

Charlotte Schexnayder Tape Summary
First Person Plural Project
8 March 2012

Intro –

JB Your background southeast Arkansas, town of Tillar

CS Born there December 25, 1923 lived there until went to LSU [Louisiana State University]
Mother teacher, father had store in McGhee
Mother very literate, \$50, paid in warrants
Moved back to Tillar 1931

JB Describe a little bit

CS Desha County, founding relative Sam Terry, farm where Varner Correctional facility now sits
His sister Annie Mitchell had farm four miles from Dumas

JB Late 19th century?

CS Varner 1840s
Very early, [called] Oakwood before 1850

6 min in

My grandfather one of the Terry twins – Dennie Pink Terry
His brother Dennison Broad Terry clerked in store in Red Fork, became bookkeeper of R.A.
Pickens & Son, 35,000 acres

My grandfather lived in Pickens till 1900, had 100 acre farm, 2-story store, D.B. Terry store
Model A Ford
I would travel around with him, he would ask me questions: did you see this?
Taught me reporting

JB Remember questions?

CS Turtles in stream? Lunch with farm manager, black family, big bell, ring for lunch. I always
loved to go there

10 min in

Dogtrot

Father died when I was seven – pneumonia.
Horrible 1931 - grandfather, Bright's disease
Family plantation – 5 cent cotton
Mother, remarkable comeback, never complained
Storyteller, great ability

JB Grandmother?

CS Died before I was born
Taught school, how met grandfather
Father - Jewell Stephen Tillar, from Selma, Arkansas
Founded town 1870, born 1886
Mother Bertha [Tillar], born 1882
Father youngest, his father country doctor

JB How meet?

CS Went to same school, small town, 200 people
My mother went to Galloway College [Searcy, Arkansas]
7th grade in Tillar, school in Little Rock [for girls]
Then Searcy – [age] 12 to Little Rock, [age] 13 to Galloway
Wonderful descriptions
Developed slow fever, don't finish degree

15 min in

Eloped, started teaching,
We went along with her [much later when finished degree]

My first job stuffing envelopes

JB What did you do with the money?

CS Saved it!

JB Same chores as brother?

CS No, he was older
Brother I army after one year in college, 1935, '36
A & M [Agricultural & Mechanical, now University of Arkansas -Monticello] for a year
Wanted to be in Air Force, went into Army Medical Corps
Mother talented violinist – Cincinnati Conservatory
taught violin lessons
I would go home, do chores from time 10 years

JB What about music?

CS I was a dud!
My mother wanted me to take music in college
I couldn't hear well enough – taught me appreciation. I listen a lot

JB Messages? Speak so eloquently about mother -

CS To whom much is given, much is required
Tramps came to door, we gave them left from lunch, shared
Richly blessed because of education

Darkest day before dawn
She lived with us for 27 years

Families lived together back then
Extremely cultured

JB Hard to do in small town Arkansas sometimes

22 min in

CS Delta rich culture, if don't live in it, hard to explain

JB Your mom: needed experience of living in big city

CS Mom played solitaire, 1933, if beat Sol 3 times-

JB How find the money?

CS Small inheritance

When sophomore at Arkansas A & M [Arkansas Agricultural and Mechanical College, now University of Arkansas Monticello], 'you and I going to University of Chicago this summer'

Arkansas A & M less than 500

Saw a lot of the cultural things, Jimmy Dorsey, Cab Calloway, museums, parks, apartment
University of Chicago

26 min in

There when telegram brother killed World War II
Went to LSU 1943

[Here comes lunch - can take a break]

Met husband ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps]
All kinds of schools at LSU, 3000

JB Big school then

28 min in

End first session

Begin second session

JB Role models in home World War II, lots of women

CS Student newspaper, encourage greatly by Monticello newspaper, woman and man
Clarence and Iva Isch

Break did come in World War II

Call to come back to McGhee

People distrusted women, suit with saddle oxfords [Note: shoes and socks fashionable in part because women's stockings scarce due to wartime shortages.]

I want to see editor – ‘just a girl!’
Speaks of murder on Railroad Street
Many, many experiences
Women shouldn't cover sports
Prove yourself
Two women editors at the time: me & Esther Bindursky from Lepanto
Two gigolos as escorts at state meeting
We sat and giggled

JB At what point feel proved yourself?

CS My place not where they were
When we married, back to LSU
Never any doubt there, women had held the country together

35 min in

JB [Returning to murder scene story] when faced with trooper, how talked yourself in?

CS You stood around and talked, established people who has standing

Alan Templeton, deputy sheriff, getting it right, different time
Not unlike legislature

JB Parole board same dynamic?

CS [Then Governor] David Pryor, why me?
Fair & tough, I thought it a conflict of interest as journalist
Consulted Bob Fisher, attorney general staff
Bob Sells, those two men, you'll bring a different viewpoint
If I had been mother [of those boys]
[Note: Fisher, originally from Crossett, had been in journalism; Sells in public relations for Southwest Bell at the time CS is discussing State Pardons and Parole Board decision in 1974.]

