

An Interview with
Elizabeth “Betty” Van Uum

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.

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Elizabeth Van Uum: I'm Betty Van Uum. I work at the University of Missouri-St. Louis where I have been an administrator for the last 30 years. Before that I was...that's enough.

Blanche Touhill: Would you talk about your childhood: your mother; your father; your cousins; your grandparents; your elementary school...

Elizabeth Van Uum: Should I be short here or...

Blanche Touhill: No, long.

Elizabeth Van Uum: ...loquacious? Loquacious, okay, here we go.

Blanche Touhill: ...and high school. Who told you that you could do what you wanted to do or was it in you from the beginning?

Elizabeth Van Uum: That's hard to say. I think there are parts of my childhood which would indicate that it was in me from the beginning. Let me start with my mother and my father, who were 24 when they married. It was in the middle of the Second World War. My father was in law school, I guess taken with patriotic fever or the fear of the draft. He joined the navy so as not to be drafted and impregnated my mother and left for three years. I grew up in those early years with my mother's family, which was a multi-generational family. It included my great grandparents, my grandfather, my grandfather's sister, her husband, my mother and me. So there were a lot of people in the house. Throughout my entire childhood until my mother died when I was 12, my parents were referred to by everybody in the family as "the kids" and I was "the baby" which I was until I had a baby. My parents, they were social, I guess. They went out a lot, a lot and they were both from St. Louis families so both my maternal and my paternal grandparents were here and I never had a babysitter. I was always with one grandparent set or the other grandparent set and I really grew up thinking I was part of that older generation. I thought it was me and the old people..."Oh, the kids are going to dinner" or "The kids are on a vacation" ..."The kids are doing this," and that was my mother and father. So I really identified with those old people and they gave me...it was really wonderful...it gave me a sense of myself. I really think I lived through the World's Fair and I think I lived through the 1920's just as a child listening to them because they were old so what do old people do? They reminisce, so they reminisced and I felt a real sense of having a sense of what went on in their lives. But all of that is to say I

was the only person in my family in my generation and my mother had one brother and my father was an only child so most families go this way; my family went this way and I was certainly the object of everybody's attention all of my life. So that probably gave me a sense of entitlement because there was nothing that I thought of that I wanted that I didn't get really.

Blanche Touhill: Stay with your family...stay with your friends. Who did you play with and what was life like as a child?

Elizabeth Van Uum: So, that's my little childhood. Then, in some ways, my childhood was sort of disrupted in that when my father came back from the war, we moved to Richmond Heights.

Blanche Touhill: What was the story about, he came in the door and you didn't know him?

Elizabeth Van Uum: Yeah. Well, I was, I guess, not quite three and there had been a picture of him on the table and he came in the door and I looked at him and I went over and I checked the picture to be sure that it was the right person. So, I did not really know him. That was the family story. But then he came back and we moved to Richmond Heights and it was now just three of us: my mother, my father and me. He finished law school and my mother was really sort of a sarcastic person. She used to say, "Your father has a very important job. He gets paid to play softball," which meant that he was in the naval reserves and so once a week they went to play softball and they thought that was very clever, to get paid to play softball, except the Korean War came along and it wasn't so great after all. He got recalled and at that point we started moving. So, we moved to Washington initially where he went to intelligence school, I guess, to learn how to be an intelligence officer and I went to the 3rd grade in Washington and then we came back to St. Louis and I went back to Little Flower for a minute while he shipped to Guam. So I stayed in Little Flower for a little while and then we moved to Guam and I went to 4th grade in Guam which was a very interesting experience.

Blanche Touhill: Did you remember the airplane? Did you go by airplane?

Elizabeth Van Uum: No, no, no, I didn't.

Blanche Touhill: You went by ship?

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Elizabeth Van Uum: We went by ship and the ship was called The Patrick and, interesting, in the last year, I Googled "The Patrick" and there's somebody who was once on The Patrick who found it, it's in some ready to die shipyard but he had a whole history of The Patrick. It had been a navy ship.

Blanche Touhill: Was that exciting?

Elizabeth Van Uum: Oh, yeah, it was exciting. We were bunked with another woman and her little girl who was my age so we had bunk beds on the ship and the kids slept on the top and the moms slept on the bottom. Their names were Jeannie and Leila Gorman and their father was already on Guam as well. The interesting thing to me about them was that Leila was Indian, that she had met and married her husband when he was stationed in India for some reason and I thought that was the most exotic thing I had ever encountered in my life, which also caused Jeannie, their daughter...we were nine at the time...to have legs that needed to be shaved. She was a dark complected and she had sort of an early puberty which just put me in a state about Jeannie. But we did have the run of the ship. Nobody paid any attention to us and we ran around and up and down the steps and in and out of everything. Now, this is something crazy: When I grew up, we were Catholics and there was really a prohibition almost against knowing people who were not Catholics. The ship had some other kids on it and there was a weekly children's service or something where the kids were in a little choir and we all sang "Jesus loves me, this I know..." ...which I knew in my mind at nine was not a Catholic song. So I thought that was the height of rebellion, that I went to the choir with Jeannie and we ran around singing Jesus Loves Me as if it were the wildest thing I could think of to do.

Blanche Touhill: Did you go by train or did you fly to the West Coast?

Elizabeth Van Uum: We went by train to the West Coast.

Blanche Touhill: And that must have been something.

Elizabeth Van Uum: Well, we took a lot of train trips.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, so you were used to that?

