

An Interview with
Phyllis Weber

at *The* Historical Society of Missouri St. Louis
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interviewed by Dr. Blanche Touhill
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Oral History Program

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PREFACE

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

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

Blanche Touhill: ...your cousins, your grandparents, how did you play as a child, were you a leader. Just talk in general about being a child.

Phyllis Weber: Well, I was born in Washington, D.C. and at the age of six months, we moved to Richmond, Virginia which I consider part of my very formative years. My father was a chemical engineer and he worked at a paint factory in Richmond. My mother was a homemaker. She loved to read. She'd read a book every maybe three or four days and she was interested in the arts. So as a young child, I used to go to the symphony and especially to the ballet and to the art museums. So that was a very important part of my life. I have one brother who currently lives in Paris and he has lived there for some time. He was a professor at Johns Hopkins University. I grew up with what in the old days you would consider a nanny, or "mammy," pardon me. She was in the country and she was the second most important figure in my life, I would say, next to my mother.

Blanche Touhill: So you loved her?

Phyllis Weber: Dearly and she loved me dearly. She had an interesting way to approach my misbehavior. She would give me what she called punishment work which meant I had to make my bed and punishment work may be for two weeks, three weeks at a time and just as the time would run out, I'd do something else. One of the things...if I, as she would say, "Don't dispute my word," in other words, don't dispute her because then I'd get maybe two weeks of punishment work. When I was 18 years old, my mother finally discovered I had been making my bed all these years and said to Mary, "Has Phyllis been making her bed all these years?" and Mary said yes, and my mother said, "Well, I don't want her to make her bed any longer." I was a Depression child so at a very early age, my grandmothers, both lived in Washington, D.C. and my brother and I were sent to Washington for the summer to sort of help ends meet and we moved to Baltimore, Maryland when I was 13 years of age where I remained until I was married at the age of 23.

Blanche Touhill: And did you go from your family's home to your husband's home?

Phyllis Weber: Yes. He was a post-doctoral fellow at Johns Hopkins University in biochemistry and then we moved after one year, we moved to Boston

where he was on the faculty at the Harvard Medical School and after three years we moved to St. Louis.

Blanche Touhill: And he practiced here?

Phyllis Weber: He was a scientist. He was chairman of microbiology at St. Louis U Medical School.

Blanche Touhill: And he stayed forever?

Phyllis Weber: Yes, until he died in 1999.

Blanche Touhill: Do you think that will still continue where people go to work for somebody and stay for that length of time?

Phyllis Weber: Well, in those days, scientists were very mobile. They moved a lot but once he got here, we just liked St. Louis and we remained where we raised our family.

Blanche Touhill: How was [glitch in tape 03:43] symphony and to the opera and the ballet, was it in Richmond that you did that or did you go up to Washington, D.C. to do that?

Phyllis Weber: In Richmond.

Blanche Touhill: So it was a culturally enriched city?

Phyllis Weber: And a culturally enriched childhood.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, that's right. And did your brother go with you?

Phyllis Weber: No, it would be my mother and I.

Blanche Touhill: So you bonded with your mother at least in the cultural aspect of life?

Phyllis Weber: Yes, yes, and she was a very sweet, funny, lovely woman.

Blanche Touhill: So you enjoyed each other's company?

Phyllis Weber: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Did she teach you to cook or did the maid cook?

Phyllis Weber: Mary cooked.

Blanche Touhill: The mammy cooked?

- Phyllis Weber: Right and I know that's not a popular word these days but it's a...
- Blanche Touhill: It was a term of endearment actually.
- Phyllis Weber: Right, and it's a special relationship that one has, it's something that was very important to me.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, who encouraged you as a child to put your mind on what you wanted to do and go and do it?
- Phyllis Weber: Well, I think probably I was sort of pretty much self-directed. I was very athletic. I loved sports and I was a tomboy.
- Blanche Touhill: What sports did you particularly...
- Phyllis Weber: Well, as a child, we played softball; we played football, whatever was available and I continued to do so, actually, with the boys in the neighborhood in Baltimore until I was 16 and I ended up on the bottom of the pile and I figured out something was going on. So I gave up sports, at least with the boys.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, actually, that same thing sort of happened to me, too. I got to be about 13 and it wasn't that I was playing on the same...well, we did play together, the boys and the girls in my neighborhood played together but I remember when I was 13, I played on a little team with the public school summer program and we were traveling to other schools and the girls, when they got to be 13 or 14, they just sort of dropped out. It wasn't that anything happened; it was just sort of understood and we, particularly understood what was going on but we knew it was what girls did. They didn't...because in those days there were no sports for girls in high school. Were there sports for girls?
- Phyllis Weber: Yes, I was on most of the teams in high school.
- Blanche Touhill: Was it an all-girls school?
- Phyllis Weber: No, it was coed.
- Blanche Touhill: It was a coed school?
- Phyllis Weber: Right.
- Blanche Touhill: And they had coed play from school...

- Phyllis Weber: No, no, that was after school that I was playing with the boys in the neighborhood, but, no, it was...
- Blanche Touhill: In high school, they had girls teams that played other schools?
- Phyllis Weber: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: See, my generation, I missed all that.
- Phyllis Weber: I think we may be of the same generation.
- Blanche Touhill: Same generation. Well, Missouri was not as forward-thinking then as Maryland.
- Phyllis Weber: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: The girls would come together and sort of play but basically you never were on a team. I always admired the legislation which allowed women to play in intercollegiate sports.
- Phyllis Weber: Oh, absolutely, yes.
- Blanche Touhill: Go on with your childhood. So what you're saying is, everybody sort of let you decide what you wanted to do and how you were going to plot your own course?
- Phyllis Weber: I think so, yeah, to some extent. I've always been a big talker. My mother said I was vaccinated with a Victrola needle. And in elementary school, I was frequently in the hall because I had a lot to say, which I thought, of course, was very important.
- Blanche Touhill: You mean, you were talking to people in the hall or you were expelled from the class?
- Phyllis Weber: Right.
- Blanche Touhill: You were asked to leave momentarily?
- Phyllis Weber: Or kept after school on occasion.
- Blanche Touhill: Did you join a debate team or something like that?
- Phyllis Weber: No, I never did that.
- Blanche Touhill: And in high school were you a leader?

