

**Diana Gonzales Worthen Interview Summary**  
**First Person Plural**  
**8 August 2015**

Intro – Jo Blatti interviewing Diana Gonzales Worthen for First Person Plural in her office, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Saturday 8 July 2015

JB Start how, where grew up?

DGW Grew up in Texas, born in California  
Father in navy, Monterey Bay, my mother Watsonville, California  
55 years old  
Four of us born Watsonville, my mother from migrant farm worker background

JB Texas story?

DGW Giddings through sixth grade, going to buy land  
Oldest of five, moved to Rockdale near Austin  
Junior college Blinn, twirler there, very involved band

I played clarinet, we were very involved  
Parents want to give us opportunities they didn't have – Girls Scouts, athletics

JB Your sport?

DGW Not stellar – loved socialization, tennis, volleyball, track  
Always band, baton twirling  
I never in a million years – karate turned out to be my sport

6 min in

Drama Club, very well rounded  
Student Council allowed to visit other parts of U.S. – Kansas City, national conference  
First time for me, brand new  
5000 population hometown  
Fantastic band & athletic programs  
Football movies – whole communities

JB Texas, whole Southwest, long Hispanic history, one of many Hispanic families?

DGW In Giddings – half the teachers African American, the only teachers of color  
No Hispanic teachers either school district  
That was my normal  
Not many international students  
Were immigrant families, many from Mexico  
They struggled, latched onto bi-lingual  
Dad's first language Spanish, his family from San Luis Potosi, bi-lingual

12 min in

All struggled in school

Mother first language English, she struggled in Spanish  
They decided we would learn English

JB Did you learn Spanish at home?

DGW Parents spoke some [esp. if wanting to keep something private], immersed when at aunts, uncles  
Understood culture, couldn't speak well  
Parents: OK, today no one can speak English, total silence, lot of sign language  
I married husband, daughter, moved to Arkansas 1996  
1996 – influx Hispanics  
My Spanish improved Texas to Arkansas – students were teachers

15 min in

I was asked to interpret a lot  
I grew up bi-cultural  
Very thankful  
That's why I was placed  
Mexican music at home  
Mix Mexican food & American food

JB Your folks' decisions – other decisions  
Women in society?

DGW My mother – community - Poland, Italians, Japanese families, just south San Jose  
Best strawberries, rich farmland, culturally diverse  
Taken aback in Texas  
Dad fast pitch softball  
1960s restroom white/colored women

20 min in

White, how classified  
Mother taught us how to handle things on your own: mow lawn, change a flat, not depend on a man  
Very much in favor of marriage an equal  
Never thought about it too much  
Dad didn't grow up that way: traditional – mother said absolutely not  
Totally against the stereotype, dad generally the spokesperson, but after they had discussed  
Support you to do whatever you want to do  
Must be something beyond high school

25 min in

JB Mother work?

DGW Yes. Generally two jobs  
Supervisor housekeeping at local hospital, also cleaned houses on the side  
Took me  
I had my first house in sixth grade  
I did that on the side

In ninth grade we moved into a house slightly larger – swimming pool  
Parents: we'll know all your friends

JB What did dad do?

DGW Entrepreneur

Alcoa in Rockdale smelting plant initially a clerk, 1 ½ years college, then computer age, scoring very well on math test  
Wrote 95% of programs for Alcoa  
On side, rental properties  
We all helped – we painted, helped with repairs  
Often times, immigrant families, dad would finance note  
When banks wouldn't give mortgage

30 min in

Did taxes for people  
Doing that to this day – mainly Spanish speaking  
Tamale house on farm

Mother has M.S. [multiple sclerosis] diagnosed at 48, bound to wheelchair  
Father primary caregiver – can tell you all about hotels, ADA accessible, very good complement  
Mother never met a stranger  
We're all big talkers

JB Real testament – could we turn that [small fan off]  
How end up at an Arkansas school instead of Texas?

