- Harriet Switzer: I can't even imagine it.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, I mean, think about it.
- Harriet Switzer: I wouldn't have gotten a doctorate.
- Blanche Touhill: No, you wouldn't have gotten a doctorate.
- Harriet Switzer: No.
- Blanche Touhill: Would you have gotten a degree?
- Harriet Switzer: Golly...
- Blanche Touhill: Or would you have been a nun?
- Harriet Switzer: No, I don't think so.

Blanche Touhill: You would have married and had children and followed a traditional path?

Harriet Switzer: Yeah, absolutely, I'm sure of that. I'm sure of that but it's hard for me to think...I thought you meant, if I were born 50 years later.

Blanche Touhill: No, earlier.

Harriet Switzer: Oh, my gosh. So we're talking about, what, 18...what's the math?

Blanche Touhill: '85 or something.

Harriet Switzer: '85, and I had my same parents, yeah, I think I would have gotten a degree.

Blanche Touhill: You would have gotten a degree?

Harriet Switzer: I think my father would have insisted. Education was everything to him.

Blanche Touhill: Now, it meant though that you probably wouldn't work.

Harriet Switzer: No.

Blanche Touhill: But you still you would get a degree?

Harriet Switzer: Yes, I would think so. I would have had a traditional life, a traditional married life, with lots of children. The thing about Dad was that he was so dedicated to education that I'm sure he would have sent me to...

Blanche Touhill: Wherever.

Harriet Switzer: Wherever.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I think Lindenwood might have had programs at that time.

Harriet Switzer: Yeah, probably. St. Louis U? No, no women.

Blanche Touhill: No women. They didn't have women until actually...I'm going to say maybe...I know at St. Louis U, my husband's aunt had a degree from St. Louis U but she was...

Harriet Switzer: Mother Krenagan had.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah, and Columbia University in New York, I think, gave degrees but they weren't graduates of the College of Arts & Sciences. They were

graduates of some other college because I was the first student to enter a class in the College of Arts & Sciences at St. Louis University. My sister-in-law, who was older than I was, entered something like University College and then the College of Arts & Sciences opened to women when I was a freshman.

Harriet Switzer: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: But they didn't have women graduates until, I'm going to say the '30s, probably.

Harriet Switzer: In the '30s?

Blanche Touhill: That's what I sort of think. My aunt's a graduate of Washington University but that was 1917 and she went to Washington University because St. Louis University didn't admit women and the corporate colleges, I don't think existed. When did Maryville start?

Harriet Switzer: The centennial was in 1973. It would be 1873, something like that.

Blanche Touhill: Well, so they did have some kind of an academic program?

Harriet Switzer: Mm-hmm, yeah, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: If you look back over your life and you'd have to say, what do you think you really always wanted to do, teach school or did you want to minister?

Harriet Switzer: In the beginning, I wanted to be a...

Blanche Touhill: A teacher?

Harriet Switzer: No, I wanted to sing and dance on the stage like at the Munny was my childhood dream and then I wanted to teach.

Blanche Touhill: So you were not afraid of performance?

Harriet Switzer: No, not really, although I got very nervous when I had to do a recital.

Blanche Touhill: But you could do it?

Harriet Switzer: Yes, I loved public speaking; I really did love public speaking.

Blanche Touhill: If you look over your life, I'm sure you still have a spiritual component to your life?

- Harriet Switzer: Oh, yeah, uh-huh.
- Blanche Touhill: What is it that you really enjoy doing? Is it supporting other people or...
- Harriet Switzer: Friendships are very important.
- Blanche Touhill: But you were a leader. I mean, you did do the transition of Maryville.
- Harriet Switzer: I loved organizing; organizing, that's it. I'm a super organizer.
- Blanche Touhill: So you love to organize?
- Harriet Switzer: Yes, yes, and orchestrate, organize and orchestrate, yes. I would have loved to have been a conductor.
- Blanche Touhill: Once you decide what you want to organize, then you really can do it?
- Harriet Switzer: Yeah, I do enjoy that.
- Blanche Touhill: Because you did Maryville and then also, you did the Washington University organization.
- Harriet Switzer: Which required a lot of organization with the board and the 15-board committees and all the board dinners and the events and all that. So, organizing, yes, and I'm very detail-oriented actually. When I did a job interview kind of survey, the person who did the test came back in and she said, "I hate to tell you but if you were a male, you should have been a pilot," an airline pilot.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, there are women airline pilots.
- Harriet Switzer: I love to drive.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, maybe that would have been your modern...50 years advanced. Even today, you would have...
- Harriet Switzer: Spacecraft, no, but I do love to organize, mm-hmm. Rewarding things that I did, I did with my husband, David, at Washington U. Chancellor Danforth came to my office and said to me, "Harriet, do you know Mrs. Bouter? Do you know a Catherine Bouter?" and I said, "Well, yes, my mother and father know her and her daughter was my confirmation sponsor at Visitation." He said, "Well, she's inviting all the heads of the major educational institutions here in St. Louis to her home to talk about starting a school for Native American Indians and the chief of the

