

Sandra Hubbard Roberts
First Person Plural Interview Summary #1
20 September 2021

Intro – Jo Blatti interviewing Sandra Hubbard Roberts for First Person Plural, 20 September 2021

SH Gives legal name, Sandra Hubbard Roberts, known as Sandra Hubbard

JB Born Little Rock?

SH Born Oklahoma City, September 11, 1941, Tulsa, Texas - moved to Arkansas about 4-5 years, Little Rock, Arkansas. Area by Arkansas River

JB Born around World War II, parents in service?

SH No, dad, broken back, side of beef fallen on him

JB Slaughterhouse?

SH Yes –

JB More about folks –

SH Both from small towns – dad [Lester Gilbert Hubbard], Cuddy, OK, mom [Ruby Isabel Wallace Hubbard] Antlers, OK. Both moved to Oklahoma City for work. She was the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen.

5 min in

Mother shy person, dad not, outgoing – opposite.

JB What brought to Arkansas?

SH Dad worked for government, area manager for GSA [Government Services Association], service to federal employees – ex. when judge needed chambers renovated. Good job, I believe. Only one telephone in house, we couldn't use phone 4:30-6:30 p.m. for us to call in That's when we were building house –

JB Where?

SH Lower Heights, off University Avenue. An experience for a young kid. Added on five times. Built things a lot. I was smallest, carried wires through the attic. Doing stuff, a lot that was fun. Older sister, four years older, [Carolyn Hubbard Wentworth] was dating, pretty busy. I was tomboy, learned to mix cement, climbed around construction with father. Watched him lay every brick.

JB Hall High School?

SH Fair Park elementary, Forest Heights, Hall High School brand new tenth grade, eleventh grade closed, real interesting. Need to slow down.

10 min in

Danced on teenage show

Peaceful time. Beginning rock and roll.

JB Grew up in segregation time in Little Rock – white schools. You made three documentaries. In an odd sort of way, all related.
“Steve’s Show”

SH Before school crisis – no African -Americans, not interacting [with African-American students] in those days

Those kids [white students] not as upset as our parents

JB Your family?

SH My mother helped me find a school – Mabelvale
One hundred kids from Little Rock went there. They were sending kids all over.

JB How far?

SH 25 miles, carpool
Mabelvale didn’t like us from Little Rock

JB What didn’t like?

SH Had to make room for us
One hundred of us is a lot
Some girls in black leather wanted to meet me behind the gym - I didn’t go

JB Your mother helped you find another school – curious as to whether they talked about segregation

SH Father something of a racist – used the ‘n’ word. I never liked that – asked him to quit when my kids -

Somewhat odd – talked to elevator man like old buddies –
Mother – there but for the grace of God, didn’t hate. Very warm-hearted.

In those days, people not for integration
I can remember black maids on benches, going to clean rich people’s houses then

JB Did you know African-Americans?

SH Not until later
I was in first class in Hall my senior year to have three women of color - to have classmates [Effie Mae] Jones/Hubbard homeroom. I could see her. We kids were told to keep out of it.

Didn't interact – just carried books around. Observes some very kind, some not – Hall and Central [high schools]

20 min in

Recounts Central High - low points, high points student interactions

Change is difficult.

Journey worthwhile.

Horace Mann high school not the same books or construction -

Speaks of differences between Hall High & Horace Mann School – supposed to be separate & equal – not equal in construction/finish

Don't know where feeling of fairness in life came from

We are all human beings

JB Spoke of mother, other influences – religion?

SH Religion present, not forefront

Disappointing

[Integration/desegregation] touchy subject – pastors lose congregations

That's how I began work on *The Giants [Wore White Gloves]*, I became so enamored with the Women's Emergency Committee

JB How find out?

SH At a dinner party. My host said: why not those women who opened the schools?

A week later I was sitting with Sara Murphy [educator, activist, member of the Women's Emergency Committee, and author of a posthumously published study of the group's work, *Breaking the Silence: The Women's Emergency Committee to Open the Schools*, 1997].

Took three years to make – glad I did.

25 min in

Not all integrationists

But three leaders: Vivion Brewer, Adolphine Terry, Velma Powell were.

Giants 1994, three years to finish [1997]

Knew nobody would do it.

I had made a living and become a successful television producer.

JB How did you and [Dr.] Sondra Gordy hook up on *The Lost Year*?

[Narrator coughs]

SH My first film was not widely accepted because I was not an historian.

45th anniversary event at Terry mansion [in Little Rock]

I produced

David Pryor, my master of ceremonies

Wonderful people to speak

Sondra Gordy had written about the teachers the year the schools had closed, asked her to speak

JB You really connected with African-American students

28 min in

JB How find them?

