

Joannie Cayce Interview Summary
First Person Plural
7 October 2015

Intro - Jo Blatti interviewing Joannie Cayce of Cayce Family Charities for the First Person Plural project at the family barn [now its food bank facility] Thornton, Arkansas, October 7, 2015

JC Great honor – family barn, mother [Jo Ann Cayce] built 45 years ago for antique business
Stock from New York, Pennsylvania brought here
Mother noticed people's needs – food clothes

JB How mother get idea for antiques to support –

JC My grandfather had auctions, bought & sold all the time
My father preacher, little church
Mother's business was a source of income from the family

JB Back up – Thornton, Arkansas, a small town. Who were the customers?

4 min in

JC Father's printing shop associated with national church, papers for them
She'd make advertisements for antique sales
Four-five different states, Fayetteville, El Dorado, Texas, Oklahoma
She is wise about money, good heart
My favorite shirt growing up - missing, one of those girls had on my sweater
Went, delivering food to family

JB Grew up in Thornton?

JC Primitive Baptist, hard shell, singing and worship - no Sunday school
Twenty-thirty people big church meetings, all sorts of people

JB How your folks meet?

JC Mother's folks lived here in town, owned a little restaurant, gambling & alcohol, a dive
She walked to church
He was in the military in World War II, came home, needed help in the printing office
Mother came to work there, she was 15, he was 22

19 min in

My father supported family with printing company
My mother supported charity with antiques
My son and I moved down here
Grocery store donated turkeys, I suggested that we could buy

JB How many brothers and sisters?

JC Three sisters, one adopted brother, story of adopted brother
From inner city Chicago, family connection, difficult times as child with first family

Minister now, wonderful husband & father

JB When you were a little girl, understand the mother took you out into community, what remember?

24 min in

JC Remember little children, food we had cooked, using hands, not plates
We always had food to eat, clothes to wear
They had shoes - worn out, holes in them
Feed the Children [organization] has been down here several times
One light bulb whole place
A grandmother took in three children in addition to her three – remembered [a food] box from my mother

29 min in

Don't remember my mother bragging, remember my cousin pitching a fit about sharing a doll
Funeral home frequently called about suits for burials, mother took one of dad's suits
Brother thought we should come first, before poor people

34 min in

JB Did parents actually talk about this?

JC More by example – Daniel [her son] got truck & hardship license, could pick up stuff in Camden & Little Rock, just stuck

JB Your education –

JC Graduated – K-12 here until about 1990, consolidated, kept K-6 grades
I went to school here, then nursing school, St Vincent's [Little Rock] with sister

39 min in

After that R.N. license
I got married
Sister worked in Hot Springs
I got cancer, chemotherapy, etc.
Pregnant years after therapy
I loved nursing, continue to use nursing for nonprofit [Cayce's Charities]

JB Affordable Care Act help folks in this area?

JC Ages 18-60, 90% tell me no, [Arkansas Department of] Human Services should help
Harder process, ex. man 20 miles from here, chronic bad back

44 min in

JB Internet access?

JC Yes, internet access, most people don't have computers

Lady behind carwash finally got together from pieces
\$30 a month too much for most people

JB Dial up, broadband?

JC We have broadband – Arkansas Food Bank, a luxury for most
Transportation a luxury – circus act clown cars
Arkansas #1 senior hunger, #3 childhood hunger
No poor people in America –

49 min in

Mother invited during [Governor Bill] Clinton's first term [ca. 1980-81]
Arkansas's most caring volunteer – brought children to the Capitol

Then President Clinton gave Daniel an award [at opening of Clinton Presidential Library, 2004]

JB What's he doing these days?

JC Daniel volunteers here weekends – four years pre-med Ouachita, Boston internship, finished
physical therapy degree last May, practicing in Camden
[While in high school] teachers told me, Daniel told me, he needs to start looking for scholarships
I developed breast cancer from cancer therapy when I was 24 [Hodgkin's disease, 1981]
Found \$125,000 in scholarships, 100% of his expenses
I had my nursing disability
He was bright student

JB Your initial cancer related to nursing?