Elizabeth Van Uum: I traveled a lot. My parents...here's the other thing about them...while they were "the kids" and they acted like "the kids" at all times, what do

kids have? Kids have convertibles, right? So, we always had a convertible which would be fine if you were in the front seat but if you were me, I was in the back seat and I went from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean in the wind, without "the kids" giving a second thought to my comfort one way or the other. We took a lot of train trips. My father's father had worked for the railroad and that caused us to be...I don't know...a long time connection with the railroads. My grandmother, my father's mother, who really had a great influence on me, had a railroad pass and when he died, she had a widow's pass or something. So she could go anywhere anytime she wanted and she did. I mean, everybody...they were all travelers in my family. They were always moving around. So, I don't know, I don't remember the trip particularly. I do remember being in San Francisco for the first time. The ship left from San Francisco and I remember the cable cars and I remember going to dinner at something called "The Blue..." ...something or other, some kind of a nightclub, I think, but anyway, there was a photographer that came around and took your picture at the table and I thought that was just the height of cool sophistication, that we had done that. It seems to me that my father's mother accompanying my mother and I to San Francisco on that trip; it wasn't just the two of us; it was the three of us, and then she...

Blanche Touhill: Then she waved goodbye to you at the ship?

Elizabeth Van Uum: And heaven knows where she went after that, wherever the train would take her, I guess.

Blanche Touhill: Well, that was logical though. She had the pass...

Elizabeth Van Uum: Yeah, and she was ready to go anytime anywhere with anybody.

Blanche Touhill: And she could help your mother with the baby or with the little girl.

Elizabeth Van Uum: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: So then you got to Guam.

Elizabeth Van Uum: Now, wait, let's talk about entitlement. So we got on the train at Union Station and my mother's family was seeing us off. I remember that. I had a doll that I loved. It was a "Toni" doll, "Toni Permanents." You could curl its hair and you could do various things with it and my grandfather had a

girlfriend. His wife have died in childbirth which was why they were all living with his family, with his mother and father who essentially raised my mother. But in any event, by this time he has a long-term girlfriend who is a seamstress...I mean, she wasn't but she could sew and she had made all kinds of doll clothes for the doll and she made clothes for me and the doll. So I remember the doll and I, we had a white (Piquet?) skirt with strawberries on it and we had various matching clothes. So, we're on our way to Guam, we're getting on the train. I'm on the train, I realize I have left the doll at my grandfather's house and there's no doll and I'm about to go to Guam without my doll. My grandfather leaped into his car, raced to his house in South St. Louis on Magnolia across from the park, ran in the house, got the doll, raced back out, met the train at Wabash Station and gave me the doll. So I grew up expecting people to do anything to see that I was happy.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, isn't that wonderful.

Elizabeth Van Uum: That was nice.

Blanche Touhill: It was just wonderful.

Elizabeth Van Uum: It was, that was nice. I mean, they could have sent the doll but I was just disconsolate that I did not have that doll. So I do remember that.

Blanche Touhill: Well, when you're nine, you're still young.

Elizabeth Van Uum: Yeah, you're still a little girl at nine; you're still a baby at night.

Blanche Touhill: So you got to Guam.

Elizabeth Van Uum: We got to Guam and I loved Guam. My mother loved Guam. My father hated...I don't think my father ever really liked being in the military and I guess it was sort of...we were only peripherally involved. He'd been at Okinawa. He didn't think it was such a lark, nor would he ever talk about it. But we thought it was completely fun. We originally got there and there were two...Guam is a...whatever you call it...when the volcano leaves a little thing, so it's this little island and it's six miles long and about a mile-and-a-half wide, which isn't very much space and at one end of the island on the top was Anderson Air Force Base and on the other end of the island was the navy base. So there were several things about Guam. First of all, there was limited officers' housing and when we first

got there, we didn't have navy housing so my father had rented a civilian house which was fine. It was up on stilts and the people who owned the house lived next door to it and it had pigs underneath it and I loved the pigs. They had kids and the kids played with the pigs and we had a caribou in the back yard. So we didn't live there very long but long enough for me to become attracted to the pigs and enjoyed them and think of the caribou. Then we moved to what were Kwansett huts. Now, Guam, of course, is tropical so I can remember, during the rainy season, it rains every day, from 4:00 to 5:00 or something and it's just like somebody hammering on the Kwansett hut.

Blanche Touhill: It was a tin roof.

Elizabeth Van Uum: It was a tin roof, yeah. I remember it being somewhat annoying but I do remember the mothers. It was a world made up of mothers and children and the fathers were off doing whatever they were doing but the mothers all had headaches for the entire three months that it went on. And I liked Guam. I liked the adventure. I went to the navy school. Guam was also a Catholic country and they had a Catholic school, private Catholic girls school that, of course, my father thought I should go to. But sadly, we weren't Guamanians and I was not accepted at the private Catholic girl's school. So I was forced to the navy school which was okay, with me. I certainly didn't know any different. I mean, I knew that I was in racy territory, going to a public school and by now, I can sing, well, "Jesus Loves Me." I was on the path to perdition, no question. So I went to the navy school. Now, here's what I remember about that. I am now nine and there was a bus that picked up all the kids and drove us to the school, which was called Aganya Heights, was the name of the school and the bus driver, of course, was a 17-year-old navy kid...or 18, a young kid. The admiral's daughter was in the 8th grade and she was on the bus with us and the admiral's daughter and the bus driver struck up a bit of a romance and we all sat in the bus seats and giggled and watched and carried on, which was okay, except that sometime during the school year, the admiral's daughter and the bus driver eloped. Now, remember, we're on this island that's six miles by two miles and I don't remember the number of troops but there were an enormous number of...there were no women on that, only the officers' wives and children were there, and not all of them. But there huge installa...Guam is the last American owned property before Southeast Asia so it's the head of all Southeast...it

is today, the head of all Southeast Asian intelligence which is what my father was doing there. But it also has a tremendous troop installation. And the other thing is, in those days Guam was completely jungled except for along the top so you couldn't really...there'd be maybe two or three paths down to the beach but you could not go into the jungle ten feet and you could be lost forever. That was in 1953, we were in Guam, I guess and there were still Japanese coming out of that jungle who had neither been detected by the Americans nor they, themselves, knew. So maybe four or five times during my stay there, some Japanese would turn up as being there. But in any event, they eloped and nobody could find them and eventually, after three days, they did find them. I ran into the admiral in Washington some years, years later and I introduced myself and he said, "Oh, yes" and we chatted and I said, "How is Carol?" and he said, "Oh, Carol's fine. She lives in Denver and she has three children" and I wanted to say, "What happened to that kid?" but I couldn't bring myself to quite say that. God, he's probably still in jail.

