

Audrey R. Evans
First Person Plural Interview Summary
June 2, 2021

Jo Blatti interviewing Audrey Evans for First Person Plural, June 2, 2021, via zoom
Follow up interview to an earlier conversation on May 27, 2021.

JB World War II meeting your parents, her request that he appear in civilian clothes.
Is there a story behind that story? Seems unusual given the benefits to soldiers in uniform during the period.

AE As I spoke to you, my mother being my mother, changing how someone looked, it seems incomprehensible.
Reflection reality, myth
Dorothy [mother] concerned about how things looked
Dressed them right – her children
My father looked lovely in uniform; I've seen it.

5 min in

Sounds more like she was testing him
Will ask my siblings
Heard it differently when I said it to you. Country was very important and service -

JB About your siblings – three of you
Referred several times to your sister

AE Eighteen months apart

JB Not much picture brother
Very clear about education within the family

Were there any differences in how you were raised - between male/female?

AE He was five years after me, seven years after my sister
I asked my mother the happiest moment of her life: when she had a boy. She thought that would please my father. He [brother] had a special status].
Our collective baby.
Very interested that you picked up

He [brother] had a life of ups & downs
Treatment centers for alcohol & drugs
Texas land deals
Rich family connections throughout, we all stuck with him
Five years ago, my brother started to decline

10 min in

After long & successful business career, retired to penthouse in Minneapolis
Imperceptibly began mental decline
Three years ago, Don [husband] and I went to Minneapolis and packed furniture

Wife of twenty years [second] left him, money gone
Did have a stroke, did have Parkinson's
Have friends with both – still have minds
Brain damage, earlier drug history
Sharp but not same person
Sister & I are my brother's contact with the world
Example - shared this interview with him – asked about religion in our home: his response:
'overstated, underplayed!'
Ever a story you want to tell your children –
Generally, in life I have not seen people pay this price. But we are still a family. He was
Five years ago, not the same story –

One thing that didn't change – he thinks that he should be the most important person in very
person's life

15 min in

My mother: 'He was the smart one, your sister has the looks and you have the personality'

Mom: 'You have to stop that -!'

His view: hard row to hoe to be the only boy...

JB That's a difficult story

AE Mixed messages – community of origin/larger community

JB As growing up, other friends same experiences, grain of salt?

AE The answer is no. How different the world is today. Either my friends committed to Jewish
identity or the other, committed to broader community. Few tried to walk in both worlds.

20 min in

I became a lawyer in Arkansas. It would be defiant – very few Jewish people. Many subjects not
discussed.

JB What are you thinking of?

AE Money wasn't discussed – so much wasn't.
Rather, who your role models were - the prettiest girls in school?

Almost every person I know – not one was given the idea should be successful individuals.

JB What ideas?

AE Marry a Jewish doctor –
Get education and have children
Parents believed in their children, a debt is owed, Jewish community and larger community
Needed to help others – cross the street to do it, humor used

25 min in

JB Message to your children

AE Succeeded with ‘all people deserve respect’

Mom: you want me to be in charge of the world. I’m trying to get my homework done & get out of school. And have some fun. Not going to do it, Mom.

Oldest son at Stephens [financial firm] in Little Rock

Other son an architect, designed software technology for architects and engineers

Both in the business world

[Note: Sons are Kyle and Jeremy Evans.]

30 min in

JB When you & family moved to Little Rock

AE Don was hired as a planner at Cromwell Architects for 2-3 years, then he and Charles [Witsell] hooked up [to form Witsell Evans Rasco, WER, 1978]. It was an enormous risk when Don & I had just moved here.

We didn’t understand then that a young white man got open doors because others didn’t.

Abundance compared to everyone else –

We bought one house and then sold it and could put that toward other things

We were being supported by the system

35 min in

Don’t know the words

There was a structure in place, a floor.

Years later, so many others had been

JB Ex. from social history – the consent decrees in the steel industry show how the floor was stacked against some workers for decades until the civil right movement of the 1960s

Question about law school experience as clerk

40 min in

AE Being a federal law clerk now necessary prerequisite almost to being a judge

Every judge given a certain number of clerks from law schools pool

- To give judges help

- To give legal world honor system a boost

Formative experience - can be trying

- On the judicial side – how nurture, keep away from you what can’t do

For me – it was like a fairy godmother – known for behavior and intellect

45 min in

Eisele - generally didn’t hire from within state, may have been second

Worked closely with him and two other clerks

Two-year clerkship, hired on basis interview & resume

Traveled across state or heard cases in chambers

When I went to the Wright firm [Evans' first position following clerkship, 5 years]

Impacted emotionally – experienced criminal trial, employment discrimination, personal injury, etc. bankruptcy

The people crafting bankruptcy such fine people

It had to do with money, not children, not body parts - didn't want to practice law in some areas

I don't think making a bad financial decision is tragic - fresh start

Learned on the job. Few I admire more than Eisele – calm, reasoned

People wanted to hire his clerks – reliable

50 min in

It created an aura I had no other way of getting

JB Until who?