Phyllis Weber: Semi.

Blanche Touhill: Explain that.

Phyllis Weber: Well I just wasn't a big leader of people but I was active in a lot of things and I think I was to some extent. One of the things, by the way, that was very important in my life, we lived near the Petersburg Pike on the way to Petersburg and the convoys would come by with the soldiers.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, in the war.

Phyllis Weber: In the war, yes, and we had a map on the wall.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, did you follow the war?

Phyllis Weber: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: You know, Joe's family followed the war. His father was a newspaper man and they had a map at home.

Phyllis Weber: Right, and we had put pins in it and listened to the news every night during dinner. So that was a very, very important part of my life.

Blanche Touhill: And, you know, we listened to Roosevelt's Fireside Chats.

Phyllis Weber: Yes, yes.

Blanche Touhill: Did you listen to those?

Phyllis Weber: Absolutely.

Blanche Touhill: And everybody listened to Jack Benny and...

Phyllis Weber: Oh, I know...Fred Allen and...what's his name...I'm sorry, I can't remember.

Blanche Touhill: Well, Gracie Allen and George, yeah.

Phyllis Weber: Yeah, but "Somebody's bar but he ain't here."

Blanche Touhill: Oh, and the soap operas.

Phyllis Weber: Duffy's Bar.

Blanche Touhill: Duffy's Bar.

Phyllis Weber: ...”But Duffy ain’t here.”

Blanche Touhill: And Helen Trent. I used to come home for lunch and the radio was always on to Helen Trent.

Phyllis Weber: And Jack Armstrong, the All-American boy.

Blanche Touhill: All-American boy, yes. Well, it was a nice childhood.

Phyllis Weber: It was, it was wonderful.

Blanche Touhill: When you moved to Baltimore, did you still go to the opera and the symphony and the ballet?

Phyllis Weber: The ballet principally and the art museum, yes.

Blanche Touhill: You have a wonderful museum in Baltimore.

Phyllis Weber: We, do, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: De Walker, is that it?

Phyllis Weber: The Baltimore Museum. Oh, there’s the Walters Gallery.

Blanche Touhill: Walters Gallery, I was very impressed with that.

Phyllis Weber: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: And you have the famous library right across from the Walters Library.

Phyllis Weber: The Peabody.

Blanche Touhill: The Peabody. I was very impressed with that too. Baltimore, I thought, had an awful lot. They had the fort where Francis Scott Key...

Phyllis Weber: Right.

Blanche Touhill: Did you go to that as a young woman?

Phyllis Weber: Yes, I did.

Blanche Touhill: I was thrilled the first time I went and sort of recited the Stars Spangled Banner to myself. I was always a historian. I could see the fort and fireworks and that was a real thrill. And now, of course, it has been (scourged?) up and had the aquarium and all those hotels down...

Phyllis Weber: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Was it an easy place to grow up?

Phyllis Weber: I think so, yes. I think it's, in a way, very much like St. Louis. I see the similarity there.

Blanche Touhill: Did you live in one of those houses that you scrubbed the...

Phyllis Weber: No, no. We lived in an area called Mt. Washington and we had a large older house.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, I know roughly where that is.

Phyllis Weber: And near Pimlico Race Track.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, and Johns Hopkins is such a famous...

Phyllis Weber: Right.

Blanche Touhill: And now they have a public university like UMSL, don't they, in Baltimore?

Phyllis Weber: Yes, they do. I think the University of Maryland has a...

Blanche Touhill: A campus probably.

Phyllis Weber: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: So you come to St. Louis and did you want to come?

Phyllis Weber: No, I loved Boston and we were talking about buying a canoe for some reason and I said, "But there's no water there other than the Mississippi River," so I just thought it was desert out here so we didn't buy a canoe. I've lived here and I don't want to leave it. I think it's a wonderful city.

Blanche Touhill: And it has a lot of the things that you're interested in.

Phyllis Weber: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: So you come to St. Louis, your husband has his job that he loves because he stayed and so where did you live and what did you do?

Phyllis Weber: We lived in University City on Waterman.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, one hundred.

Phyllis Weber: Near Flynn Park.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, indeed.

Phyllis Weber: What happened was, I don't know, somehow I was always interested in the arts. My mother also was a weaver, by the way, and had a kiln so she did that sort of thing at home and so I took a class at University City High School, the clay class was filled so I took one working in metals, jewelry and ultimately started working in silver principally and then went to gold and did that for a number of years and then as a result, I was one of the five women who started Craft Alliance Gallery.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, really?

Phyllis Weber: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: What year was that?

Phyllis Weber: It's 51 years this year.

Blanche Touhill: The Craft Alliance?

Phyllis Weber: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: And were you always down on Delmar?

Phyllis Weber: No, we were on Euclid...I'm sorry, McPherson.

Blanche Touhill: McPherson and what?

Phyllis Weber: Right next to Bissinger's.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, of course.

Phyllis Weber: And we started out, it's not-for-profit and we started out with a gallery and ultimately moved to Delmar.

Blanche Touhill: How did you get the money to run it, to get it lifted up? I can see how once you start a revenue stream can come in.

Phyllis Weber: Well, there never was, in those days, a great revenue stream, frankly, but we started off actually with...we just said we're going to have this organization and we wrote a newsletter which I was the editor and asked people to join. I think membership was, like, \$5 or \$10 or something like that. So it was always a struggle. Robert Woolson gave us \$500 which was

amazing and interestingly enough, I live in a condo now and his widow lived above me and when she passed, I thanked the family because without that \$500...and it seemed like an enormous amount of money.