Blanche Touhill: So when you came back...

Elizabeth Van Uum: Then we came back.

Blanche Touhill: Did you live in Little Flower again?

Elizabeth Van Uum: I went back to Little Flower; it was like the end of the year, for, like, a minute but, no. Now we were ready to settle in and that's when we moved to Belnor. We bought a house in Belnor and so by 5th grade I was...

Blanche Touhill: ...settled.

Elizabeth Van Uum: Yes, I was going to St. Anne's.

Blanche Touhill: Did the other children look upon you in any exotic way that you had traveled to Guam?

Elizabeth Van Uum: Well, not only Guam, I went to Hong Kong and the Philippines. We moved around...and Hawaii, on our way back, we stopped in Hawaii for a while. No, I don't know. No, St. Louisans are very parochial; they looked at me as an outside from Little Flower than any other kind of thing. But certainly, that didn't last long. I didn't feel like an outsider once I got there.

- Blanche Touhill: Were you a leader in grade school and high school?
- Elizabeth Van Uum: In grade school, I would say definitely. We went to grade school...I'm not really a baby boomer. I was born in 1943 so I used to think of myself as a baby boomer but then baby boomers got defined as 1946, somewhere along the line so I guess I'm a war baby.
- Blanche Touhill: And how many were in your grade school class?
- Elizabeth Van Uum: That's just what I was going to say, there were 100 kids in our grade school class. The two classes ahead of us were 35 or something but our class was a huge class and we were divided into two classrooms. We were called, before political correctness, "the smart class" and "the dumb class" and honestly, I'm still in touch with some of those people. We have reunions every few years. We go to the reunions.
- Blanche Touhill: The boys and the girls?
- Elizabeth Van Uum: The boys and the girls, yeah. Somebody in the smart class, Dan Lahey, always takes his watch out and says to the other smart class people, "How long will it be before they say it?" and it's always under five minutes and someone says, "Well, I was in the dumb class but I made 695 billion dollars and I have 432 patents and I have an estate in Jamaica." It never goes more than five minutes that those kids don't feel the necessity to say, "Ninny ninny boo boo," right? And then this is how unaware I was: Somewhere along the line, after this smart class and dumb class, one of the kids in the dumb class said, "Well, it was really just an economic separation." I said, "Oh, no, we were smarter." They said, "Oh, no, you lived in Pasadena Hills or Belnor or Bellrieve Acres and you were in the smart class, no matter how dumb you were." In those days, St. Anne's parish was big, much bigger before the suburban split-ups and so it extended to working class neighborhoods and so the dumb class...and I said, "Oh." He said, "Oh, you never thought of that, you in the smart class." I said, "No, I actually didn't. I just assumed we were smart." But we were friends whether we were in the smart class or the dumb class. That didn't affect our interaction with each other socially.
- Blanche Touhill: So you played together?
- Elizabeth Van Uum: Yes, we played together, yeah, and it's not like we didn't know everybody but when I think of those nuns, having to deal with 50 kids. There were

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five rows with ten desks in a row. I don't know how they ever taught us anything.

Blanche Touhill: But they did.

Elizabeth Van Uum: But they did, oh, absolutely. Everybody could read and write, absolutely, they did.

Blanche Touhill: Did you go to the library when you were a child?

Elizabeth Van Uum: Oh, yeah, in Richmond Heights. Regularly, my mother and I walked to the library and the library, when I was in high school, I always thought...

Blanche Touhill: Which library did you go to in high school?

Elizabeth Van Uum: Let me say grade school. The library was in the City Hall Building in Richmond Heights and we could walk to that and we would do that. When I was in high school, I mainly used the school library and I was the president of the library club and the library nun, Sister Alphonsa, I loved Sister Alphonsa, so I always wanted to have a career as a librarian. One summer I got a job in the City Library system and I worked at the Michael branch of the St. Louis City Library which was on the corner of Euclid...that's where the Schlafly branch is now, Euclid and Maryland but it got torn down.

Blanche Touhill: Wasn't that for the children that were crippled?

Elizabeth Van Uum: No, Michael School was the name of the school. It was right there on that corner and it was just a regular public library branch.

Blanche Touhill: And you still read?

Elizabeth Van Uum: Oh, yeah, I still read. In my library career at the Michael School, there were all those apartments along Kingshighway and they housed a lot of, I guess, older, unmarried, single women or widows or something and it was just a little branch and those women used that library heavily but once there was an author...I'm trying to remember his name, it's a name like Zane Gray but obviously it's not Zane Gray but he wrote sort of romance novels, a little bit kind of racy and they would all come in but once I got to know them and I understood they all wanted that...Frank Yurby I think was the guy's name, Frank Yurby, and at first I was shocked that they were reading it but then I read a couple of them. Then I got so I

could be a legitimate recommender that summer of what they should try next and what they shouldn't try next.

Blanche Touhill: How was high school? Were you a leader? Not as much?

