

**Marian G. Lacey Interview Summary**  
**First Person Plural**  
**17 February 2016**

Intro – Jo Blatti interviewing Marian Lacey for the First Person Plural project in her home in Little Rock, 17 February 2016

JB Growing up years – Little Rock?

ML Dermott, Arkansas, farm belonged to us  
6 children, I'm oldest  
Church, worked, school  
Far out in the country, not on the yellow bus  
Baxter, Arkansas to school, on the Drew/Chicot county line  
Our house in Drew County, my dad got us into school in Baxter

5 min in

Stair step children, except the last, came when I was in college  
We went to segregated schools, except the last  
Names already in books  
Mother finished 12<sup>th</sup> grade, daddy had 2 years  
She had a knack for early childhood training – always had vegetables, cleanliness, never raised voice  
Daddy didn't whip us hardly  
She kept us starched & ironed

10 min in

JB Kids' chores?

ML More outside – cows, hay, corn, peanuts  
If you had a book, were reading, you could get by  
No TV until 1956

JB Interested that you had then

ML They [neighbors] had before we did. Why didn't we have radio? [Father] didn't see value

JB No phonograph?

ML I could use church piano – no piano at home  
At my grandmother's had to be able to play to use hers

15 min in

My aunts bought me first sewing machine  
Describes grown siblings' careers: brother judge, sister college professor, sister math teacher, baby girl engineer,  
Daddy used to say farm important – still own  
Brother rents out [50 acres]

20 min in

JB Nearest big city to farm when growing up?

ML McGehee, Monticello – on 4<sup>th</sup> of July, Lake Village

Traveled in truck, went to Oklahoma. In that time, you couldn't stop; daddy knew people along the way

Didn't know enough to be mad or angry, had shoes and clothes.

JB Lot of children around you not in school?

Discussion textbooks free/paid for students

ML Don't remember, think I would have been told [if family charged for texts]

Finished college in 1960

25 min in

JB Thinking about family travel –

ML Daddy and mother dear white counterparts  
Daddy owned bailer, other guy [white] owned tiller, everything done on porch  
Mothers would trade recipes

JB Ever play with kids?

ML No. Library not open to us.  
2-3 magazines came to the house  
*Grit* newspaper, oldest brother supplier for neighborhood, farm help publication, now out of business  
*Dermott News*  
Movie house – never could go – daddy objected to the balcony

[phone rings]

Cousins coming to town took us to movie [in Pine Bluff]

Truck came to town hire out, mother would take us, earn pocket money

30 min in

Daddy didn't like us to work out

JB Sisters/brother?

ML 5 girls, 2 brothers

JB Chores boys, girls?

ML Some indoor chores – they [boys] had Boy Scout troop, camping

Courtship/church  
 At church, we would all pretend  
 Banquet – Audrey [aunt] made me a cute little pink dress, classic polished cotton  
 My dad out there in truck

35 min in

Teacher said Marian Glover only one who's done her lesson; boy said, nothing else to do on farm  
 You probably don't know about this: all the fun on the other side of the tracks. Couldn't go there until 10,11<sup>th</sup> grade

JB What was there?

ML Shooting dice, [not all that interesting ]

JB Stories about white folks coming down?

ML Oh no, don't know

JB Batesville barbecue, meeting ground

ML Story of her wedding weekend – bridesmaid search for ice cream cone, couldn't get served ca 1961

JB Repercussions for dad?

ML No

JB Married college sweetheart

ML UAPB – he was the one I chose  
 I had a job in the library, Jesse would come around every night, read the newspaper  
 Tells of courtship family visits

42 min in

JB College, then further education

ML Taught at Helena, then to University of Indiana both of us got MAs, husband got doctorate

Husband chose UALR [for job]  
 Two children, mother ill

JB When?

ML 1970s  
 Daughter 10, two little boys  
 Sad part – mother diabetes  
 Jesse [husband] new job, mother in coma

JB How re-enter as an English teacher?

ML Charles Johnson at UALR college program asked me to work a couple days a week  
 Then Sue Cowan Williams who had been fired [retired at the point Marian Lacey entered the system - see below\*] and needed a person

52 min in

Mrs Gance kept the boys, then UALR daycare

Mr. Elvi hired me at Dunbar Jr High to teach basic English

JB As I remember, she [Ms Williams] got fired over asking for equal pay, won the lawsuit and lost her job [\*Note: Sue Cowan William's ultimately successful suit went to the U.S. Eighth Circuit in St Louis; she did eventually regain her job with the LR School District, ca. 1952.]