JB More about that

CS For Parole board, tenderer. Sometimes too emotionally - What might be done to help them
‘Never had a place to stay’
Maybe more human touch
Closest friend Bill Hamilton, black educator

JB I'm wondering – people some experience being on outside

CS Yes, I'd been on outside some, an education

40 min in

I could do that

Our family always interested in government

JB Spoken quit extensively about women legislators

CS When my class – four women total: Nancy Balton, Wanda Northcutt, Myra Jones

[Note: Schexander (Dist 85), Balton (Dist.38), Jones (Dist. 60), Northcutt (Dist. 84) and Shirley Meacham Calhoun (Dist 73) joined four other women already elected to the Arkansas House in 1985 - doubling the number of women in the legislature and bringing female representation to 9% out of 100 districts. Carolyn Pollan (Dist. 27), Gloria Cabe (District 59), Irma Hunter Brown (Dist. 64) and Peggy Hartness (dist. 92) were already seated in the House at the time of the 75th General Assembly.]

Men suspicious

We got devious

Four doubled to eight, then twenty-one

[Note: Schexnayder served as Representative, District 74 in Arkansas legislature, seven (7) terms 1985-1997.]

At first, total disinterest women's caucus

JB How function?

CS Occasionally support, oppose an issue, mainly information group

JB Remember an issue worked as group?

CS When Huckabee was going to parole a rapist
One Republican in group
More informative, supportive

JB Your sense, joking about male legislators

CS Bill Foster, England area, editor & women, no way I'd like, after week changed my mind
Serious, worked
Had to work twice as hard
Tried to do without a lot of flash, not easy

JB Curious about newspaper

CS How walked the line?
Created a good staff
Monday-Friday at legislature, worked on paper every weekend
Met every 2 years, could cover some events for papers, some cross pollinations
What best for district
Economic cost – could figure up [advertising] campaigns easily, lost those while in legislature

JB How work with regional commitments?

50 min in

CS Prove self one step, National Newspaper Association, National Press Women, Arkansas Press Association
Because [legislative] sessions every other year
Only one person doubted

JB Who?

CS All else said as long as done both well
If you prove yourself ...

JB As doing "firsts," encounter -

CS Oh, yes, oh, boy'
There was a feeling women didn't belong
National News wasn't too welcoming

JB Your response?

CS Totally gracious, can't be dismissive of someone being gracious
Knew how to handle adversity

One of men thought it was terrible thing no women on board
Two weeks called back & said you're the woman
If not for him, 10 more years
[Note: CS identifies Frank Garred as the
National Association board member seeking women nominees, Adam Kelly of West Virginia
as supportive also.]

55 min in

Circumstances play into your favor
At first hard
Once got going, easier for others
Our staff [at newspaper] 2/3 women

JB As working on paper, mentors men, women?

CS Mrs J.R. Prewitt, Girl Scouts [troop leader], A & M College
McGhee, Clarence Ish, manager meat processing [Lenaker Co.]
My mother taught his son violin
He taught me to dream, had huge vision
What would you do to improve this country?
An original –
In college - Clara Kennan
LSU – Rosalia Callahan – librarian at J School [Journalism School, LSU]
Greatest booster was my husband
At his funeral, greatest liberated man ever was

60 min in

CS Mother greatest mentor

JB Challenges-

CS Constantly adapting
Early years newspaper, hard to make money

JB You worked fulltime when most women didn't

CS Most didn't have degrees
Not many had graduate degrees
Most men ran newspaper. Women ran linotype.
Women didn't have major role. We had true partnership, not a lot of those either
Harder for women to take a leading role

CS Thought could be bullied, more of a distrust of women
Grudging acceptance, must have ability
Always tried to be a lady

65 min in

Best I could do. Story at *McGhee Times* about someone coming in with a pistol, not polite to shoot a lady

JB Cupcakes, Sunday school?

CS I did
Archie Mae Bealer helped here 25 years with children

I did cooking, she did household chores
Early years, my mother helped personal news, society news
She kept John, my oldest son in morning

After other children came along, other arrangements
Archie Mae
Did for one another
Did best you could, raise bonus, respect for human condition

JB Legislature, difficult stands, elaborate-

CS Freedom of Information, misunderstood, depended on Arkansas Press Association
Ernest Cunningham and I would carry the bills
Always an effort to close off information
Ex. fuel records, industrial fund money, get out of public scrutiny

70 min in

JB Public issue, newspaper editor civil rights era

CS We were threatened
When began to put the schools together [ca 1970] farmers at the high school, farmers with trucks and gun racks

Company van, Melvin [husband]: 'you're not going – someone has to be with children. I'm going to walk this line and make pictures of these farmers and these guns.'

Lot of it innuendo

Bullying - if don't learn to stand up-

Dumas people pretty kind – not always

Fine school board, will abide by law

School board, newspaper and mayor, hard to buck

75 min in

Give credit to mayor

David Pryor: only two liberals in southeast Arkansas, really thought more moderate

JB That what they thought in J school?

CS With people, giants in the field. In small communities raging battles, something ignites the public
Schools for blacks vastly inferior
One of grand things in my life to see changes

JB [We've spoken of] models who helped you – book or movie that changed perspective?

CS Not 'a' book – found wisdom in many places, passages from Bible
Excellent writing, moving passages, lots of reading
Helped along marvelous family, husband, mother, children
Newspaper like member family
Stood on backs of many

80 min in

Owe a lot to many
Owe a lot to town
They believed in us and we in them
Great years, 52 in newspaper business

JB Still work in civic projects
What say to children and grandchildren?

CS Only thing I really say is be involved
Older son lawyer- law and computer
Daughter real estate and civic
Younger son head ICU [Intensive Care Unit] Children's Hospital Little Rock, 17th year medical
mission Honduras

Grandchildren, I don't know, contributions in own ways

Close

84 min in