Elizabeth Van Uum: No. In grade school I was certainly a leader. I certainly did. In fact, there was a boy that I went...Gerard Hemstead who was a boy that I went to grade school with and then I'll go on to high school. Let me talk about Gerard Hemstead. You know when you go to grade school, somebody, you really know them. You can have your measure next to that person so there were kids in my class...there was Bobby Cribbs who was absolutely a genius who had asthma who, all through my grade school...and sometimes the nuns would say something that was so consummately dumb but everybody just sat there except Bobby Cribbs would sit there until he couldn't stand it and he would struggle and you'd see it coming and he'd raise his hand and he'd be huffing and puffing and he could hardly talk and finally the nun would have to call on him and he would get up and he would say something just terribly demolishing to the nuns and then he'd sort of collapse down in his seat. But he was brilliant. He was acknowledged as the brilliant kid. And then there was Michael Shaner and he was tall and he was the class president and he had poise and he had skills. Then there was Gerard Hemstead. Now, there's not a thing in the world wrong with Gerard Hemstead. He was a perfectly nice boy, he wasn't a genius like Bobby Cribbs and he didn't have the poise and the presence of Michael Shaner. He was just an average, okay, nice boy. But I really knew then...and I know now...that I could run faster, spell better, write better, think quicker than Gerard Hemstead and he was fine. Gerard Hemstead grew up and of course his father was a dentist, he went to law school, he married a girl in my high school class, Cathy Yaak, they had five children and as far as I could see, Gerard Hemstead, from my distance, looked like he had a completely easy life. He never had a question or a bump. Of course, he would do well. Of course he would have a profession. Of course he would marry a nice person. Of course they would have a number of children. Of course they'd like in a lovely house. Of course he'd do well in his career and that was his life and I'd think, I can do everything better than Gerard Hemstead. Why is everything I do such a fight. Once at one of our reunions, I shared with Gerard Hemstead that he was my symbol of just making me crazy and he listened very patiently and he said, "Well, I'm going to tell you something

that will make you feel better." I said, "Okay, what?" He said, "I grind my teeth." I said, "Oh, Lord." At least he had a little more sense of humor than I thought.

Blanche Touhill: So you went to St. Joe's?

Elizabeth Van Uum: So then it's time to go to high school and I lived 10 doors from Incarnate Word which was a little Catholic girls school which would have made sense for me to go to and which most of my classmates at St. Anne's went to. Some of them went to Nerinx because the Loretta nuns taught at Nerinx and so there was the Nerinx push but my mother died when I was in the 7th grade so that put my whole life in a wild tailspin and she had gone to St. Joe so there was big nostalgia that I should follow in her footsteps and I would go to St. Joe which was really...I rode an hour on the bus each way to get to St. Joe and I really didn't have a great high school experience and I don't think that our class, whenever it talks, it always talks about how it didn't have a great...we didn't really bond in any very good way. I think there are a couple reasons for that. First of all, we were the first class on Lindbergh. Before that, St. Joe had been at [inaudible 26:45] and so virtually all of us bussed except for the kids from Pillar. So the kids from Pillar, they mainly all went to St. Joe and there was no Vis. We were the first private girls school, I guess, that had any kind of large classes. I mean, you had [inaudible 27:05] but they had 12 kids in those days.

Blanche Touhill: In the West County?

Elizabeth Van Uum: Yes, in West County, right. Other people were still in the city. Vis was the only...so we had maybe more people who might historically have gone to those other schools because we were out there. Well, anyway, so we're there. And the Pillar, they really did...there were so many of them that they dominated, I think, the class and the rest of us were kind of...so, I don't know.

Blanche Touhill: So move on to college.

Elizabeth Van Uum: No, no, let me stay on high school for a minute because high school might have made me the woman I was, really. I didn't have any challenge to my value system or my belief system until I got to high school. When I was a freshman in high school, I had a social studies teacher, Sister Anne Regis. Sister Anne Regis, in my opinion, was egregious. She just taught the world

according to John Birch. I mean, she got up and she made no bones about how she was approaching these social studies classes and I had come from a very liberal family and I was appalled at the things that Sister Anne Regis would say and I was in a constant state of trying to say to my fellow classmates, "Listen, be critical thinkers here. Let's just think about what she's actually saying and is that right, is that not right," and I really got no traction with my fellow students. She was a very popular teacher. She was a tall, beautiful nun and she was funny and people adored her except for me. I didn't adore her at all. And I think I didn't realize it then, I thought that all of my classmates must have been morons because they couldn't see through Sister Anne Regis but looking back on it, I think it was just that they came from conservative, Republican families and Sister Anne Regis was teaching to their belief system and so they found it not at all threatening. So Sister Anne Regis and I struggled through three years. When I was a junior, I had some relief. I had Miss Pitney who at least gave me a break from Sister Anne Regis. But by the time I was a senior, I was back to Sister Anne Regis again. Sister Anne Regis assigned us a senior paper and we had to turn in our little card saying what our paper was to be to be approved. So I turned in my little card saying something like...American Problems was the name of the course so you could write about anything. I think my card said something like "The American Economic System" or something that was very vague and I was ready. I mean, I was like...I'd had it with Sister Anne Regis. I decided to write on the history of the labor movement in St. Louis or maybe in the country. I can't remember but whatever it was, it was the most thoroughly researched paper I ever wrote in my life. I'm sure it could have been a Master's thesis. I went to the Washington U library, I went to the St. Louis U library, I had citations, I had somebody helping me lay it out, helping me type it. It was just going to say what I had to say and not what Sister Anne Regis had to say. So I got all the way to the end of the thing and I turned in my paper and Sister Anne Regis looked at it and she read the first paragraph or something and she said, "This is not what I approved." I said, "Oh, yes, it's a part of the American economic system." She said, "No, no, that was..." ...whatever I had said, she said, "That was a misleading title. That's not what this paper is about and this paper was not approved. You'll have to do it over." I said, "I'm not doing this over. I did this. You have to take it." She said, "No, I don't. I'm the teacher and you won't graduate with your class unless you do this paper over." Well, I