ML That's how I got the job. Lots of black boys in that class.

JB After integration –

ML But not fully enforced.  
 Some white teachers not students. Later white kids  
 I was there 8 years

55 min in

Very few blacks could make it into the 'gifted.' Some of my best experiences

JB How best?

ML The sentiment was they [basic students] couldn't learn.  
 Ex *Durango Street* – a required novel

JB What about?

ML Rough streets, Hispanic. Ms Lacey, we going to read *Durango*?  
 Mr Elvi: I told him, I'd been to Helena and had loved working with basic students.  
 Actually, I learned what to do – had to be ready to go, standing at the door, get the work on the board

65 min in (1 hr, 5 min in)

If you use respect –  
 Student query: are you going to be here? start of journey toward doctorate  
 Challenges balancing family, coursework, rest of schedule

1 hr 10 min

JB Was this 1980s?

ML 1983 – started thinking I could do broader job with teachers  
Found out –

JB Found out?

ML If not careful, parents, repairs, etc could take whole day  
10 full minutes, then gave parents an assignment

1 hr, 15 min

Always went into cafeteria for lunch, knew every student by Christmas  
950 students at Dunbar  
Central really tested – 300 each grade

1 hr. 20 min

ML Not educational leader at Central – 5 years assistant principal

Back to Dunbar as principal, doesn't usually work –

JB Politics?

ML More than 25 years ago, real tragic period, lots of discord at lunch  
Small group sessions, counselors, it worked  
In education, never go anywhere without someone coming up, quite fulfilling  
If want privacy, stay home

1 hr, 25 min

Friend who was principal in LR told me name was up for [Horace] Mann  
I had some of the best parents, help with the schools  
Many of the accolades – teachers and parents wanted the school to be a success  
Dr. Karnone – administrative bldg moved downtown, three of best principals moved

JB Helpful?

ML Worst transition – greatest learning curve from principal to administrator

1 hr 30 min

Hard for me to visit schools  
Didn't like that I wasn't able to get out into schools  
Also – make sure not doing principals' job

JB What you did as principal -

ML Big fault in education

Energy must go into the big projects

JB Are you comfortable talking on the record about [more contemporary concerns?]

1 hr 35 min

ML I always tell parents to visit  
Just like the city, sometimes human relations  
Focus helps, sometimes it doesn't  
As principals, administrators celebrate the best points  
Your kid can get a very good education in Little Rock public schools

1 hr 40 min

Reflection of community

JB Some organizations you've been involved with – Central Arkansas Library System  
[CALIS]

ML World Services for the Blind in Fair Park – expensive, money has been cut

JB How different from the School for the Blind on Markham?

ML Amazing how much they can do, reference Ruth Shepherd, Just Communities

1 hr, 45 min

Brief experience volunteering with elementary students, 'the Lord didn't tell me to do that!'

Chemo club with fellow cancer survivors, 4 times a year

Returns to Little Rock public library system, move to Nate Coulter administration

Little Rock Public Education Foundation - now defunct, support for teachers

JB Little Rock School District award given in her honor –

ML Story of nudge from friend to dress up for out-going banquet [when the inaugural prize would be announced, given to her]

1 hr 50 min

JB Your quote on Just Communities web-site -

ML Refers to sheltering that happened within family  
When teacher in Helena, riding bus to see husband in hospital, driver tried to force her to back of bus

Discusses color consciousness within African American community

Self-presentation in the schools – neatness, cleanliness in the classroom

All the way to females: a man should be principal

JB Teaching famous for women in the trenches –

ML Story of ‘You’re the principal?’

I was wearing my hair always like this [natural]

1 hr 55 min

JB Natural

ML Natural – never got fired, but bothered some. Students came up and asked to touch

Another discrimination item –overweight, don’t get some chances

JB Have asked on occasion if woman or African American greater factor

ML Expected white male

Tells story on herself as a person who thinks she is non judgmental - learning about a man in a waiting room who turned out to be from Dermott, knew family and rose quite a bit upon acquaintance,

1 hr 60 min [2 hrs]

JB Anything you want to add?

ML Everybody has something to give. My wealth limited, always encourage students who are going on

JB How about your own kids?

ML Describes work of daughter a nurse, a son at city center for youth & elderly, other son a doctor, grandchildren – focusing on young grandchildren now

2 hrs 15 min

Off