JC I was head nurse in a cancer unit
The doctor comes down every Christmas with a truck
We mixed our own therapy, 2003 illness [second occurrence]

60 min in (1 hr)

Double mastectomy, Daniel, age 14, devastated
Too much yet to do, saving money for Disneyworld in 5 years – made it in 2008
Every day, pay it back

JB Better in south Arkansas?

JC Up & down

JB What makes it go up & down?

JC When the job market better

1 hr, 4 min in

Late 1970s, early '80s better
Our unemployment down - many, lots, give up
Probably double digit actually
Lost many manufacturing jobs
Unskilled – timber, sawmills, McDonalds, nurses' aides, minimum wage \$7.35 – no turnover
1990s - no turnover
Immigrants moved in, lessened jobs
Doing a lot of timber, sawmills, Hispanic - Ouachita, Cleburne counties

JB Hispanics associated often construction –

JC Not building houses, no construction
Wal-Mart just announced lay-offs

1 hr, 9 min in

JC Did open a Dollar Store, Bearden

JB Where Thornton buy its groceries?

JC Wal-Mart Fordyce, partial, Bearden just closed grocery
Food stamps maximum here \$24.00, food banks the answer

1 hr, 14 min in

JC We pay for supplies

JB Your prices for grocery goods -

JC 18 cents a pound – canned goods high
This food bank open seven days a week
I like it if people make appointment, never turn anyone away
Every Saturday/Sunday – leave note on my door & I call

JB Not everybody has phone, sounds like –

JC Two young men walk here for food, I take home

1 hr 17 min in

These boys trying to finish high school. Tells their story
Problems connecting with school on what needs to be done to support them
Horrible disconnect: everybody needs to work together

1 hr 22 min in

I'm on school board – last night young woman asked for release from school, last two periods for job
Needs job/young baby/on track to graduate

JB What about job?

JC School will let her
Our graduation rate is 86% - horrible
Mainly young white males, we do everything we can
Four, eight kids apply for jobs
High school, college kids have preference

1 hr 27 min in

School accreditation agency asked me to stay on school board in transition period
Superintendent [Denny Rozenberg, Bearden] asked me to start mentoring program about three years ago

JB Mentor to do?

JC None of them in trouble – just high risk
Don't have a dad
So glad I started
One little boy stuttered a little bit, didn't fit in, played checkers, self-esteem at beating me

1 hr 32 min in

Abuse in his house - with father now
We break in summertime
Mr. Rozenberg in National Guard
Stutter almost stopped, boys generally more respectful

1 hr 37 min in

Story of second boy, autistic student who wanted to participate Beta Club/Boy Scouts project, family didn't believe in him
Mentored through successful Eagle Scout completion
Lots of transience when my mom got started on this
When you're called, can't lay in down

1 hr 42 min in

Got some papers to fill out. Fellow asked – when you die who will fill out? Daniel.
He was impressed that Daniel could read & write

JB Your mother writes about that [in *The Charity Letters of JoAnn Cayce*, Marcia Camp, comp. & ed., Little Rock: Bright Star Press, 2008]
As much now?

JC No, 8 to 22-year olds in good shape
Struggling again, may see more that can't function again
When Daniel in school traveled with the band, bought instruments
One half-time – 'Ms Cayce: what's on the list? I can't read,' - fifth grade
Boating safety, hunter's ed: could I read the questions?

1 hr 47 min in

Helped a couple of kids get those licenses
Story of looking for shoes for girl who certain shoes in exactly the right size
Most wonderful – the people who give to us

We serve anybody who comes
We have to do paperwork on everyone
11 counties: Pine Bluff, Louisiana line

JB Long way to come for food

JC That's why we put a lot in the boxes, people carpool

1 hr 52 min in

Extra food
Asked for address list for distribution
I was at the gym [in Thornton]
In pulls a truck full of women, about half didn't have a card
Saddest looking women, can't turn away
Never again

JB Tad irregular with DHS [Department of Human Services]?

JC They know they can call us
When Daniel had blankets, etc

JB How many [county] DHS offices do you work with?