DGW My husband accountant, father-in-law wanted him to work in family business [here in NW Arkansas]

My undergraduate Blinn Junior College  
Biology/pre-med University of Houston  
Met husband, married, moved to San Antonio  
First teaching assignment Lubbock [TX], then Waco, Dallas/Plano Junior High  
Gave me grounding, also received M.A. science education  
Moved to Arkansas February 1996

38 min in

The goal to stay home with 2 1/2 year old daughter until kindergarten - then business takeover, father-in-law fell ill  
Decision for me to go back to work  
Only position in the field Rogers ESL/biology

40 min in

My Spanish 'mas o meno' [trans: 'more or less']  
Reminded me of my father walking into first grade and not speaking English  
My mom's stories of always feeling behind, always traveling  
Grandmother's recollections of where/season children born

Stories of my parents growing up

Teachers didn't know how to work with the kids – did their best

Thirty kids per semester dropping, never had that  
Cultural mismatch

Papa Rap – Al Lopez, that's where I met him

Lived there for a couple of years, hired to keep peace in the cafeteria

'We hate Mexicans' on the walls

A lot of people thought temporary

45 min in

Would move away

Didn't understand teachers

Student: 'I didn't know what, signed up for French; I know Spanish, barely English, signed up for French'

The rule was parents have to come at 7:30 a.m. [to adjust student schedule]. If on the Tyson line –  
Counselors got tired of seeing me

I tried to be - ; I made a lot of phone calls to Mom & Dad

Papa Rap – break dancers group

He did a phenomenal job with the multi-cultural club

I was trying to show gifts my kids had – could do it in Spanish

I would bring encyclopedia [being tossed] to my room, find *National Geographics* at garage sales

51 min in

That's what led to grant-writing

I would talk to my parents & husband

Kids need resources – ESL & science

I'm in both: can we split it, link class & materials

Ballet Folklorico dance troupe

Math & Science school Hot Springs

Bi-lingual books at library, Springdale – brought in people to read circa 1998

55 min in

At church, cultural mismatch, Spanish/English services

Why don't we teach ESL & Spanish classes?

AND bring the two classes together, build relationships?

JB Catholic?

DGW growing quickly, used to be 100% white Caucasian

Now largest in state, five services, four in Spanish

Initially no priests that were bi-lingual, eventually Mgr. Scott Friend

After that, always bi-lingual

Going to school part-time, started doctorate

Was offered Holmes scholarship

JB What is that?

DGW Describes Holmes program: goal to increase students of color in education programs nationally, lots of monitoring & mentoring

61 min in

JB Technically, don't qualify ethnicity –thinking of fastball story – complicated matters

DGW Shows where we are, when in college, no faculty of color  
ESL endorsement in Arkansas, the faculty in back five Latino PhDs

JB Project RISE –

DGW Back up – Rogers. Now immersed in community. Only Hispanic teacher, met others also.

65 min in

Asked thirteen about starting Hispanic Women of Arkansas [HWOA] – purpose to advance educational opportunities for women and children, learn about Hispanic culture, participate actively, describes work of organization, founded 1999

2000-01 U of A, full-time, then went to Springdale, lot of professional development  
SYOPS – sheltered development strategies

70 min in

Five years - learned about a Kansas State program, through Holmes scholar connection  
Wrote successful grant to implement in Springdale  
RISE is second version in northwest Arkansas – rural areas Green Forest and others  
Frightening for veteran teachers when don't have the tools & strategies  
Combination face-to-face & on-line

75 min in

Identifies RISE team members

JB Here almost 20 years, witnessed migration almost in entirety, plus various punditry  
What do you think has changed?

DGW Different now – if anything, I don't know language – Marshallese  
Know who to go to  
Fourth fastest growing Latino population in the country

Case study: how communicate? Bi-cultural, cultural sensitivity  
This area more astute about that  
If newcomer from monolingual area – that different for that person as well  
Always a need  
For me the students I taught 1996-99, the questions in English: Ms Worthen, your Spanish better  
They're applying for citizenship  
Their questions about college for kids

82 min in

Student now bi-lingual & going on to post-secondary  
You still see some of the same things if new to community  
But now more resources than 20 years

JB Public school system in Little Rock impacted by private schooling –

DGW Not a lot of private schools  
Two charter schools as well

85 min in

JB Education has become politicized, whole School of Education [UA-F] accused by *Arkansas Times* [weekly statewide alternative paper] as bought & sold by Waltons –

DGW Hmmm- I work on a grant. I've seen a lot of change, sometimes funding there, sometimes not between Walton, Rockefeller. They're looking at quality of life – two sides.  
Endowed chairs, specific purposes  
Higher ed[ucation] – diverse thinking, you want that funding, also common ground

90 min in

Example: three of us at college [of education] on U.S. Civil Rights Advisory panel  
[tuition issue at college level]  
A student of mine was last to leave classroom – 'I don't have papers & I want to go to college'  
No, parents brought me as child  
Same way my grandparent became permanent residents/citizens  
Doesn't make sense  
We had a discussion about that - the Dream Act  
I thought that was wonderful [diplomatically does not reveal outcome]

95 min in

That's where I go back to how I was raised  
Am I really in the right place?  
What am I doing here?