SH Through her - Sondra Gordy, had already studied, so helpful.

We developed a Lost Year project: I would do documentary; she would do book; there would be website [lostyear.com].

People were afraid, white people afraid – hadn't been interacting with black people

Really important time I'd lived through

JB Almost 100% white students continued schooling

SH High school dropouts increased in Little Rock

Effie Mae Jones –

Didn't have transportation, resources

30 min in

Returns to Effie Mae Jones – we lost touch with her, no one really welcoming

Later years, 50th reunion, hosted a tea with other graduates, finally in the picture

Butler Center interviewing those kids during the reunion

JB Thinking about not interacting – shyness?

SH Not much about culture

Movie – enter at different door, balcony

Continue to support inclusion

JB Sock hop film

Initial impression, American Bandstand [a similar national show out of Philadelphia, also launched in 1957, approximately 6 months after Steve's Show in Arkansas] integrated. Was not – performers integrated, dancers not.

SH Steve's Show pre-dated

JB Your specialty?

SH Having a ball – Elvis [Presley] just on the scene.

We voted for it [music] to be on the show.

I was kind of a regular.

Black & white television

Steve just passed away a couple of years ago

A friend to the end

35 min in

JB Football and dance parties continued

SH Football very important to people in Arkansas
Central High football team #1 in nation
Some of the community leadership went in to Faubus [Arkansas governor who shut down the high schools] and asked Faubus to reinstate football

Boys in the state would come in from some place to play & go back to [crisis] schools

JB Jacksonville [AR] student interview [in Lost Year documentary]– suggests that not possible

SH Yes, I'm remembering that, too. Others talk about playing. Strange time.

JB Eventful youth, a Steverino, carpooling.
Lost year, went on to adult life. What happened after?

SH UA – University of Arkansas, graduated 1964, Fayetteville
Met husband high school
He was in a rock & roll band – star and I was a dancer.
Johnny Roberts [John N. Roberts, Jr.], rock & roll Roberts [leader, The Rebels band, among others]

Married seventeen years, then called it quits
Other life, person working, taking care of three sons, trying to make a living, really fascinating time
Office Boyle Building, magnificent seventh, all freelancer – all writers, photographers, typesetters, designers - downtown Little Rock,
With others who worked with ad agencies

40 min in

JB Seventeen years homemaker

SH First son [John N. Roberts, III], born Dallas [TX], second son [Scott Hubbard Roberts] Sherman [TX], Little Rock, third son [Jason Michael Roberts]

JB Husband pursuing musical career?

SH He had own advertising agency [Roberts-Smith, with Bruce Smith], he was good at it – Bonanza.
They still played some. Our lives changed, things got more and more complicated.

Took about six months and then first job at YMCA, membership director, started bowling every time husband came up. They were very patient with me.

Then Elizabeth Mitchell Children's Center, now Center Youth & Families, very fulfilling.
Then became first woman photographer in Little Rock.

JB How develop photographic skills?

SH When married, took class at Arkansas Arts Center [now known as Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts]

Turned room in attic into darkroom. Love to this day. My kids were primary subjects.
Able to do pictures well. Had some good gigs.
The three best male photographers in town [on same floor] – nobody would hire me.
Began to do production for them.

JB What's involved in production?

45 min in

SH Started as production assistant for them.
Find models, props – gave me a real good understanding of photography and lighting.
Find location, pay for location. Hire the models.
One time, Louis Nye from Andy Griffith show [Note: The Griffin show does not appear among Nye's many television credits, though he worked with actors & comics associated with that show. Nye's most famous association in a very long career was with Steve Allen's show, where he was the source of the 'Hi, ho Steverino' tag.]

I was making \$150.00 to the photographer's \$1000.00 per day
Hold on – learned how to do it so it wasn't offensive.
Made more money than they knew
As I started doing my own projects, would bill my services, then add to crew to expense as lump sum.
Did a lot as food stylist, television –

JB Timeline – divorce

SH Divorce 1979
1979-1980 – career, quit in 2008
Raising three boys, we're all still speaking
2008 moved to Fayetteville - family
All three sons and seven grandchildren in Fayetteville

50 min in

JB What didn't love?

SH Children a handful at a certain point, sons driving
My parents helped with their cars
Being broke, water cut off – story of son calling.
In beginning, it was tough. We stayed in the house, didn't change neighborhood, schools.
They are wonderful men, love so much
All born in September

Ex-husband passed away two years ago, happily remarried. Everybody ended up for the better.
I'm happily single

JB Did you get help raising them from former husband?