Blanche Touhill: Well, for the 1960's...

Phyllis Weber: Right. So, yeah, and I was very involved in Craft Alliance for many, many years and actually continued to work in metals until I went to law school and it just was something I couldn't continue to do.

Blanche Touhill: Now, why did you decide to go to law school?

Phyllis Weber: Well, my children were, like, 12 and 13 and I said, what am I going to do when they leave home, and so I like working in libraries. Actually, I worked at Widener Library which is the main library in Boston and I really like library work. There were no library schools here and my mother was always sort of interested in social work so I applied to social work school and to law.

Blanche Touhill: At Wash U?

Phyllis Weber: St. Louis U.

Blanche Touhill: And the law school at St. Louis U?

Phyllis Weber: And the law school and my husband said, "You don't want to be a social worker. You want to go to law school" and I thought, I can't do that. I'd been out of school for many years and so I followed his advice and he was always pushing me.

Blanche Touhill: He was?

Phyllis Weber: Yes. In fact, when we were in Boston, he said that...he was nine years older than me and if something were to happen to him, I needed to have something and so I ended up getting a Master's in Education. I never liked school. I never intended to teach school.

Blanche Touhill: But it was an insurance policy?

Phyllis Weber: Right, and I was at Boston University and at Boston University, a lot of the professors were people that hadn't made associate professor at Harvard and so they went to Boston University and I had a course in constitutional law and that's what inspired me.

Blanche Touhill: Well, you didn't do that right away. You waited until your children were a little older, before you enrolled in law school?

Phyllis Weber: Right.

Blanche Touhill: But you remembered the course in Boston?

Phyllis Weber: Right, yes.

Blanche Touhill: So you went through St. Louis U?

Phyllis Weber: I did.

Blanche Touhill: And you graduated?

Phyllis Weber: I did.

Blanche Touhill: And then what did you do?

Phyllis Weber: Well, I had been a Democratic committee woman at that time.

Blanche Touhill: In U City?

Phyllis Weber: Yes, in that area, Hadley Township, and Courtney Goodman was the prosecutor and there was a vegetable truck, Delao's truck, Pete Delao and it used to come every Thursday and Courtney's wife got on the truck and she said, "Phyllis, you should go work at the prosecutor's office," and I said, "Oh, I couldn't do that" and then, when I was about to graduate, she said the same thing and back then you didn't have to go through personnel. The prosecutor hired you. I was maybe 45 or 46 and I really didn't have a lot of confidence in myself, to go out and get a job and so I thought, okay and I was a friend of Kenny Rothman's.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, I remember Kenny.

Phyllis Weber: And Kenny said, "Well, now, Phyllis, why don't you do what I did, start at the prosecutor's." I thought, oh, okay. And so that's how I got the job.

Blanche Touhill: You know, I have a lot of relatives who are lawyers. I think to get that trial experience at an early age is a wonderful thing. I've known so many lawyers in my life, never practiced in the courts and I think at the end, to be a judge, you really have to have some trial experience.

Phyllis Weber: Oh, 18 years.

Blanche Touhill: So, you know how the courts run.

Phyllis Weber: Right.

Blanche Touhill: And I think Kenny Rothman was right, even if you only stayed a couple years, I think it's a good grounding. You have to go to court every day to be prepared, to win some and lose some, I guess.

Phyllis Weber: I didn't lose too many.

Blanche Touhill: No, I'm sure you didn't.

Phyllis Weber: Actually, I have the record in the courthouse for the quickest jury verdicts. I had one 6-minute and one 7-minute, never to be beaten, I think, and there was an article in the paper about it. My friend, Steve Goldman, said, "Well, we always call her 'Fast Phyllis,'" so there was an article about that.

Blanche Touhill: How did your children react to your studying for law school?

Phyllis Weber: I thought I was always home when they got home from school but they say it wasn't true. So I'm not really sure. But when I was working in metals, it was very intense. I'd work from the time they left home and I'd work until 1:00 or 2:00 o'clock in the morning.

Blanche Touhill: Did you have a little place to work?

Phyllis Weber: I started in my kitchen and then I set up a workshop in the basement.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, so you could just leave things and then come upstairs?

Phyllis Weber: Right.

Blanche Touhill: Back to your artwork, is your necklace something you made?

Phyllis Weber: No, it isn't. Actually, I was going to wear something that...

Blanche Touhill: ...that you made.

Phyllis Weber: This is hand-crafted by a well-known...somebody from Baltimore but I was going to wear something just to show you but then I don't know why I didn't.

Blanche Touhill: Did you sell any of your work?

Phyllis Weber: Almost everything. I have very few things that I didn't sell, just a couple.

Blanche Touhill: And through Craft Alliance?

Phyllis Weber: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Were the other five women also artists?

Phyllis Weber: You may have known Muriel Helfman?

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Phyllis Weber: She was one of the five and she was really the sparkplug. Yes, we were all people involved in crafts.

Blanche Touhill: Were there many women craft people in those days that were going to sell their work?

Phyllis Weber: A fair amount in our gallery, certainly. I would say yes.

Blanche Touhill: I just don't know about art. I know there are so few women artists...well, there really aren't, I guess. They just don't get the notoriety.

Phyllis Weber: Right, they do not, but in crafts it's different. I mean, the women tended to be weavers and ceramicists.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, and not jewelry?

Phyllis Weber: Right, not as much, no.

Blanche Touhill: Am I wrong that Richmond, Virginia had some kind of a jewelry program?

Phyllis Weber: I don't know. I wouldn't know that.

Blanche Touhill: Somebody told me that it was in Virginia someplace but I'm not sure where.

Phyllis Weber: By the way, I came from a very liberal family. My mother was in the ACLU in Richmond, Virginia in the '30s because of the Scottsboro boys and as a child, I would deliberately sit in the back of the bus.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, you did sit in the back of the bus. So, in Virginia, the African Americans sat in the back?

Phyllis Weber: Oh, absolutely.

