

Kathy Webb Interview Summary
June 29, 2018
First Person Plural

Intro – Jo Blatti interviewing Kathy Webb at the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance offices, June 29, 2018 for the First Person Plural project

JB Parents' story

KW Rural Arkansas –requirements teaching
68 years marriage
Craighead, Lawrence County, multiple grades
Taught in Swifton [Jackson County] for a few years
Dad became a Methodist minister
Grocery Blytheville [Mississippi County] post WWII
Older sister polio epidemic, sister OK
Two children, 12, 10 and baby
Hendrix to finish college, then Southern Methodist University

JB Growing up as –

KW Little Rock really home, different churches

5 min in

JB Preacher's kid?

KW All stereotypes about –

JB What mean for you?

KW Good things – as teenager not an always appreciative

JB Best thing?

KW Good meals – people liked my father; he took principled stands – bombing Cambodia.
My mother more political. Strong values, appreciated growing up in the Methodist Church.

JB Often reported story JFK [John F Kennedy] grade school activism in the family

KW Predominately my mother. Her family a big Democratic northeast Arkansas, Adlai Stevenson.
Mock election JFK in 6th grade. Experienced discrimination against girls/women – safety patrol [boys only].

10 min in

JB At that time, where get the grit to protest?

KW I don't know. Read the newspaper – help wanted ads segregated 'men/women.' All the jobs I wanted 'men.' Questioned then.

The teacher went to our church. We got a compromise: I got to be a fire marshal – first girl, big change.
Always noticed – schools offices - boys ran for president, vice-president, girls ran for secretary, treasurer

JB Chores in family boy/girl?

KW Not overly burdened. Didn't have to get a job as a kid

KW We didn't have a dryer – didn't like hanging out clothes
Now I use a clothesline on occasion

JB Quite an athlete when young, other interests?

KW I love to read – books in paper, Nook, audible also
Lifelong love, tennis, baseball

16 min in

I got a baseball uniform for Christmas one year, in a family picture with it
Big anniversary, 8 or 9 at the time

JB Fiction/nonfiction reader?

KW Books - lists recent reads: Mitch Landrieu on Confederate statues New Orleans
Evicted, low income housing [by Matthew Desmond]
Robert Moses [New York city planner] by Robert Caro
Every page of *Alexander Hamilton* by Ron Chernow
The President is Missing [James Patterson], Brene Brown [TED speaker & writer], *Calypso* by David Sedaris

20 min in

JB Book club?

KW No, and happy not to
Hard to make the commitment, like to read on my own

JB Woman's college –

KW Randolph Macon, really happy to do so
Women really every role, would not trade that experience
Integrated with others really fancy restaurant across from college
Sit down meals, laundry bags all clean & folded
Remember protesting working conditions in the laundry
Viet Nam War protest, tennis

JB A lot of company in protest?

KW Bishop Spong [Episcopal priest, known for provocative positions theologically & socially]
Close to [Washington] D.C.

Particularly being in the East, helped me to see a lot I wouldn't see in Arkansas
One trip, parents would be mortified- hitchhiked with National Guard members, would be facing
off later in the day

25 min in

JB Speaks to how closely people could communicate in that time

KW I didn't know what I wanted to do when I graduated
Enrolled at UCA, graduate work in history
Hired in the Little Rock School District, history & Spanish
Halfway to degree

JB How moved toward now?

KW Various things – married, divorced, joined NOW [National Organization for Women]

JB Marriage – gay people who married 'college try?'

KW After we divorced, really came to terms

30 min in

Particularly at that time –

JB Compared to the East, not as open?

KW No –
Arkansas Gay Rights, met in hotels, no full names
Guy president, I was vice-president – guys wanted to be in charge
I've heard the same thing about Viet Nam and civil rights
1980 pretty big, 20 people, paper bag parade, didn't want to be identified, could be fired
Did have one relationship with a woman in Virginia
My bosses fired me & evicted me upon discovery
White privilege to hide behind
I'm lucky, had options

35 min in

My family supported

JB Made national role NOW – not endorsed by the leadership – from regional base

KW Describes national NOW board run from Arkansas – on the national board,
Decided two years later to run for office as national secretary, Arkansas a state with low
representation, not helpful to ticket
Had met Debby Wilhite, political organizer, white Chevy – across the country, flew to Florida &
Michigan
Debby organized delegates & off I went

40 min in

Parents came to conference, hospitality room

JB Impressed with support, I'm guessing –

KW Yes, president of NOW soon hired Debby

JB So far, only case study American LGBTQ woman in politics – notes content of the article ["Beyond Lesbian Identity" by Christina Standefer in *Gender and Political Commitments in America*, Janis L Edwards ed. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Bks, 2009)]

KW I hope you'll send me

After 20 years, back to Arkansas, almost the same as when I left

45 min in

Fundraiser for John Kerry [2004] \$16,000 – act like we're
2004 formed Stonewall Caucus, too

JB 1969, Stonewall New York City [June 28-29, 1969]?

KW Within a couple of years - have somebody run for office – Atlantic paper
Victory Fund [political action committee dedicated to increasing the number of openly LGBTQ public officials in the U.S.]
Alice Lytle & I went off to boot camp in Colorado
Define yourself before somebody else does: small business owner; church; competency
Arkansas Democrat endorsement

50 min in

Best team – good candidate
You can't run a campaign and do the campaigner's job
'You need to raise \$5000 today & don't call me until you do'
Well-oiled campaign

JB Then ran unopposed

KW Until city election [Little Rock – 2014 Ward 3, opponent Geoffrey Yamauchi]

JB Want to situate you before return to Little Rock

KW With NOW almost six years

55 min in

JB Doorknob story – so impulsive, so uncharacteristic

KW NOW internal politics complex – about a year into second term – council will get ugly
A break would be good

JB Flyer on my doorstep: make \$100,000 Domino's [Pizza]. That would be good.
180% turn

KW Their response: too old, woman [99% guys], mid-thirties. I thought: I can do this. I
Always liked waitressing, the customer service aspect

First few months – physically exhausting: washing floors, delivering pizzas. Promoted, promoted,
promoted.