took my paper home and I was in a fit. So I said to my father, "I've done this paper; I've worked on this paper. This is a fine paper. She won't accept this paper. I just won't graduate," and I will say this for my father, he did sort of stay with me so we made an appointment with the principal and we went to see the principal, me, my father and Sister Anne Regis and of course the principal said...what I now know, the faculty reigns supreme and if Sister Anne Regis won't accept the paper, Sister Anne Regis won't accept the paper and I said, "Well, then, I guess I just will be a St. Joseph's Academy dropout because I am not going to do that paper over." And my father is now beside himself. The whole family...my mother has died just a few years earlier and there's tremendous concentration on anything I'm doing from all these old people, right, so we worked out a deal which turned out to be a wonderful deal, that I would have to go to summer school at St. Louis U and take some kind of a social studies or political science class and then that class could count as my high school credit for social studies and I would be allowed to go through the ceremony of graduation but I wouldn't actually get my diploma which was not perfect in my father's mind but it was probably good in Sister Anne Regis' mind because I had been a National Merit scholar. We had the Junior Classical League and you get your name engraved in the trophy, I had done that. I had won a scholarship to the three girls' school, Maryville, Fontbonne and Webster. So there were many academic honors that would have looked well to the class but anyway, they decided I could go through the ceremony and they could announce all of that stuff but I couldn't get the diploma. So that's what we did and I went through the ceremony and I got a diploma folder and before my grandparents could say, "Oh, let's see the diploma," my father yanked it out of my hand and said, "Oh, I don't want anything to happen to this. I'm going to put it in the trunk." So they did not really realize that. So there may have been an indication that I was not going to be bullied when I was in high school.

Blanche Touhill: I know you went to St. Louis U.

Elizabeth Van Uum: St. Louis U, yeah. Now I'm out of high school and my father's, like, an admissions counselor. I remember, they were 36 when she died, so he's now 38 and single and he's got me and he's saying, "What do you think about California? Would you like to go to Manhattanville What about Colorado? There's a wonderful school in Colorado," and I think that I had

been so disrupted by moving around and then my mother dying shortly after coming back. You said talk about your friends. My friends were everything to me. I mean, once my mother died, I just attached myself to various friends' family. They couldn't have been kinder. They included me in family vacations; they included me in family outings, dinners, stuff because I was sort of loose on the streets from that time on. So I really didn't want to leave my friends and I really just wouldn't go. That was all there was to say about it, as much as he tried to...he said it would be a wonderful experience, I would grow up.

Blanche Touhill: But, you know, I think in those days a lot of people went to school in St. Louis.

Elizabeth Van Uum: Oh, yeah, they did. Most of them did.

Blanche Touhill: And I think Wash U was really an option.

Elizabeth Van Uum: Well, that was the only option that he thought of because he thought if I was going to stay I had to go to the Jesuit school. I really think if it hadn't been for sex, my father would have been a Jesuit. He was very connected to the Jesuits. He'd gone to school at Regis when he was an undergraduate and he was friends with the Reinert's, the family was from Regis and he was always very involved with the Jesuits.

Blanche Touhill: You then got married too?

Elizabeth Van Uum: Yes. Well, let's keep on going. So here I am, going to school and then my father got married. That was what caused me to get married. My mother had been dead, I guess, about six years by then. I was a junior and my father announced that he was marrying a woman with five children which caused all of my grandparents to have apoplexy. They were completely, 100% opposed to my father getting married and they were terrible. I mean, everybody was terrible. So I really was loyal to my father in that situation. I wouldn't take their side. I thought they were just being jerks and I certainly thought my father had a right to a life and I couldn't see any reason that they were being so awful and my step-mother was lovely, there were five kids. So I stood with my father. However, that meant that I suddenly went from living essentially alone doing whatever I wanted, because he was out doing whatever he wanted, so I'd been pretty much independent during those teenage years, to suddenly living with another family and five children and, honestly, I really do know

that's why I got married. I couldn't think of any...I mean, you could say, "You could have moved out," "You could have lived with your grandparents," "You could have decided to go away to school at that point" but all of those options seemed to me like it would be saying to my grandparents, "You're right. He has disrupted my life" and I really thought the only legitimate way to maintain positivity with my father and not, I guess, take my grandparents...say to my grandparents, "See, you're right; he's upset my whole life," was to get married. A lot of people in my generation, my era, were getting married and I've got to tell you, it never occurred to me that I would get married that early. It just did not occur to me. But anyway, I looked around and the least resistant of the boys available I married and it was fine. I liked him very much. But I immediately, of course, got pregnant so now I am finishing my junior year but I'm pregnant so I quit school, I didn't go back for my senior year which made everybody crazy, just absolutely insane but that wasn't the end of the world for me. I had those two children and then when Rich died in 1969, I was still young enough to do something else. So I did what every middle-class person who doesn't know what to do with themselves...when he died, I went back to school. So it worked out.

Blanche Touhill: After you graduated, you became very active in politics. How did that come about?

Elizabeth Van Uum: Well, it came about through school. So I got married and I didn't really anticipate ever having much of a job or working or doing anything but playing bridge and playing with the kids. And then when he died, really I'd always been sensitive to civil rights but I never actually had been involved in any...well, I didn't really know any black people except the waiter at the country club. I didn't have any interaction with people very different from me. I lived in a very ghetto environment. But anyway, after he died, I went back to school and I took a night school class because you put the kids to bed at 7:00 or 8:00 o'clock, you're home during the day and in my class was a fellow who was a football player. His name was Bob Reynolds. He was a St. Louis Cardinal Football player. So I took this class and I met this fellow named Bob Reynolds and, first of all, he was African American and he was a football player and it was a graduate class and that was an odd thing, to have a black graduate football player in my class. So I was interested in him and I got to know him and I got to know his wife. I lived in University City; they lived in University City and he funded a magazine

called Pride which was sort of a glossy thing like today's Ladue News or Town & Country or something that touted the accomplishments of African Americans. So he introduced me to some of his friends which were part of the civil rights activity in St. Louis and in those days, it was my sort of first venture out of my little world by myself. I always think of that as the moment that I became an adult, that I moved into doing those civil rights activities and through Bob, there was a bar just east of St. Louis U in Laclede Town which was a very watched housing experiment, just east of St. Louis University and this bar called The Pub was the height of a lot of interactions and stuff. So I went to The Pub and Bob introduced to... where I met Betty Lee who eventually came to work with us. She was running Pride at that time...Proud was the name of the magazine, and I got involved with the Core people and that was when I really started my social activism. Shall I talk about that?

