

Sandra Keiser Edwards
FPP Interview Summary #2
April 2021

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Intro - 7 April 2021, Jo Blatti interviewing Sandra Keiser Edwards for First Person Plural. Second interview. Checking levels

SE Delighted to be with Jo Blatti today as we continue our interview.

JB You observed that Girl Scouting important – how? What you remember?

SE Mid-1950s & 1960s – fundamental.
Parents empowered me to follow own path.
Scouts gave structure, how functioned together with goals and objectives, personal growth
Eleanor Shorts dedicated teacher and Girl Scout leader
Troop and core strength, very disciplined. Rural Virginia.
Most beloved activity camping – bunkhouse, wilderness, creating meals, doing it in horrible weather and not complaining.
Our family never camped. Father served in World War II, never wanted to do that. Delighted that Scouts took care of -. Lived on Appalachian Trail.

5 min in

Badges, deep dive into subject matter. Curved bar, first class. Continued into college.
Prepared for role in feminism, capability women could make.
Mother active volunteer
That model community service: surrounded strong women - vaccines, PTA [Parent Teacher Association]
I channeled it more in professional career

JB Remember mother assisting domestic workers, specifics?

SE One young man, entertainment and catering
Young woman in our household toward nursing
She took volunteer work to rehab center – actually worked there

10 min in

My father wondered how she [mother] could be qualified to work, more than qualified
Went on to a very long dedicated, successful career
I was surrounded by very capable, caring women, invested a lot in me

JB All your siblings had college educations – raised to expect?

SE Father couldn't in depression, his oldest sisters did
Mother: education, the one gift no one can take from you

All [of us] studied liberal arts
Know how to be intellectually curious
Power of education to contribute members of society
That was the time we should grow up
Rite of passage, after four years
Had to have figured out what was next
Credit Girl Scouts with freedom to choose what I wanted to do
Senior year in high school selected to represent Girl Scouts in Switzerland international round-up

15 min in

JB What was that like?

SE Host homes, very freeing
In Switzerland when lunar landing happened [20 July 1969]. Hiked 5-10 miles to see TV on moon 1969 summer

JB Girls/boys chores in home?

SE I don't recall that. Amazing to me. Father ahead of his time in that regard –
Three mowable acres – Gravely tractor, grew up on it.
Grew up on horses, cleaned out stalls, put chains on cars.
Acolyte, candles, offering [at church] just boys, also paper route just for boys.
On a date, roles delineated
At home, pretty democratic
Father: weeds don't know it's Sunday –

20 min in

JB Described high school integration as 'successful' – what successful meant?

SE Looking through eyes of the community at that time. Very strong black community, a great school system that was torn apart. Nobody protested.
Juxtaposed Little Rock, other examples of the time
We had very few black teachers - that had to be hard.
How much better it would have been if they'd distributed more of the teaching staff?
Our school stayed the same and we had blacks join us. Success meant I can't remember any parents who complained about this.
Was that the best thing?

JB Where the teachers went?

SE I think they stayed in the [existing] schools. The kids moved.

JB Get to know the students?

SE Oh, yes. We formed friendships. Also got to know Amish and Mennonite, who stopped school in the 7th/8th grade and went to farm. My family socialized with others in context of church.
Helped anticipate the world changing –

JB College years – ‘activist heart’?

25 min in

SE Primarily student activities, principally around music. Very interested in making sure that everyone could come, campus-wide. That said, I was in a sorority, understand exclusivity. Discusses open/closed organizations, membership organizations. Participation in student government, honor council. Describes honor code as hard work, not my cup of tea.

JB Main event this conversation Crystal Bridges

SE In the way I describe it, I hope it will seem a natural evolution, the arts, whether visual, performing arts, music. The arts a significant part of any community’s life

30 min in

Business aspect in New York, California never appealed

Providing opportunities to the communities I lived in always the commitment
Gives example/mission of public broadcasting in central Pennsylvania
Clay [Edwards, late husband] and I lived and worked together for almost 25 years. Then he wasn’t here – overnight.
Was I going to continue?
Approached by Walton family, intrigued

35 min in

SE Loved Arkansas
Regional/national cultural destination

Each area I have worked, been asked to help build something
I’m in my 14th year, came after groundbreaking, going from concept to reality
This very day, another 100,000 sq. ft. expansion [underway]
Concept of wellness, whole health institute. We’re ready.
We’ve talked about anti-racist - create programs.

