

Sandra Keiser Edwards
FPP Interview Summary #1
18 March 2021

Intro – Jo Blatti interviewing Sandy Edwards for First Person Plural. This is a zoom interview, March 18, 2021. Taking levels -

JB Begin at beginning

SE Milestone year, 70. Born Charlottesville Virginia, UVA [University of Virginia], raised Waynesboro, on the Blue Ridge, Skyline Drive
Where Interstate 81 meets Interstate 64
Centreville Valley, Hickory Hill – where it all started

JB Who parents, how meet?

SE Fascinating how they met – mother’s bridal book [Ruth Evans Keiser]
Her family, just moved, her father associated DuPont
Bunny, boy she’d marry [Bernard ‘Bunny’ L. Keiser]
Because of depression, he’d have no college
She was a state college grad, home economics. They dated until money to marry.
I’m the third of four children, three girls and one boy - Mary, Peg, ‘Little Bunny,’ no longer,
carried my father’s name
There were four of us

Grandfather [Evans] engineer/chemist at Dupont, seven children

5 min in

SE Early industry, GE [General Electric] plant, Crompton corduroy. One of the things that made Waynesboro interesting – engineers and scientists to run the plants, nice blend.

JB Your father?

SE My father independent businessman, born salesman. Car dealership, then a number of things
Served in World War II, captured German prisoner.
Solidified purpose – to return home, be joyful, centered.
Probably one of best gifts – wonderful guy. House full of love.
My mother more structured, made family run.
They courted on the dance floor, big band era. Rolled back carpet. Turning on the music.
Mother had aspired to dance, whatever after that -
None of us took to dance.
Loved freedom of dance –

JB Other extended family?

SE Paternal family on next hill, aunt and uncle next door, could see their house
My mother’s family in northeastern U.S.
A great aunt in the community

JB You went to Lenoir Rhyne nearby [for college]

SE My sister Peg, my brother followed, Lutheran co-ed

10 min in

1968-69, not many co-ed schools at the time in Virginia
Most girls' schools, UVA nursing path
Family choice, my path
How might have been different
Always had an activist heart – Lenoir Rhyne gave me an anchor at the time
Not sure a larger university would have provided

JB Is this the Lutheran

SE My family 5-6 generations farming people Virginia, Lutheran people, part of our social life

JB Co-ed, segregation...

SE Yes, very much segregated town
Integrated when I was in high school, went well
Black community had its own schools church, working class of the town
At early age understood something was wrong with this –
Became clearer in the 1960s

15 min in

I always wondered where might have come from
My mother always worked to help domestic workers in a better situation – fairness & equity
Not a lot of different cultures and races represented in college, but very aware of the national scene
The payoff for me has been the hard work we're doing today, more recent systematic work to change
Education/access not enough

Also, as a child, unusual environment Woodrow Wilson hospital became county rehab – physical facility
Votech and high school inclusion/access unique
Also deaf, blind, and a significant mental institution
Helped understand more about the human condition

20 min in

I and all my friends involved, opportunities other capable

JB College experience, early experience promoting music

SE Always as a child responded to music. Obligatory five years of piano – didn't really take to piano.
Joined chorus.
Knew the difference between my admiration and my abilities.
I found dancing and meeting somebody. But it was really

It was hearing the bands live and knowing when a hit. I booked the prom when I went to high school.

25 min in

When I was in school [college], active student council, became head of concert committee. Opal Moretz, a widow, our union director, you need to take this and run with this. Schools throughout the South – bands would show up late, drunk, not at all. By the time I'm a sophomore, this group of union directors sits down with bookers. Block bookers, developers, turned into a national conference – William Morris, ICM [International Creative Management]. By the time I'm a senior, I'm a student chair, national conference. You should think about graduate school. At that time - field houses, arenas – go to a school at a major university, 1972-1982 phenomenal time in live music. You can't do that work more than ten years. Crazy work. Community, remarkable opportunities.

30 min in

JB Folk to rock?

