

Beverly Morrow
First Person Plural Interview Summary
October 27, 2021

Jo Blatti interviewing Beverly Morrow on October 27, 2021 for First Person Plural. This is a zoom recording, will be archived at the Pryor Center and at the UA Center for Arkansas History and Culture in Little Rock.

JB Begin by asking family history – growing up, family background

BM Born in Brooklyn [New York]
Parents Eugene and Rebecca Dalrymple
First nine years Bedford-Stuyvesant
Older sister died at age twelve, younger sister died when I was seven

Moved to Flatbush [central Brooklyn neighborhood] when I was nine
Education very important, my dad, did homework with him
Junior high, did well
Miss Simms, a teacher, became close family friend – ninth grade homeroom teacher
One time my mom was going to punish me –
Miss Simms said ‘you never know how this will affect her’

Wanted to go to Bronx High School Science
Counselor not in favor, didn’t get in
Hindsight, best thing

JB Why?

BM MIT workload, high school prepared me

JB Ok
Folks native New Yorkers?

BM Dad, yes – folks from Trinidad
Mom, North Carolina, two years of college
She moved in with a cousin who knew my dad

JB Family rare – two children died – not often encountered
Particular illness?

6 min in

BM Younger sister, cerebral palsy, died at four – that’s why so appreciative Arkansas Children’s Hospital, how medicine has evolved
No physical contact, children not allowed in hospitals then
Last memory when she went away

Older sister, asthma. Most expected to grow out of it.

JB Thank you. I’m sorry -

- BM Looking back, would have been beneficial to have had therapy –
- JB Not everybody grows out of it [asthma]. I remember a chancellor of NYC schools, relatively privileged life, who didn't make it. Ambulances in the city, high-rises -
- BM A lot of advances now. Commercials for asthma medicine. My sister was to be a tester. We lived in a single family house. The ambulance came relatively soon. She was probably gone. The Lord calls you.
- JB I lived in Ft. Green/Clinton Hill
- BM We were on the edge of Prospect Park. Small world. My daughter [Kiisha, lawyer] lives in the house I grew up in now.

11 min in

- JB MIT class, became chemical engineer
- BM 57 in department, 7 women
- JB Large enough to feel a cohesive group?
- BM Yes, that was enough
- JB When I talk to other women of color – hard to tell sometimes whether color/women the issue when coming up –
- BM Yes – example, even with this Woman of the Year [Women's Foundation of Arkansas, 2021] someone asked: why did they? When I spoke with a white lady [also a recipient] she said, 'no one would ask that.' That was interesting.
Some very obvious, some very subtle.

15 min in

- In school, MIT, not many issues in my department, in other departments more.
- JB I wondered. 1970s, lots of women's consciousness on the humanities side, different in the sciences?
- BM At MIT, totally technical. Took a humanities class, easy A, not as well prepared for outside world.

Interviewer laughs

- JB Bed-Stuyvesant, Flatbush – other people, teachers, family? Community around you?
- BM Uncles – Dad's family in Brooklyn
Mom's sister on Long Island
Two-three outside friends who were aunts/uncles because of closeness
Sundays visiting
Christmas big event, very traditional, describes visiting around

I keep that tradition with my children – Christmas is mine.

JB How describe family values?

BM Both parents Sunday school teachers, grew up Methodist [became Baptist] – confirmed at twelve.
Education, giving back, expect no payment
Help other people, respect elders, give up seat

20 min in

Love of family

JB Any organizations – Scouts?

BM Scouts through junior high school [and a leader with her own children]

Youth groups in church and singer in choir
Handball in junior high, not in organized sports

JB Is handball an Eastern thing?