Blanche Touhill: Yeah, but what I'm trying to get to is when you decided to run for office.

Elizabeth Van Uum: Oh, okay. Well, I did this Core stuff; it was 1970 and '71. We had a big activity where we integrated the brewery which was a huge big thing and it took several months. It really taught me how political movements worked and how social movements work. I learned more from that Core experience than I had ever learned being a child of a family of lawyers and basically privilege. I had no idea how things worked until I actually got involved with Core. So at that point we had this boycott that boycotted Anheuser Busch because they didn't have enough African Americans in the brewery and there is a long story to that but at the end of the day, we won something called a "show cause order" from the federal government which had an executive order that said they wouldn't do business with anybody who was not a fair employer and once they got that order, Anheuser Busch began to settle how they would have minority hiring and when they settled in St. Louis, there were five breweries, the other four breweries settled and when those breweries settled, then they settled in Newark and then they settled nationwide. So it was probably the most...I would say it's the most important thing I've ever done in my life, was that and I really had no idea what I was doing but the other people had some idea and I learned how that happened. So by 1971, the women's movement was coming along and I have now been writing the press releases and writing the speeches for the African American Voice to give. I'm saying, "Well, here, let's do this." I'm

definitely part of the thought process but I'm definitely behind the scenes. I am a white woman, right, and they were people that had to be the front people in the whole thing. And so somewhere around 1971, I thought, you know, I can say this myself and I also had kind of an awakening about the conditions of women. I don't think I had...those people who were in the dumb class had pointed out that I didn't notice that it was an economic division, not an intellectual division, were right. I probably wasn't very smart or very reflective but in that period, I thought, well, you know, if I hadn't been born and been an only child of an only child of a relatively well-off family and my husband had left me instead of died and I hadn't had that financial security, I couldn't possibly have gotten a job that would have allowed me to continue life at the same way that I did when my husband was alive. Clearly I was as smart as he was and I certainly should have been able to do his job but I could never have gotten that job and I realized that there were just millions of women like me who just didn't have that same good luck. So that caused me to become just fervent in the women's movement. In 1971, we went to a speech by Bella Abzug at the JCCA, it was some part of a speaker series and she was a national figure and she'd been against the war and there were a bunch of us in that audience and one of the things in the early women's movement we always said, "Never leave until you introduce yourself to each other and make the connection and make the network" and we all kind of introduced ourselves to each other and, boom, we were just on fire with the idea that women should be half of the democracy. So we formed what was the Missouri Chapter or State Organization of the Women's Political Caucus and it was devoted to getting women elected. The theory was that democracy can't function unless it uses all of its resources. Women were not part of the public sector in any significant way. We were 50% of the population, we ought to have half of the Senate seats, half of the House seats, half of the governorships, half of everything if we were going to make full use of our brains. So we started and we had two objectives. One was passing the Equal Rights Amendment and the other was getting women elected to office and we didn't know each other but we were sort of a diverse group but we were wildly...

Blanche Touhill: Who were some of the people that were there?

Elizabeth Van Uum: Well, Sally Barker who in those days was Sally Spitzer, Susan Bloch, a woman named Carol Berry, a woman named Mona Goldstein, Jane North, my next-door neighbor was with me. I think of those early days, there was that guy, Lyn Foster, do you remember Chuck Foster?

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Elizabeth Van Uum: Lyn Foster.

Blanche Touhill: What about Sue Shearer, how did you get to meet Sue and Sheila and Harriet Woods?

Elizabeth Van Uum: We didn't have Sue yet. There was just us. So Sally was our smartest person. None of us had ever been to a political meeting except Sally who, when she was in high school, was a Goldwater girl. And Sally was an ABD political science person from Washington U and so she knew a little bit more about the structure of politics than any of the rest of us. So we looked to Sally for all of our information and research. One of the things that we thought, well, we had to have candidates, right, and that was the year after redistricting, 1972. It was the first year that...two years is when they run in the new districts and we knew enough to know that a district without an incumbent was an easier district to try to capture than to try to beat somebody who had been there. So we had in the Central County, where many of us lived, an open seat. It had previously, part of it had been occupied by a fellow named Jack Schram who was running for Lieutenant Governor and part of it had been occupied by Buzz King who was also running for Lieutenant Governor and one was Republican and one was Democrat. The new district was drawn and it looked to be a pretty safe Democratic district so we knew that whoever won the primary would probably win the thing. So we thought, well, there's no incumbent and we have a lot of people that we know that live in this area and this neighborhood. We'll try to find somebody. So we went around and we talked to everybody we could think of, any woman that seemed to have any kind of visibility and we went to Harriet Woods and she pretty much said "Oh, girls go away, Good luck but I'm a television star and I'm part of the Creve Coeur Township Club and it's not going to happen." So she dismissed us. So finally Sally found Sue. We used to meet three times a week, we were meeting in our little cells, right, and Sally said, "Well, I think I've got somebody. I've got this old woman who is sort of a friend of my mother's and I think maybe we could talk her into it." So

we went to see Sue and we talked her into it. She really was not an experienced speaker.

Blanche Touhill: Well, she had never worked.