SE Major arenas. Those who could fill 10,000 or more – mainly rock
American rock groups, also Bob Hope, Dolly Parton
Steve Martin, Beach Boys

Western Illinois, hotbed, 15,000 student body, paid fees, demanded the best
Discussion of music scene in the quad cities area [Davenport, Macomb, etc. - Western Illinois University, Macomb]
'Vinyl Center for the Arts' improvisation for Broadway road shows

35 min in

SE Interested in arena management, looked like next move. Not many women in the field, looking for my next opportunity. Just wasn't coming.
Went to Shreveport, help a hotel develop a seasonal project
Shreveport symphony came to me.
Soon to be husband Clay Edwards also contemplating next move and being married to me, also in music business
Discussed development with symphony, opening up programming with community

We got – did that for 5 years.

JB How meet Clay?

SE I met Clay at National Music conference at Davidson College

JB Since college

SE He was ahead of me – four years, through the music business
Finally decided it was the real thing

40 min in

Clay got the invitation to Penn State - where my mother and grandfather went to school
I went as trailing spouse
I decided to join public broadcasting membership and production
One of the first distance programs
Ten years 1988-1998

JB How closely did you work?

SE Closely – same development team, reported to same person

JB Ever differences?

SE Great respect for each other. Clay more analytical, structured
I'm more emotional, intuitive
Bottom line - share same values: public education, arts in curriculum, access information

When we came home – focused on other things

JB What kinds of things – shut the door?

SE Clay marvelous cook
I prep & clean up
Fortunate to have couples' friends
Spend a lot of time with their kids; we didn't have any. Camping, canoeing.
Read the same books, 2x and talk – good partnership.

45 min in

JB Conventional career path, looking for next step. Glass ceiling?
10,000 arena
Also, companionate marriage -

SE Take Clay first. Clay was a feminist. His mother had a position in a major law firm in New Orleans – not an attorney, but managed a significant office.

I had very good fortune in graduate school. There were four men, in the 50's, had served in World War II mostly running parks and rec[reation], then arenas, university arenas.
Saw something in me. Interested in it as a career, took me under wing. Get me with veteran managers.

50 min in

Didn't see me as the female, but a fellow journeyman. Got me into professional organizations, made sure if there was a panel, I was on it.
I chose not to go on because it was becoming too much of a business - young bucks with aluminum briefcases –
Definitely a glass ceiling
But a group from that fraternity, took an interest in me, everything was transferable, those business principles -

JB Much more common now, job sharing. How people responded?

SE We were able to deliver programming, move the organization forward
We were able to delineate individual roles, goals & objectives clear

If anything, probably more difficult for Clay when I had the perceived higher position, title early 1980s

55 min in

Don't know any better way than to produce
I am a natural collaborator. I found Clay to be the same way – together.
I really credit Dave Gearhart [Dr. G. David Gearhart vice-chancellor advancement 1998-2008; chancellor, 2008-2015, U of Arkansas] paved the way, gave us the credibility, the platform to successful.
In universities, not unusual to see scientists running a lab together. Something else in administration

JB How did Shreveport symphony do with its audience development issues?

SE I wish I'd known then what I know now. They loved the pops concerts. The core mission concerts- we were dealing with aging audience, often the founding members. They wanted a younger base, but –

We were working within a rather traditional framework, finding a way to work with art forms – key.

60 min in

First few months of covid lockdown so much creativity, silver lining -

JB Lot more research into who wrote music

SE Yes, rich. About the story, very hopeful -

JB Fay Jones house -

SE Fascinating – a couple's story

1 hr. 5 min in

Organic architecture, modest houses, Louisiana & Pennsylvania

Clay interested in seeing a Fay Jones house when we moved to Arkansas
More than what we need. Mother: someone needs to steward that house
Lovely experience
After Clay passed away initially comforting
Then, using a smaller footprint

It's time. Found a person as passionate. We feel like historians. Makes me smile.

SE Live in Bentonville.
2009, Alice Walton & I decided to drive, empty house, wonderful place [site].
My home on that place – Ozark beachfront property
7-10 minute walk to work, built a new house. Architect Sarah Susanka [of 'not so big house'
design principles fame].

1 hr. 10 min in

Rewarding process
65 when started, maybe a bit younger
She's a great partner
Worked with others to build

JB Instructions?

SE Porch with house attached, lot of light, devotee of Fay Jones & Frank Lloyd Wright
Dining room/ kitchen

JB Not everyone would build retirement home 7 minutes from work

SE Great walk. Alice Walton #1 cheerleader [of Crystal Bridges], I'm #2, can't see life without being
involved

JB We're at 90-minute mark

SE Girl Scouts and weave together formative

Plans for future conversation

OFF

1 hr. 14 min in