Ad proved to be true.

This watch – won at Domino's – Rolex – changed the face [originally pizza box].

First woman national manager of the year

Became regional manager at Domino's

1 hr.

My boss far right – had worked for Trent Lott- very outspoken.

Decided we had to have a debate – you take Clinton, I'll take Bush

I respected my boss, he respected me – I loved him

We spent hours talking - real mentor

Suspected he was gay when we met

JB Did he turn out to be?

KW After we got to a certain point, he admitted

Instead of coming out, out of state bars

Got AIDS, died

After I came back to Little Rock, Frank came to see me, still in Chicago

My mother died and Frank died

He would have been so proud

Early 1990s

JB Boss who razzed you a lot, gave people the space –

KW Some people would have taken offense – 'Hilary'

Whole lot of guys making \$100,000

I was there to do my job

They didn't harass my job

I could invite women in, I was able to do that

Fascinated that I was from Arkansas and knew the Clintons

Full blown AIDS made me very sad

He would not tolerate any of things people are talking about now

JB People that came up in the 1960s & 70s, vestiges of chivalry – agree with that?

KW Don't agree that vestiges were beneficial, had to work 2x as hard –

1 hr. 10 min in

At Domino's, a couple of guys, making the case, I learned to come in, the numbers didn't speak
for themselves

Women twice as hard, being a lesbian

If you don't think I'll make it, I'll prove it to you

JB The old joke true equality = mediocre woman running a Fortune 500 company

KW Amen.
Manning the table, staffing the table, doctor - his name/her name/ a little extreme

JB The pedestal not useful. but recent changes to family law not entirely helpful to mothers and children
Brief discussion follows

1 hr. 15 min in

JB World of food and restaurant punctuated by nonprofits

KW Fell into food at Domino's – operations
Like making things run well/hospitality/restaurant/campaign

JB Cook, how learn?

KW Practice. Mainly in Chicago – a few political things. 1996 Democratic Convention
Debby [Wilhite], Clinton's second inaugural
Really enjoyed that experience

JB Second inaugural, Komen

KW Friend had breast cancer. Bush was president; we all did the race together.
Ended up coordinating Komen affiliate in Chicago until I moved about three years later
20th race last year

1 hr. 20 min in

They tracked me down for that

JB Did you wear Wonder Woman [costume]?

KW Who knew that would become important in my life?

JB When I moved to Arkansas about 20 years ago, Lily's [Dim Sum and Then Some] donation system

KW When I worked at Domino's, Frank always donated pizzas. I always wanted to be in charge so I could choose. Restaurants get called on a lot for food. We had a big fundraiser a couple of weeks ago.

JB Favorite things to cook?

KW Probably nothing
Go into prep mode – took me a while to figure out.

1 hr. 25 min in

Grilling, barbecue

Also, being sick [breast cancer], got me out of the habit

I think about it. Death in the family – I get asked for favorites, corn casserole, pecan pie, chess pie, coca cola cake, spring rolls, cold sesame noodles. Restaurant size quantity, still had gallons. Remember several people – my mother, Mary Ann McGowan's mother, Lou Hodges –

Cook here [Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance for families

After I got sick didn't have time, but others do.

JB You mentioned the Victory Fund earlier – you did an interview with them, talking about small victories in political life

KW Not all on the national scene, look at the Tippi McCullough story in Arkansas [Mount St. Mary's, October 2013]

The anti-bullying bill in Arkansas legislature - sexual orientation, sexual bias

I didn't sponsor, thought it would easier if not

First open LGBT on city board [Little Rock]

1 hr. 35 min in

Tippi [McCullough] -marriage/fired

The fact that several open[ly LGBT] candidates this year – a victory

Fight on

JB To what do you refer?

KW If GOP appoints somebody hostile, Arkansas has no protections

Continues discussion of Tippi McCullough case & candidacy – she grew up in family that struggled

JB A couple of years ago, people would have said ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] dead. Make a difference?

KW No, no

Will not find any GOP women supporting ERA

1 hr. 40 min in

If another state ratified, there'd be a challenge

A couple of Democratic women killed in committee – abortion

Devoted several years of my life to it [earlier] but –

JB Finding common ground, how?

KW Look for what have in common

Work on aspects we agree on. Ex. - tweet John Boozeman [R- Senator Arkansas] for farm bill vote

1 hr. 45 min in

We're not getting anything done
Core group GOP women texting last night
I work with Governor [Hutchinson – GOP]. He was voted best conservative. I was best liberal.
We met a couple of weeks ago.

JB ERA – don't you think some GOP women might go for it?

KW No- abortion. Ex. - economic issues – I know we had common ground on those issues.

1 hr. 50 min. in

JB Future – more on your own?

KW Running for reelection [Little Rock city board Ward 3, 2018]
City government very exciting
City of compassion - aspirational goals, cities around the world: homelessness, racial equity, schools

1 hr. 55 min in

Progressive city, more livable city, walkable city

JB Anything you would like to add?

KW Addiction, impact AA[Alcoholics Anonymous] 36 years, leave it at that
Insights into issues that a lot of people struggle with
That's a battle, cancer's a battle
Glad to wake up and fight another day

JB I look forward to more of your adventures, as many do –

2 hrs. - OFF