Blanche Touhill: And were the hydrants black and white? Were the water hydrants black and white?

Phyllis Weber: I don't recall that.

Blanche Touhill: Okay, but the bus, definitely.

Phyllis Weber: Well, the bus, state liquor stores and the white folks went in the front door and the blacks in the back. They were not allowed, of course, in the department stores or things of that nature.

Blanche Touhill: So did they have black stores that sold to them?

Phyllis Weber: I don't know.

Blanche Touhill: How did they get their goods?

Phyllis Weber: I don't know because, as a white person, of course I was in the white...

Blanche Touhill: There was a segregated society.

Phyllis Weber: Right, and in fact, in elementary school, we would stand and sing Dixie.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, did you?

Phyllis Weber: Yes, but my mother was born in New York so I always thought of her as a Yankee.

Blanche Touhill: Yes. And your father was a Southerner?

Phyllis Weber: He was from Washington but Washington, D.C. was very Southern.

Blanche Touhill: I lived in Washington in the late '50s and it was a small Southern town.

Phyllis Weber: Right.

Blanche Touhill: And we used to ride the streetcar.

Phyllis Weber: That's right.

Blanche Touhill: It was before the subway came in, or the metro or whatever. Well, so you were a prosecutor for 18 years and how was that?

Phyllis Weber: It was the best job I could have had.

Blanche Touhill: Really?

- Phyllis Weber: Yes. I was in charge of the grand jury for 15 years in addition to being on the senior trial staff.
- Blanche Touhill: And that was quite a responsibility.
- Phyllis Weber: It was, and you know, Buzz Westfall who was my major boss. Fran Carpini and I were part of the department heads so he did not discriminate, I did not think.
- Blanche Touhill: Were you one of the first women on the cabinet? Were you in the cabinet?
- Phyllis Weber: Well, it was just...
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, he was the prosecutor's attorney?
- Phyllis Weber: Right.
- Blanche Touhill: That's right. Before you became the county executive.
- Phyllis Weber: Right, and at that time, Fran and I were the only women in the office. There were four women and we were the only two that really went into the courtroom.
- Blanche Touhill: And what year was this?
- Phyllis Weber: I started in '76, and there were maybe three or four or five other women that you would see in the courtroom and private practice, very few.
- Blanche Touhill: Were you the first women in the prosecuting attorney's office in the county?
- Phyllis Weber: One of the first. I don't know the history but once I started, then Buzz was...a lot of other women came in.
- Blanche Touhill: Came in?
- Phyllis Weber: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: The reason I say that, when you say '76...you said '76 you started?
- Phyllis Weber: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: I moved into administration in '74 and it was because of the Civil Rights Act of...is it '65, that protected women, made us part of the protected

class and then the Reauthorization in '72 which I think...I could be a little off but I think it was the Reauthorization protected women in employment, applying for jobs and holding jobs and a conversation took place within the University of Missouri system that all the campuses had to hire women administrators and they had to examine how many women were tenured and how many women were full professors and I think I surfaced in that...they put out a call for...they had some administrative jobs open. Now, they didn't admit that but I always felt I was appointed here in St. Louis and there was a woman in Columbia who was appointed in Columbia but she dropped out after a year or two and I stayed in.

Phyllis Weber: Well, I think that one reason I got my job was because I was a woman.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, that's what I'm saying, It was an era when they were looking, to be truthful, looking for smart young women who could handle the situation.

Phyllis Weber: It was the same thing with the judgeship.

Blanche Touhill: Yes. Now, let's not get there yet. Is there anything else you want to talk about in the 18 years that you were the prosecutor? Were women beginning...well, they were beginning to be sentenced more for crimes, weren't they?

Phyllis Weber: I think it was still a lot more men, really, unless it was shoplifting or forgery or something of that nature.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, credit card...

Phyllis Weber: Right. It was a fascinating job and I still have lunch on Wednesdays which I won't have today with some of the men that I worked with and they're now judges in the county and I get together with them on Wednesdays.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, how nice.

Phyllis Weber: So keep up with what's going on and I go over to the courthouse sometimes, sit in on a trial to see what's going on.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, to keep current?

Phyllis Weber: Right.

Blanche Touhill: Is crime increasing?

Phyllis Weber: I don't know. That's not something that I'm an expert in.

Blanche Touhill: How was it handling grand juries?

Phyllis Weber: It was wonderful and, you know, I think that people don't really understand the system.

Blanche Touhill: Would you sort of explain it?

Phyllis Weber: Well, briefly, a case would go through the warrant office.

Blanche Touhill: Of the prosecuting attorney?

Phyllis Weber: Right, and if it fit certain categories, it went to the grand jury: homicides, sex cases, things that required multiple witnesses, things of that nature.

Blanche Touhill: Complicated?

Phyllis Weber: Yes, complicated. I'd review all the cases. If I thought there was not sufficient evidence, which did not happen all the time but if there was not, it wouldn't be presented and it's just a very interesting experience because I can go take you around St. Louis County and tell you about a lot of the crime scenes that we've presented and what happens is the witness comes in and they're questioned by the prosecutor and it's tape-recorded and then the grand jurors, they could either interrupt or they could wait until the end and ask questions and then the prosecutor leaves the room and then they discuss the case and make a decision, press a button and make a decision for what they call a "true bill" or "no true bill."

Blanche Touhill: How many have to vote for the true bill?

Phyllis Weber: Nine.

Blanche Touhill: Nine out of twelve?

Phyllis Weber: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: The grand jury is a group of citizens who serve for six months?

Phyllis Weber: I think it's four months. Funny things happen, just like in life. I remember this little girl who said she had been sexually assaulted by her mother's boyfriend and when she was taking the oath, she had her fingers crossed behind her which...guess what? No true bill.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, you know, that's so life...

Phyllis Weber: Right. Well, life passes before your eyes at the courthouse.

Blanche Touhill: Do you have any other story like that?