JC Dallas, Cleburne, four-five, Fordyce is the closest
Baby food, would take right to DHS
Daniel would take car seats

1 hr 57 min in

Ronald McDonald House gave him mattresses up to the ceiling, hundreds
This lady told us about a family that needed help. Got Terminex out there
Big turnover, whatever we have
Four giveaways [clothing, household items] per year
Send notices through schools, backpacks home
Also newspapers, radio, First Step, Head Start programs

JB So much, people with tough lives
People who have a success?

JC Yes, Clarence: wife laying on bed, seizures from brain tumor, three-year old boy with autism, the man was drunk
Momma went to work on getting them better place to live, boy to Children's Hospital
His daddy - told him to paint that fence
Got Clarence a job & stopped fire in trailer, insurance
Newer trailer, better job with Ouachita Industries

2 hrs 7 min in

JC Recycle clothes, notes that Arkansas among the few states with recycling programs for clothes and cardboard, Cayce Charities participation
Takes two-three weeks to make food boxes, shorter, better, no labor if use pallets, as they've begun to
Volunteer labor up the road, worked with family there since 2006

2 hrs 12 min

JB Do you ever see yourself as out of a job?

JC Influx of new poor, 200-350 new families a month; rotate, may not see for 3-4 months
Then sickness, job loss bring back
Then maybe 100 seniors
We don't see abuse of this food bank
A lot of them poor, women with cancer real bad

JB Unemployment insurance?

JC Day laborers, paid by cash

JB Not on the books?

JB Yes. Just lately – harder to pay in cash. More inspection. Some agency following the log trucks, don't know who
Lot of roofers – haven't caught up with everyone yet

2 hrs, 17 min

Young man, not much older Daniel, foot injured in the woods, to UALR [UAMS?] on a charity basis

JB Pressure from Health & Human Services?

JC Respect for us & what we're doing [RR whistle in the background]
Required to be open weekly and file monthly reports
Inspected frequently

JB DHS pressure on loggers –

JC Not that I know of
Somebody putting pressure on as never before – past five years

JB Uptick Latino workers, documented?

JC Trailer park in Fordyce – delivery of food – account of Latino man married to American woman, got picked up, subsequent hardship for family left behind

2 hrs, 22 min in

Tells of second food delivery experience – mother of children murdered & buried nearby, unsafe neighborhood

JB You mother, in her collected letters would take out against policies that affected the poor – have you seen changes?

JC When I agreed to run the business: my mother said, ‘I want you to remember, the poor child has no voice’

The schools are into parent involvement now

2 hrs, 28 min in

They didn’t even want me over there when Daniel was little
Now all these parents nights, other events

JB How’s it working?

JC See a big improvement, constantly asking to volunteer

JB Program for adult learning?

JC I did that in Little Rock, on-line program here – Bearden, Camden, etc.
GED or more basic, public schools have really stepped up

2 hrs, 32 min in

Our school as good as a private school
Mr. Rozenberg [superintendent] connecting high school to higher ed
½ day community college
Fourth year – not quite an associate degree, 100% free, like a \$10,000 scholarship
Only high school in America that did that
Pilot program, now a state program

JB How many students?

JC Legislators didn’t like it – either have to do it or Vo-tech

2 hrs, 37 min in

Some did need remediation

Moves to general issues of fundraising for the program:
Old people have a hard time
People who help us like to hear about children
Other food banks tell us that many of their elderly are raising grandchildren

2 hrs, 42 min in

JB Children = future?

JC I hope it’s not that older people should have prepared more: ex. women at home, husband didn’t draw much social security
Young people coming of age at a tough time
Latinos taking over aspects of the chicken industry

2 hrs, 47 min in

Tyson [Industries] – a reliable source of [food] donations, has become easier to work with the food bank system

Latinos don't participate much with Cayce food bank/giveaways unless married to Caucasians
Compares Cayce food bank to other regional food banks –

JB Yours more generous than others?

JC Yes. Some say have to live in my county [we don't]

JB More money?

JC No – work very hard to get free stuff

JB Could you describe the network –

JC My mother worked very hard to send those letters with personal thanks. I send letters, too.