Elizabeth Van Uum: No, she had never worked.

Blanche Touhill: She had been a housewife.

Elizabeth Van Uum: She had been a housewife...

Blanche Touhill: And mother.

Elizabeth Van Uum: Right, and mother and she was...

Blanche Touhill: What was she, about 50 then?

Elizabeth Van Uum: She was 48. We thought she might have been 90 as far as we were concerned.

Blanche Touhill: But her children were raised?

Elizabeth Van Uum: Yes, her children were raised and her daughter, Cathy, was a doctor. So she thought, "If Cathy can be a doctor, I can run for office."

Blanche Touhill: And she ran.

Elizabeth Van Uum: And she ran.

Blanche Touhill: And she was to do the Equal Rights Amendment?

Elizabeth Van Uum: Yes, she was going to do the Equal Rights Amendment so during the campaign, Sally, at that time, was married to a newspaper reporter, a fellow named Dana Spitzer and he covered Jefferson City. So Sally said, "Dana can't help. You can't let anybody know" but Dana, of course, did help so Dana came and he would tell her what the issues were and how they would break down and how she should approach it because we really were novices. We had no idea. And I'll never forget, we got to some debate somewhere in a little church basement and Sue is up there and she's talking about Blue Cross Blue Shield and she got it confused and Dana is there covering the thing, right, and, from the stage, she said, "Now, is that right, Dana? Did I say the right thing?" I thought, oh, God, Dana's going to die but in any event, what we didn't know in that campaign was that even though the district looked like it was an open

district, it really wasn't an open district. There was a state senator who had been in the legislature from the time of Roosevelt, who had participated in the drawing of that district and he drew that district right around his son's house. So while it was open, it was drawn for our candidate. Since none of us had ever been part of the political system, we didn't really know anything about him or the son or anything. I do remember that Jane North and I went to one of our first political meetings of the township and then we always went back to the cell of the Women's Political Caucus but we went to the township meeting and we got there and, if you've ever been to a township meeting, it's got the same 20 people that had been going for 100 years and they go for another 100 years. We walked in and of course we're new people so everybody looked at us and we just sat down like it was a perfectly normal thing that you show up at a township meeting and we listened to all the stuff and then they introduced him and they said, "Okay, now we have our candidate for the state legislature. Let's hear from him" and a young man gets up and he starts to speak and they don't introduce him because, of course, they all know him. So we come back to our little cell from the township meeting where we're supposed to be [inaudible 51:00]. We said, "Well, we saw the opposition. We saw the opposition" and they said, "Well, who is it?" We said, "We don't know. They never said his name" and they said, "What do you mean, they never said his name?" We said, "Well, they all seemed to know him and we didn't know them and we didn't want to ask so we didn't ask his name." So we came back, having seen him but not knowing anything about him. But eventually we found out who he was and he was a young lawyer and this is something I will be grateful for for the rest of my life: we ran the campaign...this is before (Nicpak?), before really terrible, negative campaigns. Our campaign slogan was, "The better of two goods." The candidate had no...we said, "There's nothing wrong with this young man. He is perfectly fine and we're consistent on all the issues. There's no place where we would find any significant difference but we think it's time for women to have a seat at the table and therefore we think Sue would be the better choice because, while they'll agree on everything and there's nothing wrong with what he would do, she would just give an opportunity to have a woman's perspective on the whole thing." So that was really good luck on my part because eventually that young man became...

Blanche Touhill: Your marriage.

Elizabeth Van Uum: That man. So we didn't have any really...and he was really...

Blanche Touhill: But Sue won.

Elizabeth Van Uum: Sue won. Oh, my god, what I know now: We had so much energy in that campaign, we could have elected her governor. It was really the fever pitch of the women's movement. We had women from all over the state coming to help us; we canvassed the district four or five times. We had volunteer resources that were just beyond anything and we also had all the newspaper support and all the popular media was talking about women and women taking their place and we ran on that issue.

Blanche Touhill: I'm going to jump a little bit: Then you became the first woman to be elected to the County Council?

Elizabeth Van Uum: We, I've got one sentence to bridge that so Sue and I went to Jefferson City together. I went as the lobbyist for the Equal Rights Amendment Coalition and she went as the sponsor. So we roomed together for that two years and we didn't pass the Equal Rights Amendment.

Blanche Touhill: Well, tell that story. Who was the last vote? I mean, you lost by one vote, didn't you?

Elizabeth Van Uum: Yes. Well, the senator...remember the senator and the young man...the senator who had been there since Roosevelt, when we got to the capitol, sort of me us on the steps with his arms crossed and said, "Welcome to my house, girls. Let's see how you do here." While his son got over it, he really didn't get over it and he went from being a fairly socially liberal legislator to...he was always socially liberal except that he made an exception with the Equal Rights Amendment and he took it upon himself to defeat us.

Blanche Touhill: And you lost by one vote?

Elizabeth Van Uum: And we lost by one vote. We lost in the Senate but we passed in the House but we lost in the Senate by one vote.

Blanche Touhill: And that was one of the last states, wasn't it?

Elizabeth Van Uum: Yes.