Phyllis Weber: Well, I had the case, the courthouse shooting but that case...I was traditionally against the death penalty and in the prosecutor's office, I waived. I wasn't really sure and so that case was assigned to me. It was not tried for a number of years later because of the other factors but I didn't know whether to take the case and I talked to my friend, Steve, and then I talked to another judge and he said, "Look, you're in the office and if it's assigned to you, you must take it." So I did.

Blanche Touhill: And you have to fight for whatever side you're on?

Phyllis Weber: Right.

Blanche Touhill: What's true.

Phyllis Weber: Right.

Blanche Touhill: Once you know it's not true, you...

Phyllis Weber: I mean, I had so many interesting cases and several that remain in my mind after all of these years.

Blanche Touhill: I think what it is, it's so intellectually stimulating, isn't it?

Phyllis Weber: It is.

Blanche Touhill: So you were there 18 years and then what happened?

Phyllis Weber: Well, then I applied to be an administrative law judge.

Blanche Touhill: Why did you decide to change course?

Phyllis Weber: Because after about 17 or 18 years, on Sunday, I started to think...I always looked forward to going to work and I started saying, you know, I've got to go to work tomorrow, and then when I started saying it on Friday, I decided to move on. And so I applied. I think there were about 200 and some in the class. There were, like, 4,000 applicants.

Blanche Touhill: Well, you have to take a test?

Phyllis Weber: Yes, the test, which was really horrible. It was like a law school exam and it had nothing to do with criminal law, of course. But anyway, I managed and you had to have seven years of trial experience. At that time, when you were hired, you had to go to another city, not the city you lived in and I just said, "I'm not moving." I didn't say it that way...

Blanche Touhill: So when they called and said...

Phyllis Weber: I said, "I want St. Louis," and they wanted a woman, they wanted a woman here in this office.

Blanche Touhill: So they said, "Fine."

Phyllis Weber: That's how I got it, to the resentment, I think, of some other people in my class that had to move. It was okay with me.

Blanche Touhill: You had made up your mind, what you were going to do.

Phyllis Weber: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Now, when you talk about a class, what was the class?

Phyllis Weber: Oh, you spend a month in Alexandria, Virginia.

Blanche Touhill: Taking courses on how to be a judge?

Phyllis Weber: Right.

Blanche Touhill: Or administrative law judge...

Phyllis Weber: Right.

Blanche Touhill: It's a little different...

Phyllis Weber: It's very different.

Blanche Touhill: ...because you don't have a jury.

Phyllis Weber: Right.

Blanche Touhill: It's all you.

Phyllis Weber: Right.

Blanche Touhill: So you have to learn. Well, now, you don't get to choose what kind of administrative law judge you're going to be?

Phyllis Weber: Well, no, this was specifically Social Security Administration.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, it was specifically Social Security?

Phyllis Weber: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: So you knew you'd end up in Social Security. So talk about the class in Alexandria.

Phyllis Weber: Well, it was lectures and it was very pleasant. It turned out my great grandmother was buried in Alexandria.

Blanche Touhill: So you were able to go find the grave?

Phyllis Weber: Well, my cousin came over and it turned out it was, like, dark and we were afraid to go in. It was way in the back of the cemetery and we were afraid to go. So I didn't see it.

Blanche Touhill: But you knew; you were there...it was there.

Phyllis Weber: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: And, really, in Washington, they have all kinds of cultural activities too so I imagine...did you have time to take advantage of any of that?

Phyllis Weber: As a child?

Blanche Touhill: No, no, as an adult when you went back for the course?

Phyllis Weber: No, just pretty much stayed in Alexandria.

Blanche Touhill: So you come back and you're assigned in...

Phyllis Weber: ...Creve Coeur.

Blanche Touhill: And how was that? You were the first woman?

Phyllis Weber: Yes, and I was just used to working with men so they'd hang out in this one guy's office and I'd just hang out there. I didn't realize that they really didn't want me.

Blanche Touhill: Well, they probably did want you.

Phyllis Weber: I don't think so. In fact, the chief there was very unpleasant to me. There were two men that were there temporarily and I was permanent and

there was a parking space available but he gave it to the men. We redid the office and expanded to a second floor and I asked to stay downstairs and he put me upstairs and so I just remember one day he was yelling at me in the office and I just yelled back at him and told him never to raise his voice to me again and that was the end of it. But that took some time. And I have found, until people get to know you, a lot of the secretaries who are women don't like to take orders from women.

Blanche Touhill: No, they don't. When I first went into administration, the secretary looked at me and she said, "I want you to know at the end of this day I'm resigning. I'm going over to personnel." Well, she wasn't quitting the university but she said, "I'm going over to personnel and apply for a transfer and I'm going to tell them I didn't want to work for a woman." I thought, isn't this the silliest thing I ever heard of in my life because women spend their time talking to other women.

Phyllis Weber: I know.

Blanche Touhill: It's a new experience when you get a little authority, I guess.

Phyllis Weber: Well, I think of myself as a shy person but I think I'm probably not. So I just sort of plow in, I guess.

Blanche Touhill: Well, you were always a talker.

Phyllis Weber: Right.

Blanche Touhill: So I think law requires either listening very carefully to what other people are saying or talking yourself.

Phyllis Weber: Right.

Blanche Touhill: Did you enjoy the administrative law job?

Phyllis Weber: It was okay. I traveled a lot. Once a month I'd go down to Cape Gerardo which was fine. I retired, I was 68, it was about time.

Blanche Touhill: When you went to Cape Gerardo, was it a different kind of clientele?

Phyllis Weber: Not particularly but we also went...I went to San Antonio and Houston and they were a lot of Hispanic people.

Blanche Touhill: What is the Social Security Administrative Law job? What do you do?