2 hrs, 52 min in

JB Computer, internet?

JC Mail- one of reasons we have a post office here:

My dad, the printing business

My mom, antiques, charity letters

I buy 1500 stamps every few months

We've really got local donations now

JB At one point, trucks coming in –

JC One month – another food bank: they'll deliver to you once month, power jack. Saves me two days.

Still get tons of clothes from West Virginia, Illinois, New York, Pennsylvania -

Feed the Children would bring personal items – soap, deodorant, etc

Always looking to film here –

2 hrs, 57 min in

Family with three children living in van, Feed the Children interview

Disagreement over how to get the family into better quarters

2 hrs, 62 min in (3 hrs, 2 min in)

JC Another family seemed to fit Feed the Children criteria, then my momma got sick
Wondered if I wanted to get into it –

JB The trains that have been going by as we've been speaking –

JC Don't know what they are carrying – timber? West to east.

Used to be tiny grocery by the tracks, railroad guys were his best customers

JB I wandered around getting here [lost] – no open stores

JC None –

JB Where do you all get a quart of milk?

JC Transportation, gas – we keep milk. We freeze milk, will last 3-4 weeks frozen. Buttermilk lasts months. I check it periodically.

3 hrs, 7 min in

Old people love specialty breads for toast, eat a lot of toast
I always get the maximum
Story of peanut butter – good deal, ordered maximum. Billed, but not on truck when unpacked
Discussion of rising commodities prices (eggs, butter) follows
Egg producers have quit donating in past couple of years

3 hrs, 12 min in

What's available: beef tongue, tripe, chitterlings, chicken legs. Story of fellow going to library & getting successful recipe for beef tongue, lady who brought her recipe to church. No turn downs or complaints
Challenges of distributing 2000 lbs of watermelon, 8000 lbs of cabbage at a time

JB When growing up & traveling with mother, saw same community your friends in school, saw?

JC Oh, no Momma: what you see, you do not tell

3 hrs, 17 min in

JB Nod to someone else?

JC Oh, yes. African Americans had a way of speaking – slang. I was fascinated.
Sixth grade, first time Arkansas integrated
One young black man in class [in the whole school], tore pants, kids circled him
I was so shy, but said, 'Stop!' Stood there until a teacher came
My mother taught us not to see color

When Daniel was in school – kids' backpack project. Teacher/administrator reservations about him knowing who was getting the backpacks. Set up 'blind' system. Daniel did the work – didn't know identities of recipients.

Kids themselves figured it out – thanked him

He was high schooler, played football & other sports, they looked up to him

3 hrs, 22 min in

JB Anything you want to return to?

JC Annual coat giveaways
Holiday parties for Daniel's class - led us to a little girl whose family needed to have water turned on

JB Much of the housing you & mother describe sounds substandard, how continue?

JC Describes lockout by landlords: nobody should be living that way. Describes water line problems, again via landlords

3 hrs, 27 min in

Continues account: fellow loans out money at high interest

3 hrs, 32 min in

Mentally challenged man used as slave

Someone asked me – harder going in or coming out. Coming out: I always feel like something got done

3 hrs, 37 min in

Ex. man who repaired trailer, had two mattresses for furniture, needed a bottle of Murphy's Old Soap to clean everything
Children's books: do we have to bring back? No, yours forever

3 hrs, 42 min in

Tooth care not a big issue for most adults/children, really encourage use of toothpaste & brushes

JB Very generous with time, thank you very much

JC It's so easy to tell the story

JB Unless you want to add – great place to stop

JC Big Easter egg hunt, want to do a long time, with Daniel's help & his wife's help

JB Another person in the family –

JC Came from a tough background
Everybody has a success

3 hrs, 47 min in

JB Great place to end this

RESUME – also 3 hrs, 47 min in

JB As a child, remember your mother being recognized in community

JC So appreciative of everything
Here 25 years, just in past year, thank yous, such a humbling experience
Last night at school board, I shamed them into helping that girl
They're touched by what we do

3 hrs, 52 min

It's like I took off a bag over my head

OFF