BM Yes, there is a lady out of Brooklyn
In south more double Dutch [jump roping]

Just as many handball courts across the city as tennis courts here when I was coming up

JB You actually attended Erasmus High School in New York City

BM Right. At that time, it had the math and sciences, neighborhood school. Really strong in sciences.
Had AP [advanced placement] classes. In most of the classes, I was the only black person. Played
in the band.
If you had 90s all eight semesters to get this award – really wanted for my father. Fast forward to
graduation -

25 – 28 min in INTERRUPTION NARRATOR ZOOM SIGNAL

I was the only black person to get that award

JB In the midst of telling me of going for this medal for your father

BM Did receive the medal, special announcement, but not in the written program.

JB That seems extraordinary
How many black students?

BM 1440 – 50/50, large number
I was 64th in the class

JB Not as if the school/ doesn't know how to deal with diversity –

BM That was my sendoff high school

30 min in

JB Did that affect MIT?

BM Already accepted. Back then, might not have put that much on it.
Years later, daughter Achilia, brilliant, didn't do well on a kindergarten test.
Narrator explains a situation in which consequences showed up in third grade, she as parent requested a review & matters were resolved in the girl's favor.

It's sad, what happens to the child whose parents don't have the time –

JB A kindergarten test might affect third grade placement –

BM If you can't afford the time, don't have the opportunity –

JB PTAs assume parents work 9 to 5, what about swing shifts, two jobs, tag teaming childcare?

35 min in

Often little understanding how a modern family works

BM How we educate our children needs to evolve

JB Married shortly after college graduation

BM Day after -

JB Both started engineering?

BM He started MBA [Stanford]; he worked for a short time as a mechanical engineer in college
I was at Standard Oil California

JB Your early experiences?

BM Standard Oil had had one or two female engineers at that time
First offer, woman in the field six weeks, didn't consider

Designed equipment

First reaction – black person, then a woman – then getting respect for my decisions

Mentioned I had a mouth

'If you're going to do the work, don't give me the job'

Happens in too many cases

Have to prove yourself, tiring, stressful

JB Did you & your husband compare notes?

40 min in

BM Example: MIT business class

I'm a rule-follower, husband not
Professor test: wrote on mine- is it a coincidence or chance that your answers resemble Mr. Morrow's? Could well have reversed the question -

At Proctor & Gamble: we both interviewed
The interviewer suggested that I was riding on my husband's coattails
At the time, mechanical [Curtis Morrow's field] and chemical [Beverly's] the most different
'I'm not interested in this job, either!'

It arises. You have to choose your battles

Unfortunately, I don't think it's gotten much better. It's a constant.
Just a constant.
I don't want to say – business

When we had the Barbie doll – don't give me the black ones.
Relates some white customer reactions to black dolls [unwanted], choosing to interact to white staff. Her own disciplined responses.

JB In addition to McDonald's, you & your husband got into merchandising -?

BM No, Barbie dolls, Happy Meals [toys]

45 min in

JB Talking McDonald's - we're speaking in a week in which employees are demonstrating in 10 cities about corporate sexual harassment & racial discrimination policies.

This is in response to a particularly awful alleged incident in Pittsburgh

You are associated with women's organizations and with McDonalds that has a reputation for treating employees well.

Some of these protests go back to the time that your family-owned franchises.

Did earlier protests reach Pine Bluff & other stores?

BM The news is about corporate guidelines,
The franchises have individual guidelines
Our stores – TLM – The Lord's McDonald's – Christian values. I made it real clear -
No cursing, very hands on, in the stores most every day
When growing up, 'you look nice.' In this day and age, you can't do that. I tried to make myself accessible to all employees.

50 min in

When things look like a problem, nip in the bud
People have lost jobs, for things might not have other places
Have to treat people fairly; don't curse, don't treat people badly.

Respect person's values. Don't tell sex jokes.

JB Makes sense

The other question that occurred – was this a garden variety national initiative or a regional minority initiative? Trying to recruit in the South?

BM My husband became a full-blown operator in New Jersey.
Curtis -were looking for black applicants
Describes the trial process: 50 hours in stores, then 12 months – 2 years, all the McDonald's training, still might not be offered a franchise
Offered two stores in the New Jersey area
Wanted a new store – when this new store appeared in Arkansas

55 min in

JB You had to go through the same –

BM Yes, I had to be an approved owner-operator; I think they give you twelve months.