- Phyllis Weber: Well, we handle cases for disability, paternity and certain tax cases, basically.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, and certain tax cases too?
- Phyllis Weber: Yes, if somebody...let's say that they have retired but they're really still working.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, and they get Social Security...
- Phyllis Weber: Right.
- Blanche Touhill: ...but they aren't reporting that and then all of a sudden...
- Phyllis Weber: And they're still working and they're not supposed to be getting it.
- Blanche Touhill: At least above a certain amount, whatever it is. Is that still true? That is still true, isn't it?
- Phyllis Weber: I think so. I actually retired in 2000, so I've been footloose and fancy free since then.
- Blanche Touhill: Let me deviate a little from this question and talk about...have you ever received an award or awards that you're really very pleased with?
- Phyllis Weber: Well, I can tell you about one that I find humorous.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, that's fine.
- Phyllis Weber: For some reason, and I really think it was a fix, when I joined the Metropolitan Bar, I became the 3,000th member and so my picture was in the newsletter and there was a big event to honor me...
- Blanche Touhill: ...as the 3,000th?
- Phyllis Weber: ...and Gephardt who had just been elected to congress, so here's little old me and I go to this big event and I don't know a single person and they gave me a small...it must about this big...it's an arch on a wooden stand, the 3,000th member and Gephardt got a big silver service. So, that's the award that really stands out in my mind.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, that's wonderful. That's a wonderful story. Did you get it at the same time?
- Phyllis Weber: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: You went up to get your little arch and he went up to get his silver service?

Phyllis Weber: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: That is a humorous award.

Phyllis Weber: I can't think of necessarily awards but I've been on a number of boards which I consider honors.

Blanche Touhill: Like what?

Phyllis Weber: Well, Great Rivers Greenway, I was on for seven years; I've been on three or four boards when I lived in University City. I do some volunteer work and I'm on a board there. My term was just up and I continue to be on the board of the Friends of the University City Library and I live in a condo and I'm now on the board there. So I consider those honors, to be asked.

Blanche Touhill: People love the University City Library.

Phyllis Weber: Oh, it's wonderful.

Blanche Touhill: It must be more than just a library.

Phyllis Weber: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: It's a community?

Phyllis Weber: Yes, it is.

Blanche Touhill: I had a friend who was very active in that, Jane Miller. Do you remember Jane?

Phyllis Weber: I know her name, yeah, and I'm sure I've met her.

Blanche Touhill: Where is that located?

Phyllis Weber: On Delmar, in the loop, right near City Hall.

Blanche Touhill: Right near City Hall. Oh, I know the building. Is it a new building?

Phyllis Weber: Well...

Blanche Touhill: It just looks...

Phyllis Weber: It looks new. I'm sure it must be close to 40...50 years old.

Blanche Touhill: Let me ask one other question: If you had been born 50 years earlier, what would your life be like?

Phyllis Weber: I don't think I just would have been a simple housewife, although that would have been expected of me. I mean, I don't like to clean house, that's for sure.

Blanche Touhill: And you don't like to cook?

Phyllis Weber: Yeah, I did.

Blanche Touhill: You like cooking?

Phyllis Weber: Until now, you know, I'm by myself. It doesn't interest me particularly, but, yeah, I cooked a lot, of foreign things, had a lot of cookbooks that I'd make different things.

Blanche Touhill: Did you pick them up when you traveled?

Phyllis Weber: No.

Blanche Touhill: You just found them?

Phyllis Weber: You know, I've traveled a fair amount actually and my husband, he did a sabbatical in 1970...'71 and then the summer he had a grant from the British government so he spent almost every summer at Oxford, England and he'd go into the lab every day. So that was a lot of my travel, was to go there.

Blanche Touhill: Did your husband spend a lot of time in the lab?

Phyllis Weber: Yeah, oh, absolutely.

Blanche Touhill: I mean, at night?

Phyllis Weber: At first. Usually scientists, they reach a point that they have helping hands.

Blanche Touhill: Absolutely, yes, and when you're good, you get the helping hands.

Phyllis Weber: Right.

Blanche Touhill: And they learn from that.

Phyllis Weber: Absolutely.

- Blanche Touhill: Okay, so you decide to retire and you retire. What do you do then, because that's 15 years ago?
- Phyllis Weber: A neighbor said to me, "You should know on Monday what you're going to be doing."
- Blanche Touhill: After you retire?
- Phyllis Weber: When you retire. So I do volunteer work. I work on Thursdays at the botanical garden in the Kemper Center. I love to weed and dead head.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, you do?
- Phyllis Weber: Which nobody else really cares. They consider it to be busy work but to me it's like Zen. I just sit there and pluck the weeds and I like that and we work from April into October there. I took the month off actually but I've worked for eight years at a place called The Bridge which is a drop-in center for homeless people down at 16th and Olive and I work in the kitchen. Then I work on the serving line which, I haven't worked there this month but I'll go back in July and I find that...you know, it's interesting.
- Blanche Touhill: Are there regulars that come in?
- Phyllis Weber: It's amazing, it's a very, very changing population. There are some people there that have been there for years but there are always many, many new faces or people you see two or three weeks and then they move on.
- Blanche Touhill: Do they move on because they're trying to get back into the system?
- Phyllis Weber: I don't know. The one thing I don't do is ask people personal questions. So I really don't know. There was one man that I had befriended...that's another whole story but I knew a little bit. He got gangrene, I think he had been out in the cold weather. I didn't even know how old he was. It turned out to be he was 82, but anyway, I would visit him in the hospital and I had somebody take me because it was, like, in St. Charles which seemed very far away and this man talked to him and then I learned a little bit about him. He had grown up in the Delta and started in the cotton fields and what not, but I never asked him any personal questions. I know some people do but I just feel, if they want to tell you something, they will.

Blanche Touhill: And is it men and women?

Phyllis Weber: Mainly men.

Blanche Touhill: Do any children show up?

Phyllis Weber: On occasion, yes, we do have some children. It's mainly a black population.

Blanche Touhill: And who runs that?

Phyllis Weber: It's in Centenary Methodist Church and we rent space from them.