JB I'm thinking about your daughter –

DGW Senior year Washington University St Louis med school, interested in working with  
psychiatrically vulnerable populations  
Different activities – softball, tried to help her blossom  
We don't get degrees in parenting  
Call upon friends & family  
Raised her to be independent

JB Friends similar upbringing?

DGW Several friends already married, not important to her right now  
Volunteering at an immigrant health clinic

JB Very curious – political campaigns 2008/2012

DGW 2006/2012

JB Carrying the flag or serious?

DGW Ooh, hard -

Asked both times. First time, off guard. Need somebody who understands the community  
Approachable, not many  
Daughter in sixth grade - of course .  
Husband, more protector – have to have thick skin  
People curious about how treated, never felt mistreated  
People talked to me  
Partisanship – ‘that party’

106 min in

I didn't win, gave the best shot  
More Latino candidates  
2012, Arkansas Senate  
\$73,000  
Tamales to support campaign [parents], my sister  
Would like to run again  
Mindful of time, compelled to serve  
Legislature where I'm drawn

JB Arkansas Nonprofit Alliance

DGW Al Lopez & I – One Community, complemented HWOA  
Bring people together  
Collaborating with Arkansas Nonprofit Alliance, later ACE [Arkansas Center for Excellence]  
Latino & Marshallese leadership

Lot of training of parents – Latino parent  
Parents Take Leadership Action – 15 immigrant families and three schools, gifts to table

115 min in

Question: challenge, how solve it as parents  
Legacy project at children's school  
Just finished third year  
Family Literacy program – bi-lingual books, keep kids at grade level over summer  
Third year, just finished  
Expanded every year, over 1300 books

120 min in [2 hrs ]

Then community program Springdale

JB Community cultural festival-

DGW Cultural program Springdale/Shiloh Museum partner, break dancers, mariachis  
Look out to audience, they all ran out of stuff

800 backpacks filled with books  
Variety of foods, diverse entertainment

2 hrs 5 min in

Access to services, fun venue

JB How long?

DGW Fourth year, started with Fayetteville, Springdale since, they wanted us

JB Owner martial arts –

DGW Continuing interest – Plano seven, years, sold to my first black belt  
At night, when not teaching, 75 students  
Husband in law school, gave baton lessons Parks & Recreation  
Self-defense class- loved it  
Being coordinated, good workout  
1988, female rookie of the year  
Little at a time, competed all over the state  
Loved teaching, also worked out

2 hrs 15 min in

At Plano, saw how it could help students  
Developed ‘at risk’ karate program nine boys  
Five stayed with me, three mornings a week  
Principal used coke machine money to support  
Senior – all friends have dropped out, but I’m graduating  
Following year, we moved  
I want my students to be successful, families too

Don’t ever have to ask if can put a student in my classroom

JB So generous [with time]

One last question: Arkansas Advocates, Rockefeller Foundation – translate from teacher role?

DGW For both boards –

Advocates, do research, hopefully that can turn into good policy: Ex. ARKids  
Other nonprofits – as work together, often same issues  
As a board member, easy for me to see examples  
That’s how I can help: what about undocumented students?  
As an educator, you can go to college, but you can’t?  
I feel I need to speak  
In both of them, I served because I believe in their work  
Advocates on behalf of families  
For Rockefeller – education forward, it’s really a good match

2 hrs 25 min

Nonprofits start because somebody not being served



I certainly ask question  
I certainly hear both of them [referring to parents]:  
My mother: come on use your head  
My father: there's always a way

Mother in check out line, little boy in line  
Adults passing him by, my mother said, 'he's next'  
These lessons ring true today  
Don't do this work by yourself  
So many women –

2 hrs 30 min in

JB      Wonderful place to say thank you –