SH Every other weekend, summer trip
Better for me

JB Sometimes joint custody can be fraught

SH Wonderful group of friends, support
Recalls porch conversation with friend, 'I know this is a hard thing you are doing'
I just wanted my sons to be good citizens, husbands –

55 min in

JB You mentioned/alluded to men having stranglehold on good jobs, how you figured out better pay as an entrepreneur –
Community of women when working?

SH Ad agencies would hold pay 90 days – not obstructive, just the way it was. Cranford Johnson, Robinson, Wood, etc. Not that men were obstructionist, just the way it was -

JB Run that by me again, 90 days?

SH If a freelancer as I was, would go to the lobby and to the person who signed the checks. I paid my freelances first -
National office of good old boys' system
So much better now, but I'm not in the work force now
My children aware of women working, tuned into that
One guy stiffed me – great only one in 25-year career – very wealthy man
Did one other thing for him – get straight this time – didn't pay me for that either.
I did get the money for the people who worked on it.

1 hr. in

SH Got really good at what I was doing
1984-85, biggest client was a bank in Little Rock, North Little Rock, bought by another
Lost my biggest client, what am I going to do?
Movie came to town out of New York – Mary Steenburgen and Kevin Bacon
I became casting director, Jay Russell director, Levon Helm in it, from Arkansas, wonderful
Some of hardest work, most interesting work I've ever done
Bought first computer for \$8000, only one in production office with a computer
Was making \$300 a month, didn't know better
End of the Line, name of film (released 1987)
Had to start rebuilding client base 1985, '86

You learn through cycles of work
As I got older, take Friday off
Would take December off. Everybody had spent budgets for year. they were all partying for sake of Christmas.
You had to put money back, if you had good runs you had to save money.

I had to borrow money at times. I'd be called a divorced woman with an erratic income. I'd never been called that before. But truly –
Went to every bank in Little Rock

Growing up in Little Rock, I had friends that had banks.
I had one that saved the day. I was still learning how to pay off the IRS, about to lose house.

1 hr., 5 min in

Went to every bank in Little Rock
Finally, one guy backed me
Have my money with him to this day
When mother and sister passed away, free to move Fayetteville.
Wonderful place to live.

JB How spend time now?

SH Projects, Netflix
Lost ability to edit, hard drives computers full
Used to volunteer Humane Society (photography), Fayetteville Arts Council
I quit volunteering to be a fulltime grandmother
My house across the street from middle school
Now kids are older, take every day and make fun – not doing worthwhile
Do garden every day, cook for grandchildren in college, foodie group

1 hr., 11 min in

JB Big picture - Women's Emergency Committee
Differences in the ways women, men contribute to community affairs?

SH On quite a few boards, March of Dimes, YMCA, donated videos more than money, Arkansas
Community Foundation, Women's Foundation of Arkansas, Terry Mansion – tragically decaying
rights now
Men in our time - money for paycheck
Women would do the work
Some boards had strong male leadership – not the norm. Women as caretakers.
Segues into the mid-1950s crisis, but generally women did the work
Refers again to pastors in the 1950s losing congregations
Men learning to be more giving

JB Next question – women opportunities in you time

SH Women considered now. Opportunities better. Double-edged sword. So much matters on who
you worked for -. I hired the people

My kids -
Life is: 10% what you make it
90% how you take it
Attitude is one of the more important things in life

To be open and reasonable

I remember magazine about feminist problems, would hide from husband. Ongoing process

JB He wasn't a feminist, were you?

SH I became one. Nothing like a divorce to turn your head around. I am to this day. I used to hire women who needed help.
Work with March of Dimes, Women's Foundation of Arkansas, Arkansas Community Foundation – work in progress.

JB Work with Terry Mansion – committee, longstanding connection

SH They [museum-city dropped ball on that
Committee disbanded
In touch with Ellen Fennell [chair, Friends of Terry Mansion]
Want Arts Center to watch *Giants Wore White Gloves*. They turned integration around.
We think there was an endowment [to care for the Terry Mansion]. I do follow online. When given to the city. Don't know if true or not.

JB I can tell you that is the story from mayor's office. We both have the same set of facts.

20 min in

SH Hope someone will fix it. Chimney is crumbling.
I'm hopeful. Thinking of sending them both films [*Giants* and *Lost Year*] to show what happened.

Much history before that – school

JB When you think about it – a person, a book, a movie that influenced you?

SH When I premiered one of my films at Hot Springs Film Festival, I fell in love with Ken Burns and his work, the speaker. He spoke about doing documentary –

Color Purple (1985) about a black family, trials and tribulations, so authentic, well done, Academy Awards, 11 nominations – no awards. When are we all going to come together?

The most influential people? My mom and dad the way they conducted themselves. The sweetest person, my mom, rubbed off. Very positive.

1 hr. 28 min.