Blanche Touhill: What else do you do?

Phyllis Weber: I go to the gym a lot.

Blanche Touhill: What gym do you go to?

Phyllis Weber: I go to Wellbridge.

Blanche Touhill: On Forsythe?

Phyllis Weber: Yes...and I do Monday, I go there Monday morning, Wednesday morning, sometimes Friday morning, Thursday afternoon and Sunday.

Blanche Touhill: Wonderful. So you swim?

Phyllis Weber: I do water aerobics. I take a class called "Nea" which most people haven't heard of but it's sort of mind, body and spirit, they call it and it's wonderful.

Blanche Touhill: Well, you look fit.

Phyllis Weber: Well, thank you. For my age, I would say so.

Blanche Touhill: So what else? Anything else or is that mainly it?

Phyllis Weber: That's mainly it.

Blanche Touhill: You might do other things periodically?

Phyllis Weber: Right. I've done a fair amount of travel.

Blanche Touhill: Where have you traveled?

Phyllis Weber: Well, after my husband died, the year after, I took a...twice now...

Blanche Touhill: Were you working?

Phyllis Weber: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Or had you retired?

Phyllis Weber: No, he died in '99 so it was in 2001 and I took a three-month trip around the world on the QE2 and I did that and I met some nice people and we did it the second year and then the third year we went around South America. That was wonderful. So that was a big travel.

Blanche Touhill: But you saw the world?

Phyllis Weber: Right.

Blanche Touhill: How is it to see it all at one time?

Phyllis Weber: A lot of people say, "Oh, wow, you're only there one day or two days," well, you know, I figure I wouldn't have been there at all. I went to Vietnam which was a very important place for me to visit since I had been very active in the anti-war movement. By the way, also, the Civil Rights movement, I participated in a lot of activities for that and I've been to Europe and what not. I'm tired of flying over the ocean.

Blanche Touhill: Well, it's not as easy as it used to be.

Phyllis Weber: No.

Blanche Touhill: And it's more crowded than it used to be.

Phyllis Weber: I haven't mentioned that I have two sons and five grandchildren.

Blanche Touhill: Wonderful.

Phyllis Weber: And my son in Atlanta has two children and they are college age, and he works for Turner. He's a video editor.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, indeed. I've met Ted Turner as a matter of fact.

Phyllis Weber: Oh, really? Wow.

Blanche Touhill: I was at a dinner once and we were at the same table.

Phyllis Weber: Charming man.

- Blanche Touhill: Well, it was such a fast dinner but he likes, he gets along with everyone.
- Phyllis Weber: Yes. So my other son lives in Chicago and he has three young children and on Friday I'm going to see him in Kansas City where he is the lighting director for the Rolling Stones.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, how wonderful.
- Phyllis Weber: So this will be, like, my 11th Rolling Stones concert and I have a whole list of rock concerts that I've been to, which is always kind of amusing because Van Halen...I don't know whether you know Van Halen...anyway, somebody asked me if I was Mrs. Van Halen or if I was Getty's mother, Getty being the drummer for the Rolling Stones, because here are all these young people and here's me sitting up there. But anyway, it's fun.
- Blanche Touhill: They always get you good seats?
- Phyllis Weber: I sit with my son and he sits at the lighting board.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness. Oh, how wonderful.
- Phyllis Weber: When I traveled on these cruises, I would take a little Mickey Mouse and take his photograph in all these wonderful places. Well, so, my son has now adopted that he has a little Minnie Mouse and he takes a picture for his children and when they were performing in Barcelona, Bill Clinton was there and he said to my son, "Would you like your picture with me?" and Ethan said, "No, but would you take it with Minnie Mouse" and so I have a picture of Bill Clinton holding Minnie Mouse.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, he was a good sport, wasn't he?
- Phyllis Weber: Right.
- Blanche Touhill: So your son, really, the musician, travels all over the world?
- Phyllis Weber: Right.
- Blanche Touhill: Or the lighting man.
- Phyllis Weber: Right...all over.
- Blanche Touhill: How did he get started in that? I know that's a side track.

Phyllis Weber: Well, he majored in economics at Brown and didn't know what he wanted to do and a friend said, "Why don't you come down to New York and work in this lighting company." He had worked on tours that came to the university and what not. So that's how he got started.

Blanche Touhill: And what does the other son do?

Phyllis Weber: He does sports editing for Turner.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, that's sports editing.

Phyllis Weber: Well, he always tries to explain to me what he does but I'm not really sure. He does the teases, whatever that means.

Blanche Touhill: Okay, I...

Phyllis Weber: Right, that's to get people to watch the show.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, I see. Oh, yes, of course.

Phyllis Weber: That's what they call it.

Blanche Touhill: Sure. Well, I do think that Turner Classic Movies has made a great contribution to the culture of the United States...

Phyllis Weber: Oh, they're wonderful.

Blanche Touhill: To have all those old movies.

Phyllis Weber: I know.

Blanche Touhill: That was a grand idea. I often wondered whether it was Turner's or somebody else's that did that for him.

Phyllis Weber: I don't know. He went to Brown and apparently either was kicked out or dropped out. I'm not sure for which.

Blanche Touhill: I don't think that's unusual. There are people that don't fit in.

Phyllis Weber: No, but what I'm suggesting is that, from that, he went on to this really wonderful, wonderful career.

Blanche Touhill: Well, he saw there was a need for world-wide news, I think. I was in Taiwan and turned on the TV. It was able to get the news which Turner had...

Phyllis Weber: Right, CNN, absolutely.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah...had done and I thought, whoever did that was right on target of what people want.

Phyllis Weber: Brilliant, yes.

Blanche Touhill: As you look back on your life, talk about the Civil Rights Act and your demonstrations.

Phyllis Weber: Well, I would take my children, of course and we'd go to demonstrations and march...

Blanche Touhill: In St. Louis?

Phyllis Weber: In St. Louis. No, I never left St. Louis for that really.

