

Sandra Hubbard Roberts
First Person Plural Interview Summary
5 October 2021

Intro – Jo Blatti interviewing Sandra Hubbard Roberts (known as Sandra Hubbard) a second time on October 5, 2021. This is a follow up conversation to our initial First Person Plural interview on September 20, 2021. Both will be deposited with the Pryor Center in Fayetteville and the UA Center for Arkansas History and Culture.

JB Thank you. Could I ask you again to say your name and get levels?

SH Sandra Hubbard Roberts, over the hill television producer

JB Life story and work as producer, listening to interview, more as producer
Could you think back again – your own teenage years
The lost year [1958-59 school year] and personal life: repeatedly observed ‘young less afraid than adults around them’
'57 crisis - did this come up in your own household?
Impact older sister’s education?

SH Older sister graduated Central 1955

JB Did your parents talk about Central crisis, school board at dinner table, elsewhere in household? f

SH Not a conversation many had with teenagers
I’ve been told, it seemed something they did not want to discuss with kids

5 min in

Some on side of right/fair
Some no change

Remember talking about where was I going to go to school
I started to Mabelvale –
So late - three weeks of shorthand at Draughon’s business school, [216 West 6th Street, Little Rock. In a follow up email, Hubbard noted that, “Several other displaced girls went to the same classes. We were trying to get up to speed in typing and shorthand, in order to attend other high schools already teaching classes around the state.” SH to JB, Feb 7, 2022]

Lot of kids didn’t go to school at all
Mother/father not activists, not involved
Such an unusual time
Black people only on bus benches
Some people who lived around Central had black friends – in neighborhood
Different around Central

My neighborhood all white – told don’t be involved, don’t be mean
My senior year, one black girl in class. I saw people be mean to her.
One group in school mean to her.

We were just making do.

So amazing that football continued [the previous year].
Rest of us – Steve’s Show after school
I remember asking Steve [Stephens] if blacks ever approached about coming on. He said no.

10 min in

Two high schools in Little Rock, the same plans
Hall/Horace Mann built 1956 – not fair

JB As adult or student?

SH I remember knowing in high school, kids talk to each other
Everybody kept watching tv every night, broadcast every night
Inspired more to come, others to stay home, not get involved at all. Refers to movie, restaurant restrictions of the time.
Interviewed Horace Mann students later
All three of my sons bussed, riding with neighbors and friends

JB Make friends at new schools?

SH Baseball son made friends, invited over, their parents wouldn’t let come. Separate society.
Returns to Women’s Emergency – integrationists.

15 min in

JB Appreciate that.
You married in the mid-1960s –

SH 1964

JB Just as the second women’s movement was taking shape in the 1960s & 1970s
Mentioned hiding feminist articles from husband. Did you read them?

SH Yes!

JB Do you remember any?

SH Wow - so long ago. Agreeing with most of it. Husband ruled – bottom line – fix meals, raise kids, middle of that. Divorce – we weren’t being treated fairly.
Began to ask for a percentage of fees upfront, midpoint and then upon completion.
Describes papermill, trucking clients and jobs, a cameraman who initially had difficulty taking direction from a woman.
Outlines several board meeting situations:
- One in which she answered a question about learning her craft with a housewifery analogy – to the chagrin of her crew/clients. Funny, but don’t diminish what we do with homework analogy.

20 min in

- Gives another example in which she suggested an idea to her clients that initially embarrassed them – and was later adopted with success.

Notes UAMS, banks, most utilities among clients
Comments on situations in which she was treated differently as a woman
A gentleman wanted me to pose nude with him – I wouldn't & didn't work for him again.
The older I got, the more I realized, up to me to stop all that.

Pretty soon I was respected.
Job for one of the big ad agencies – sheriff or something
Didn't like him, not interested
Twice your fee upfront – what time should I be there? Deals were made.
I learned so many things
Heber Springs company -gun that would open/close electricity, didn't have to go up the pole.
You just got educated.

[Moves back to 1950s]
Kids not advocates – in our world, dating, dancing when could
Desegregation crisis historic moment, one of bigger things in my life

25 min in

JB Documentary aesthetic - black & white, found footage
Use of commercial lighting & make-up a decision?

SH As my business developed, better crew support, lot of what I needed
Awful lot of free work nonprofits in those days

Women's Emergency Committee shot at a different time, with different crew
One of the women interviewed told me, 'When they turn on those lights, you become a different person'

30 min in

Production assistant work, photographer's stylist, catalogues
Stylist brochures, Dillard's, etc.
Casting black man as CEO, white woman president, break that mold a little [ca. 1984-1995]
before other people
Real proud of that

JB Leads to related question about hiring decisions, crew –diversity

SH Not in those days – starting to be black cameramen, mainly for tv stations. There weren't many women.
I was unusual
Did a lot for lawyers – videos, settle out of court

JB Mediation?

SH Encourage people who were being sued to settle
Woman and man, who were married couple, favorite make-up artist
I learned that some people reliable, some not
Beauty of running your own business

Raised rates under some circumstances, nuisance fee, describes behaviors that might produce 'nuisance' charges
Describes work at CNN [cable news network] as a 'go-fer' in 1990s, when President Clinton running for office

35 min in

Learned a lot about national news tv production. That was fun.

Remember Susan McDougal? [McDougal and ex-husband Jim McDougal were partners with Bill and Hillary Clinton in the Whitewater real estate deal that came under scrutiny of independent counsel Kenneth Starr in the mid-1990s. Susan McDougal was sentenced to 22 months (served) for civil contempt of court for refusing to testify in the matter. A later trial for criminal contempt and obstruction of justice brought no conviction. President Clinton pardoned McDougal in 2001.]

I was there the day she came in –

JB Handcuffs?

SH Susan came through my door – I had my script ready -
'Susan, did you talk?'
'No.' 'What did you say?'

Hilarious to me!

I'm just not cut out for this!

Tells story of causing a 'scramble' when Kenneth Starr moved from courthouse to federal building next door

JB You've answered generously, anything you'd like to add?

SH 25-year career

40 min in

Told you about movie [*End of the Line*]

Panned because we hired too many hillbillies

I wrote a letter to the editor

Older gentleman had a beard [actor], wasn't going to have anything to do with anybody [narrator confirmed as Wilford Brimley, usually pictured with a moustache]

Story of police hired wanting to quit at 5 p.m.

Only time I cried on set

The day Kevin Bacon was there –

[Interviewer telephone ring for spam call interrupts momentarily]

SH Now try to pay people what they're worth, not what they're asking. Some men liked to hire because I was a woman – nice. Papermill like that.

JB Have an agent?

SH No – word of mouth, recommendations
If I had time to do it

45 min in

Learned to save money early

JB Unless you have closing thoughts –

SH One statement –Steve Stephens, from *Steve's Show* documentary:
'Some days you have to wait 'til the evening to see how beautiful the day has been.'
Been a long haul –
Please don't use [what I'm about to say –]

JB Then I'll turn off –

46:49 min in - OFF