AE Sybil Hampton

JB How came to bankruptcy – heard both district court and the court you preside over

AE In Eisele's court - appeals
As his research person, saw work products
Ike [Isaac] Scott, Wright, Jennings firm
They call bankruptcy a planet - a place unto it self

55 min in

I'd do it all over again

AE The depth of emotion in other areas of the law – would rather be in a closed system of fresh beginnings

I was crushed for people who lost

JB Self-awareness

AE I had some maturity and some opportunities

JB Now describing self as third stage – mentoring, judicial campaign watch

AE Cannot practice law, would give up pension
Retired subject to recall

1hr in

AE Should you go back go on the bench

Could volunteer forever – until Trump elected
Took my name off the recall list

My last meeting in federal courts, talk of honoring Jacob Trieber, Helena. [William McKinley appointed Trieber (1853-1927) to the eastern district bench where he served until his death. Legal scholars note that Trieber became unpopular with white citizens for his consistent inclusion of African American citizens under the law.]

First federal Jewish judge 1901

Proud

Audrey, want to serve on that committee?

Got to know David Solomon Sr. [Helena resident & philanthropist]

Bryan Miller also on the committee [contemporary federal district judge, Helen roots]

JB About when?

AE 2014-2015 courthouse renamed; bill passed in Congress [2016]

Whole time I was working on this people of Helena telling me about Elaine massacre [of 1919 Judge ([Bryan) Miller and brother Kyle (head of Delta Cultural Center, Helena). Both were descendants (of those killed)].

Put me on an evolving track.

That's how I met Sybil Hampton

Did not know what I was getting into -

Prior to that and simultaneous to that was when the Arkansas Bar Association created a nonpartisan organization to counter the impact of dark money on judicial elections -

1 hr. 5 min in

Five people to be a rapid response team - three legal, two press, wrote own by-laws

During an election file a complaint

Rapid response team would respond w/n 24-48 hours

Problem, no power, only power of the press

But – there is a neutral body

Back to the drawing board

Procedure that would have more impact – something government ---

JB Might lead to legislative?

AE, I hope, quickly heading toward partisan election [judiciary] dark, unaccountable money

1 hr. 10 min in

Hope more impactful system

My mentee called – bad turn

I don't want to be a person who says 'when I was on the bench...'
I want to learn from the students

JB Back to Elaine for a minute
Elaine not in the public consciousness, somewhat like Tulsa [Oklahoma race riot of 1921], well known to historians, but not others
Well-coordinated public event, public memorial, community, national dimensions
New facts unearthed
A little more about process, collaboration?

AE Little hierarchy, collaborative, each day every person involved would learn something. People listened and grew together

1 hr. 15 min

I hadn't been doing public work, community organizing, controversial issues
Wasn't used to anger, accusations, disagreement
Sybil Hampton my counselor, voice of reason, history & loss

JB Part of the collaborative?

AE More offside, initial efforts broad
Some feeling in Elaine [town 25-26 miles from county seat of Helena and 3 miles from the massacre site of Hoop Spur] that the memorial should be there. Confusing. We had their agreement [initially to placing the memorial in Helena]. We're still working.

Continuation of learning, communication

Unusually lucky – mother with kids, lawyer, judge, looking forward to opportunities to educate this state - reconciliation Elaine, country -
Descendants [of Elaine] created a very strong organizations, invited all of us to attend – zoom has made possible
People in Elaine who believe they were excluded - had opportunity to get to know, better place

1 hr. 20 min

EJI [Equal Justice Initiative] has appointed people to carry out their work in Arkansas - Kwame Abdul-Bey
I will be showing up with them
[Brief interruption here]
Joyce Elliott bill – not out of committee [2020-2021 legislative session – testified from my personal experience -we weren't listened to this session

AE Also volunteer at Temple & federation [Jewish Federation of Arkansas – regional Jewish charity, comparable to United Way]. Delightful assignments, zoom gala. Why do people give?
Tikkun [Hebrew for those who are learning to give or repairing the world] alum. Three people, wonderful experience.

Another project - turkeys to people, real accomplishment

Reconciliation racial, long term

JB CALS [Central Arkansas Library System] board –

AE Wonderful organization - binoculars, yard tools, books via internet, reaching elders

1 hr. 25 min

Computer skill set, do more, new appointee, love to read

JB Maybe the bookmobile should come back?

AE Team up! Two trailers, books and fresh vegetables.

JB Anything you'd like to add?

AE How important making a decision who to marry is – we've had to evolve

1 hr. 30 min

Always figured it out, need more education about marriage, value systems, collective responsibilities. Married 53-54 years, were it not for my husband's capacity to evolve -

Have to have two people share work, share the obligations, share children.

JB Person, film, book – transformative?

AE When all of seventy-six –

Working with Judge Eisele – showed spectrum, grandeur of the law

Meeting Sybil Hampton, being mentored by her, at the core of issues, making people into 'other'

1 hr. 35 min

Book – *Cry the Beloved Country* [1948 novel about tragedy and complexities of apartheid in South Africa by Alan Paton]

Message hope & love

Now probably haul it out & reread

That's it

JB Thank you

AE Feels self-centered, ego-based.

1 hr., 37 min.