Blanche Touhill: And where were the marches?

Phyllis Weber: Oh, Lindell, I think Lindell and what not, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: And how did your children react?

Phyllis Weber: Well, I involved them in that and in politics. When I was a committee woman, they would...they say that they don't have a lot of interest in politics since then, unfortunately.

Blanche Touhill: Well, they may come back to it. Do they always vote?

Phyllis Weber: Oh, absolutely, yes.

Blanche Touhill: So, I mean, there's a difference between being dedicated to voting and then being active in politics.

Phyllis Weber: Right.

Blanche Touhill: Both are terribly important. When you were the committee woman in the Hadley Township, did you have any power?

Phyllis Weber: Well, Kenny Rothman was the committee man and he had a very, very strong personality. So I was the worker and the organizer...I'm sorry, I said Kenny Rothman...it was Marvin Madison. He was the committee man.

Blanche Touhill: The reason I ask that is I have known committee women over my life and it's true, it's years ago, but they didn't have much power and that was when I was young and I always thought to myself...I guess I thought it was a male dominated sport in a way, but it's a very serious thing because the committee man and the committee woman really know their people and they have to get the vote out. They have to be organized enough to get the vote out. They're very important in the democracy as it moves up the line.

Phyllis Weber: Yeah. I can't remember...what would it be? '76...'74...it would be '76, I guess, and I had every door in Hadley Township, had a ballot. I had people out at 4:30, 5:00 in the morning but they were left at every single doorstep.

Blanche Touhill: So you...

Phyllis Weber: I was very active.

Blanche Touhill: You were active, but I think maybe that's Hadley Township. What do you think?

Phyllis Weber: Yeah, because I remember one of the...NBC or CBS called us, they'd called in advance and said, "We want to know what's happening in Hadley Township" because it was a very Democratic Township.

Blanche Touhill: If that vote doesn't come out, then...

Phyllis Weber: Right, they were very interested what was going to happen.

Blanche Touhill: The whole state could totter on that, St. Louis County and Hadley Township, and really the city as well. How did you get interested in politics?

Phyllis Weber: All my life, I guess. Well, I was interested in history. That was my major in college and it was what I was interested in in high school and I think that was maybe part of it. And my family, we would, at the dinner table...

Blanche Touhill: You talked politics?

Phyllis Weber: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: So you sat down at night and had a conversation while you were eating?

Phyllis Weber: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Were you able to do that with your children, sit down at night and have a conversation?

Phyllis Weber: I think a lot of the conversation...some, yes, but I think also a lot had to do with my husband; we'd talk about his job because being a chairman, there's a lot of politics at universities also. I'm sure you're quite aware of that, and the personalities, so there was a lot of conversation about that as well, but politics, of course.

Blanche Touhill: Talk about an important event. I know you've had a lot of important events in your life but choose one and talk about it.

Phyllis Weber: Well, one thing that really comes to mind was in 1968, a friend of mine, Jean Sharry and I because we were both active in Hadley Township politics, decided we would like to go to the convention in Chicago and Marvin Madison was the committee man and he had the tickets to get in or we thought he did. We tried to talk to people to see if we could get tickets to get into the convention hall but we could not. So there was a big rally that took place in Grant Park and Jean and I thought, "Well, that would be interesting" so we went and we actually sat in the very front row where the stage was and it was Bob Dylan and Phil Ochs and all kinds of...whatever, and in the background...and I think it was the Museum of Natural History, we looked and there were soldiers, or appeared to be soldiers with weapons lined up on the roof and as the concert was going on, and it was really wonderful, all of a sudden we heard a ruckus and a young man came running down the aisle from the back and his head and face were all bloody and so it was pandemonium and we looked over and we saw the whole phalanx of police officers in riot gear and about maybe 20 feet from where we were a young man was climbing up the flagpole to take the flag down and the police grabbed him and were beating him and, even now, it's very emotional to talk about and so we ran as quickly as we could over to Michigan Avenue and we stood...

Blanche Touhill: And you were able to make it?

Phyllis Weber: Yes, we stood in front of the hotel, the Hilton, I guess, and it was just complete pandemonium and we were staying, by the way, at the YWCA and so Jean and I said, "We got to get out of here" and you know, our children at home, we're mothers, our family is there and here's all this

stuff going on. So we were running up Michigan Avenue and we were actually chased by two police officers and I guess they finally just gave up. But meanwhile, having been standing at the Hilton, there was tear gas all over the place and what people were doing, they were handing out paper towels that were wet and if you put those over your mouth and your nose, that was to protect you, and believe it or not, I still have that paper towel. So anyway, that, as I say, was an exceedingly significant event.

Blanche Touhill: And how did that affect you?

Phyllis Weber: I don't know. For two or three years, it really...

Blanche Touhill: You would recall...

Phyllis Weber: It was with me, yes.

Blanche Touhill: The violence?

Phyllis Weber: Yes, and I was saying earlier...not to you, to Zelli, I have a male friend in Baltimore now who was my boyfriend when I was in college and he was very active in the Vietnam Movement. He was manager of an office which was very active in Baltimore and he had these files and he called me the other day and told me he found a letter that I had written to the Post-Dispatch. It was in '68. I don't know how he got it. It was in his files. I hadn't seen him since the '50s and so, interestingly enough and it recounts some of the things I've just told you.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, how wonderful. Did he send it to you?

Phyllis Weber: He did. It was actually a mimeograph copy of this letter and I have no...because I didn't know him...I had no idea how he got a hold of it but isn't that strange?

Blanche Touhill: Well, you've lived a very interesting life.

Phyllis Weber: I have.

Blanche Touhill: And as a woman, you were on the forefront of law and politics and change so I congratulate you.

Phyllis Weber: Well, thank you. It was very nice talking to you today and to talk about all these wonderful things.

Phyllis Weber 6-22-2015

Blanche Touhill: It is wonderful.

Phyllis Weber: Thank you.