[Narrator refers to background noise]

JB How balance? Three kids, right?

BM Four kids, one 6 months -

JB Did you have household help?

BM No, I look back now, no idea where the energy came from -

[Closes door against noise]

It's really funny, now that I'm retired, have a housekeeper
Ten years, one store
No way I could have managed multiple stores and raised my kids, so I didn't take away from the time with my kids growing up

JB Take me through a typical day, how balance it?

BM When I moved here, they were twelve [Achilia], ten [Kiisha], eight [Chane] and 6 months [Asha]

JB Also, not an easy transition - Arkansas not an immediate love affair
What was hard about it?

BM Young baby, had to do so much. No real close friends. No family. Didn't cope well. Would go to New York. Five years. I would drive back. When got to Memphis, welcome to Arkansas sign, tears would come down. My kids would say: 'Mom, it's going to be all right.' Came to a point: make the most of it or leave.

1 hr. in

That propelled me, first board 1989, 90. Opened up a new world, a different world. A servant in the community. Made me happy.

My husband always says if you're around someone long enough either hate them or love them. Helped me grow as a person.

JB Four kids, store –

BM So - approved operator '89.
Asha 2 1/2, mother's day out program, church down the block
When Curtis was home, he watched Asha
Then I did a lot of work while she was in school

Cooked dinner, kids helped with homework, they helped me housekeeping
Husband/mom, split store and house for awhile
Store at 5 a.m., sleep at midnight

JB Grueling schedule

When all the kids home, thought no one really helping
When left with Asha, could see –
For six years, I really had the stair steps -

JB When moved to Little Rock?

1 hr. 5 min in

BM We stayed in Pine Bluff until Asha graduated high school. We moved to Little Rock 2005, 2006 – a good decision on our part. Important for the kids to grow up in a black community.

JB Strong black college, black middle class –

BM In Jersey really had to be intentional about getting together with black families, church and elsewhere in Freehold Township

JB Late 1980s – volunteerism in Pine Bluff, first?

BM Volunteers in Court, helped former inmates pay restitution
Then United Way of SE Arkansas

[Interviewer phone rings once]

Opened up eyes to a number of committees. That was the start.
Go in to help, come out with so much more.

Don't want to rubber stamp
Want to make a difference to community we're serving.

JB Importance of medical – family's experience
Other particular opportunities you look for?

BM In line with mission?
Children, women
Advancement black business, entrepreneurs – happening in that community
Education – that’s our way out of this mess
Learning to accept people as they are
Black people especially
A lot of money thrown at issues: not much has changed
Looking for measurable results, sustainable

JB Talking earlier about your experiences, have women’s opportunities changed?

BM More than black persons’. One or two is nice, but not great.
One Beverly Morrow – many others better than Beverly Morrow
That’s where some of my concern is.

1 hr. 15 min in

In California, have to have women on boards
How many blacks, Latin American women will be?
All of us have different perspectives, all needed to go forward

JB Significant issues in the ways women/men address issues in community organizations?

BM Men tend to go from point A to point B
Women look at the humanity of the situation, more compassion.
Take into consideration people as individual, rather than conglomerate – a big difference
To get to B.
Men straight, women know might have to do a detour, will be more advanced [in the end]-

JB The person I’m talking to trained as a scientist, how informs your work in business/philanthropy?

BM Contrasts: McDonald’s instructions for milkshake, air conditioning, her training in physical sciences
Used to be able to help with kids’ math homework, probably not now –

Being analytical about things
Everybody knows how to count their money –
I think I still use it all, the foundation -

1 hr. 20 min in

JB Anything I haven’t thought to ask?

BM Hopefully fits your format
Really blessed, friends very different, from everywhere

Fortunate in education, business, opportunity to make a difference

JB Thank you

1 hr. 22 min OFF