

**Mary Harsh Interview Summary**  
**First Person Plural**  
**10 July 2015**

Intro – Jo Blatti interviewing Mary Harsh for First Person Plural project in her home, Magnolia, Arkansas, 10 July 2015

JB Could we begin with your background –

MH Only child, describes family home downtown Magnolia

JB Parents?

MH Father, Ford car, banking two generations, Farmer Bank  
Family history in area, Warnock side, mules, timber

JB How parents meet?

MH Lived two blocks, never knew how got together  
Ft. Worth [Texas] honeymoon  
I was born 1922, mother ill  
Moved out to country & back to town  
I could walk to school, was taken to school  
Birthday in January  
My mother decided I needed to skip a grade & be with cousin, took me to a tutor to pass exam  
1938 – learned to drive

JB Dad still in dealership?

MH Gave me a car. Went to Stephens College [Columbia, Missouri] – [famous actress] Maude Adams there. My mother wanted to be an actress. She attended Henderson-Brown, Arkadelphia

12 min in

JB Raised with idea of education?

MH Yes. Dad couldn't write with right hand  
Met girls from other places U.S.  
Now, best friends, Warren, Arkansas as it turns out  
Graduated

JB Two-year?

MH Met John [Harsh]. I went to University [of Arkansas Fayetteville]. He went to air school, the war [WWII], 1941  
I went my way, university became a girls' school  
I graduated, major Spanish & history, English, second education  
Had job teaching in Little Rock

Friend needed sub [in Magnolia]  
I fell in love with a fellow from El Dorado

Went to New York with his mother

JB How come New York?

MH 90-day wonder [officers' school]. Set to marry. I don't know –  
Coming home to see him- turned out to be day of John's mother's funeral

20 min in

At that point, he was pursuit pilot, Louisiana  
Describes husband's career choices late WWII, early postwar period, coming back to Magnolia  
Early charity activities, boxes to 'quarters' throughout the county, 50-60 at Christmas

30 min in

No children then, volunteer work with Charity League

JB How changed?

MH Now school equipment, sponsor meets –  
Then charter member PEO – college for girls, scholarships  
Asked my mother first, 1951-61  
Very fortunate, good health, means to do, husband encouraged

JB See your folks doing?

MH Don't know how to explain –  
Daddy Shrine Hospital Shreveport [Mason], Mother Eastern Star  
I was never very active Eastern Star, I couldn't memorize

JB Grew up in Depression

MH We never - . Parents just had me.  
Maybe they didn't travel.  
When I was in high school, beginning to come up  
Discovered oil in Columbia County, 1936-37

McAllister built hotel  
1938-1950, moved along pretty well

JB Husband broker oil

MH Parents had land for oil

We had three children, five years before the first, mother to help  
All this time I played bridge

39 min in

Started at University of Arkansas, my mother played  
Older you get, less interested in the hand you get  
Never did get enough points to be a master

When parents died, began to travel  
Neighbor and I would go  
Would take grandchildren for birthday trips

Been member of Church of Christ, sliding since mother died. John died  
Molly [daughter] still teaches, I go listen to her - First Methodist

My husband died with aneurysm, had a cardiogram right before died, didn't find it  
Then I traveled more – describes trips – wall of mementos

45 min in

New York, plays, river cruises

Describes roses [gorgeous, look like floral displays] - lifetime commitment  
Always had some help with garden  
Now help with roses

People who've been taking my roses been getting older [church altars, etc]  
Told my girls – you can plow up my hobby if something happens to me  
[Note: Also shows collection of beautiful African violets]

JB On computers, technology, women's roles, what sticks out?

MH Everything – cars, bicycles, speed  
We are so dependent on electricity, frightening to me  
Airplanes have changed, telephones  
I still have my mother's telephone chair  
Even fireplaces –

JB Hat, gloves -

54 min in

MH 1950s neighbor church  
I was first one to wear slacks to school. Taught in all-black school in Magnolia & moved with  
integration.

JB When?

MH 1967. Wonderful experiences. Went to junior high school, most came along with me. Last year  
decided to wear slacks. [clock chimes]. Even was wearing them to church by then. Principal came  
to me, superintendent after school

58 min in

Could wear nice pants [ca 1971]

JB Any other revolutionary moments?

MH Probably not

Done some stupid things – trip to Mongolia solo with the Smithsonian. Diesel transport making me sick. Went to airport before Beijing had an airport – primitive. Worst thing I've ever done. Contact never came, got in car with strangers. Got best pictures I have [on travel wall in dining room].

64 min in

I came out all right

Two best friends - 99 & 96

I feel young

JB Wonderful that you have companions  
What's in the water in Magnolia?

MH Lost all friends from high school except two, WWII, Korea

JB Stayed active in Columbia County

MH Community Foundation – courthouse, trying to restore, source grants  
Once they move out of square, couldn't keep area going

69 min in

Fordyce let court go - both banks moved off  
Mother quite active Harding College, picked up on that

JB SAU [Southern Arkansas University]

MH Yes – kept re-electing me

JB Return - your experience black, integrated – memories of students?

MH Only time I taught those five years, teachers quite involved

JB Enough work to go around?

MH In my Daddy's time – KKK, he didn't belong  
Racist can be either side – white/black  
How much more you want to do?

74 min in

In my time, two fires

Granddaughters set fire to my bedroom  
Barbecue fire nine weeks later in attic  
This is new house as of 1992, safer house  
Speaks of late husband, how hard the fires would have been for him, his reliance in routines

JB Hopes for children, grandchildren in community affairs?

MH Opportunity to be involved – just have to do what can do  
None seem to be religious  
Hope they have integrity

My mother: if somebody says they don't have a fuss with husband/children/parents – truth not in them

80 min in

Difficult to teach a lot of things –  
One of the grandchildren calls me  
Most of them don't pay any attention  
Repeats hope for integrity

Love to read – thankful that I can –

JB Good place to stop - with thanks

81 min OFF