Washington Bureau of Indian Affairs is going to be there. Would you please go there in my place? I'm not able to do that." So I did and so these heads of schools sat around and we talked to the chief and Catherine Bouter described the kind of school she was thinking that would teach religion and English, be the kind of schoolhouse that she remembers as a child. She had always loved Indians from the time she was a child. So everybody thought, well, this financially is not viable. It's not going to work. So as I was leaving, I was with two faculty members, one from Maryville and one from Washington University. The one from Maryville was the head of the Education Department and the one from Wash U was the head of field education for training teachers how to teach or watching over them. So the one from Maryville said, "Harriet, what the Indian population needs is social work. That's what the reservations need, is social work and Washington University School of Social Work is the best," and the faculty member from Wash U said, "Yes, that's it." So then we had a lunch with each other and then we invited Catherine Bouter to a lunch and we talked to her. She again described her school and we told her that it was really important that social work was needed and Master's in social work scholarships would be a tremendous thing.

Blanche Touhill: To train the Indians?

Harriet Switzer: To train the Indians to go...

Blanche Touhill: Then return back to the...

Harriet Switzer: Back to the reservations. So I was dating David at the time and I said, "David, what do you think?" He said, "Yes, I think that's a good idea," so he worked on writing up a proposal for the Bouter Foundation and what happened was that the dean of the School of Social Work, my husband and Catherine Bouter and Catherine Bouter's finance person and myself met and we talked about this and Catherine Bouter went away and talked with her finance person and it turned out that the Bouter Foundation gave a yearly \$500,000 forever grant to the School of Social Work for training MSW Native American students, requiring them to go back to their reservations or to an agency of the government that was helping the Indian population and so, today, it's been, I think, something like 40...how many years since 1988...I think 25 years and I think 100 Native Americans have graduated with their MSWs and they have a

commencement all their own in which they receive an Indian blanket and they have an Indian ceremony with the fire, some kind of branch that they wave around, and one ceremony, a woman who had adopted a child from an abused center, child abuse center, was there because her adopted child was getting an MSW at Washington University and she bawled. If you've ever heard anyone actually bawl, it was just so overwhelming to her and it is overwhelming, to go from a child abuse center to receiving your MSW from Washington University is amazing. And I think the same way about the Elizabeth Gray Danforth scholarships that are given to junior college graduates.

Blanche Touhill: And you worked on that too?

Harriet Switzer: Yes, oh, yes, very seriously but that transforms those people's lives. There was a story of an electrician who was working for one of the members of the board of the Women's Society and she said, "What do you do when you're not doing this?" and he said, "Well, I go to Meramec Junior College." She said, "Do you get good grades?" He said, "Yes, I do." It turns out; he got the competition for the scholarship, got the scholarship, graduated with all kinds of honors and went to medical school. He is now a pediatrician at Missouri Baptist. It gives me chills to even think about it. But those are the kinds of rewarding projects that I was able to work on.

Blanche Touhill: So your organizing skills came into play? Now, did you organize your brothers?

Harriet Switzer: I would get in trouble when they weren't good so I tried to.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, so you tried to. Well, I think those are all wonderful stories and I really appreciate your coming by today and, unless you have one final word...

Harriet Switzer: My final word is to thank you for asking me to do this. I've kind of gone through the story of my life.

Blanche Touhill: Well, it's a wonderful story and it's a story of a woman during these periods of gigantic change.

Harriet Switzer: Gigantic change, from handwriting to computers is...

Blanche Touhill: Is sort of a reflection of that.

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Harriet Switzer: Reflection of that, yes, and I consider you one of my very dear friends.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, I do, too. Thank you very much.

Harriet Switzer: Thank you.