- Blanche Touhill: ...In order make it a Constitutional Amendment.
- Elizabeth Van Uum: Yes, that we needed six more states but we were the first state where it really got any opposition. Up until then, it had just been going through all the legislators. It was like motherhood and apple pie. Of course, we're all in favor of women and it was our state...well, of course we had Phyllis Schlafly who decided to make it her cause célèbre and it was the first big battleground state and we did, in fact, lose by one vote.
- Blanche Touhill: At the end of that two years, you decided to run for the County Council?
- Elizabeth Van Uum: Yes, so that election cycle and then the County Council seat became open and of course we were encouraging women to run for whatever, school boards or city councils, anything that came we wanted a candidate. So we knew there was an open seat going to be on the County Council and I knew zero about the County Council and zero about zoning or sewers or anything the local County Council does but I sort of ran on the Equal Rights Amendment but by that time I had pretty much public visibility out there talking about women and the Equal Rights Amendment. So, while I was actually running for the County Council that was certainly secondary to my campaign. I was out there saying women should do this and women can do that and women are just as good and I won.
- Blanche Touhill: And you held that post for 12 years?
- Elizabeth Van Uum: Eight years, two terms and then I lost in a redistricting. That was 1974 and then in 1982, we had a county executive who was a Republican, Jean McNaring, so the executive controls the redistricting process and they redistricted the district.
- Blanche Touhill: And you lost to a woman?
- Elizabeth Van Uum: I lost to a Republican woman, yeah, Ellen Conan.
- Blanche Touhill: And then you came to the University of Missouri-St. Louis.
- Elizabeth Van Uum: And then I came to the university and here I've been.
- Blanche Touhill: How many years have you been there?
- Elizabeth Van Uum: Well, I lost the election in 1982 and I really came in the fall of 1983 on a part-time basis. I started out part-time. I wasn't finished in the County Council until, like, January of '83, by the time you get sworn in and

everything, the end of January, and then I flopped around for six months or eight months until finally I came to the university with Arnold.

Blanche Touhill: Well, let me say, every building from Arnold Groveman's Science Building, every building or major acquisition happened under your jurisdiction. You negotiated all those buildings.

Elizabeth Van Uum: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: It was 20 million dollars to buy property and then the various buildings that were built in addition to that. You did all.

Elizabeth Van Uum: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: And you're now doing the Great Streets.

Elizabeth Van Uum: Yup.

Blanche Touhill: So you have made a huge difference in the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Elizabeth Van Uum: Well, you know what? It's been a wonderful career. It's really been great to be part of a team. I will say, I would divide my career into two-thirds and one-third though. The first 20 years were truly wonderful. The first year I got here, I remember, Blanche, thanks to you, I was here for a few minutes and I've been in a situation where I could count to 1,000 before I would have a pure interaction with another woman because the County Council deals with building and construction and zoning and development. Those are really all male completely dominated environments and so it was ridiculous why I was on the County Council. Sometimes people would come to see me and one guy brought his wife and I thought why is she here? She didn't know why she was there either but he just wasn't comfortable. He thought it would be better if she came along and we all sat there and talked about ingress and egress and how many stories the building could be. It was kind of crazy but when I got here, there were women. There was you and there was Lois and there was Nancy Evakian and I thought, oh, my god, look at this, all women doing something. You were all doing something but at the end of the day, who was deciding were Blaire Farrell and Arnold Groveman. Now, Art should have been deciding but I don't know that he was really...he was maybe in the conversation but I thought, well, yes, there are women but

we're still not quite there. So I worked for Arnold for about a year-and-a-half, I guess, and he was wonderful to me in that he completely opened his correspondence, his office, his thoughts to me and while I didn't know anything about the university either when I got here, by the time Arnold left, I understood the urban university movement, I understood the requirement for excellence upon graduation, I understood how the faculty viewed itself and how the institution viewed itself and, again, it was sort of another movement thing, civil rights to the women, to this urban university movement, thinking that cities had to provide opportunities for all of their citizens to succeed. By that time, Washington University and St. Louis University were both retreating from any kind of a local mission and we were the hope of the community and we were young and we were growing and he really imbued, I think, at least as far as I could see, his administration and most of the faculty all believed that we were going to be great. We were on our way to being great. So I did understand those things from him. I also understood fighting from him. The first day I was here, he left town on a vacation and they called Art and they said to fire me and Art said, "What will I do? You haven't been here 24 hours," and Arnold said, "Don't do anything...he didn't say anything. We tried to call him and he wouldn't talk to us on the phone so by the time he came back, it was too late to fire me and I was here. But that's how I started, the first day I was here.

Blanche Touhill: Talk just generally about the women at UM-St. Louis.

Elizabeth Van Uum: Well, as I started to say, Arnold was wonderful but it was still a male-run environment and it was only about a year-and-a-half and he left and then we had our first female chancellor, Marguerite Ross-Barnett and that upended the gender situation at the university and I will say, that began 20, more or less, great years. First we had Marguerite as the chancellor and you, Blanche, were the vice chancellor so two people were both women which was revolutionary that a large institution would have that kind of women leadership. And then, of course, Marguerite was only here for a few years and then you became the chancellor. I can remember joking to people, saying, "You know, we have cabinet meetings and we try to bring them along but it's so tedious. I just don't have the experience," talking about male colleagues and joking and I will say that for that 20 years, I felt like I was in a warm bath, of other people who, we shared the same ambitions, we shared the same ideas and we were

focused on getting stuff done and we got a lot done against all odds and against a lot of power concentrated in the center of the state. They either ignored us or we kicked them enough that they noticed us. They said, "Stop or we'll squash you" but we kept on going. So those 20 years were wonderful. Then the next administration came and it's like the tide came out and the tide went in. I went to a cabinet meeting a month ago and there were three women in a room of 20 people. The provost is a woman but I, frankly, question whether she has any autonomy at all, which she does. Decisions are pretty much all male-based again. I have carved a little niche for myself. I'm doing stuff that is not as important to the university as the stuff we did the first 20 years. It's nice, it's auxiliary, it helps the neighborhood, it helps the university generally but we're not as focused on task about building the university, increasing the academic offerings, increasing the number of students who became...I miss that I'm not part of that movement anymore but nonetheless, I've enjoyed the external things. I enjoyed the Express Scripts group's activity, I'm enjoying the Street but I recognize that I'm again fringed.

Blanche Touhill: Thank you very much.

Elizabeth Van Uum: Okay

Elizabeth "Betty" Van Uum 6-12-2014