JB Do you find that reflected in visitor demographic?

SE Ten years in – highly educated
Progress in targeted programs for more representative audiences. Go where people are, outreach within communities.

40 min in

Time works against us. Societal barriers, continue chipping away.

JB Examples of programs found effective?

SE Yes - weekends - dedicated spring on the grounds, specific programs for Latinx, LBGQ. Great success with that. Anything with families a great success.
Significant project with food bank, also put an art kit (well done)
New one next time
Outreach, not so branded.
At our best with other partners improving the quality of life

45 min in

JB Mentoring/mentor

SE Healthy work environment
Constantly helping others and healthiest is one where you continue to learn
The team at Crystal Bridges and Momentary, I am learning so much from them.

Being vulnerable: I can use your help.

You talked about technology. We're all in this together -

Young staff member wanted to talk about how to interface with others – apparently had appreciated my style
Had observed my style. Took as a remarkable compliment.
Everybody is watching -

Still work with Girl Scouts. Not as much one on one, more strategic –

JB Other public activities - AAUW [American Association of University Women]?

50 min in

SE As relevant as when my mother was a member – but different
A lot of legal issues today
A friend, no longer living, Anne Drummond – just deal us in, don't leave it up to us

JB How, if at all, do you think women opportunities have changed?

SSE Opportunities are greater. A generation of women don't have to second guess
The whole idea of equality has yet to really take hold, still live in society that is gender-biased
Even I who am female

More honesty, less game-playing
Women in high school speak out, healthy signs
Making progress. Are we there yet? No. Hopeful.

JB You've spent a great deal of time with artists – transformative?

SE Incredible question – blessed to be around

In the music area -
Beatles – as 11–12-year-old realized they were transformative. I got to grow with them.
Growing up with Bob Dylan at the same time

55 min in

Beatles more a window and mirror my own feelings and thoughts -
Elton John the same way - transformative for me
Watching and being a part of
Never a fan, spent most of my life working with them [fans], facilitating fanship
Want to write an essay about being a fan
Beatles from the music column

From the art side
One time with Alice Walton, each of us had a different approach
Visual art – can't explain – good with words, enjoy writing
More moved by color and form and gesture – abstract expressionism
Not narrative or realism in our collection
Sherry Mitchell [contemporary Canadian botanical watercolorist], Helen Frankenthaler
[American abstract expressionist painter, 1928-2011] – women interestingly enough

1 hr. in

I see, sense movement, music association – even in more realistic, historical works

Having been in museum for a number of years, more appreciation for some realistic works,
contemporary in their life – I love the stories

One of my favorites – Martin Johnson Heade, hay bales in the field [ca. 1870-75]. It just centers
you.
Love the question -

JB Anything I forgot to ask?

SE Early we discussed church - central to the family, one of community
My parent wanting to make sure I had a system of belief
Confirmation age – asked the minister, he couldn't answer to my satisfaction
Put me a on trajectory, made me a more spiritual person – I have to figure out on my own
More clarified how I feel

1hr 5 min in

Third generation - family culture
Yet encouraged to make my own exploration
Those early years fundamental to path

JB Honorable – doubt as part of faith

SE I started seeing this as social center/club
This is what we believe
The idea of constantly asking forgiveness -
Baptist, Catholic, Jewish had different guidelines, very freeing

My spiritual journey very important thread, very personally

JB Stay Lutheran?

SE Chapter in my life
Affiliated with groups less theologically based— home churched, a lot clearer about my faith. All contributed to it.

1 hr. 9 min in

JB A good place to end –

SE As my father would say – ‘amen’

Brief exchange [delete]

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