

Mary Dillard
First Person Plural Project
Interview Summary
19 July 2014

JB Begin your growing up Arkansas

MD Born Malvern, age 5, moved to Benton
Oldest baby boom, January 1946
Family central Arkansas
Mother, Hot Spring County
Father Huttig [Union County]
Father 12 years older, maybe blind date
Mother teaching school, during war [World War II]
His first wife died TB [tuberculosis], had son –brother Larry
Four babies, four years
Middle child

JB Mother always teacher?

MD Stayed home until youngest in school
Didn't have to have 4-year degree when she started
When I was 10-11, she started completing degree – evenings, weekends, summers
We had assignments

5 min She taught elementary school until I was in high school
Never got by with anything

JB Do that as career move or following you all?

MD Good math teacher
My contemporaries say she made difference, checkbook, taxes
As well as algebra – financial literacy

JB In your curriculum math, other subjects?

MD Good student - good teachers
Excellent English teacher made difference
We didn't get television until 1950s - or air conditioning
In heat of day, wanted to be inside
We would mow through books

JB Remember titles?

MD Gann Public Library [site of Benton, later Saline County, Public Library in 1950s & 1960s] –
whatever available

JB When growing up – chores?
Did boys and girls have same chores

MD No, no. When Larry was 12 or so, helped father in store. We girls had housework.

JB Brother?

MD Physical stuff. Big outdoorsman, hunting. Some point at which only so far we girls could go in woods.

JB You became biologist, into tadpoles and such?

MD No

JB How make the connection?

MD College – Doug James [professor of biological sciences, U of A-Fayetteville], birds, Louise Cramer, made all interesting

11 min

Degree zoology, good biology high school

JB What imagine

MD Really liked outdoor stuff, wildlife biology
Married in college, junior year
Then-husband ROTC, during Viet Nam
Went to Augusta, Georgia, Ft Carson, Colorado
I worked in juvenile detention
To graduate school in environmental biology

JB Any kids first marriage?

MD No
Jim Kirk, first husband nice guy, accepted University of Arkansas program
I was already well into my graduate program
Difficult to transfer at that time
He got involved with wife of deputy mayor of Fayetteville
They later divorced

JB What happened next for you?

15 min

MD Opportunity to spend summer in Yugoslavia, botanical project (cacti) in Ljubljana, Slovenia
Professor from University of Colorado stealing from project
Very interesting summer

JB What did you do when discovered situation?

MD I went to Belgrade (now Serbia) – agreement that Dr. Suschnik and other graduate student would back me up
At end of summer, visited good friends in Germany, borrowed typewriter and sent report to Smithsonian Institution (source of project grant)
Came back to Arkansas, tried to get a job, Game and Fish not hiring women

JB Wondered if no jobs or no jobs for women

Letter to Smithsonian - any repercussion

MD Next chapter – call from Smithsonian
My letter only one
Dr. _____ lost his job, had stolen thousands of dollars
We were supposed to get salary and per diem, got per diem only
His mentally challenged daughter was on the payroll as scientist

24 min

Whistle blowing?

JB Sensing doesn't feel right

MD Why didn't others follow up?
I wasn't somewhere where that was going to cost me a lot
Some of the things you remember – industrial area of Yugoslavia - so polluted

I worked for EEOC (Equality of Economic Opportunity Council) in Benton for 5-6 years
Good – grant, revenue-sharing
Used scientific method, we got lots of money

JB What mean scientific method?

MD Used that to plan social programs – look for real evidence, won a real competitive rural, knowin
how to research and write

JB When into political consulting?

MD Still at EEOC, state had a lot of money- daycare and so on
Not willing to contract with nonprofits Human Services Non-Profit, went over state plan with a
fine tooth comb

JB When?

MD 1970s, early 1980s
Conceded - money flowing to non-profits

30 min

Somebody offered us money to continue, became Non-Profit Resources
I did that for 5 years
Walter Nunn –

JB Who?

MD Was running the Institute for Politics and Government (Rockefeller funding)
Excellent program, taught people how to run for office
On the board of Nonprofit Resources, recruited me, how I learned about politics
Gloria Cabe - 1st campaign [for Arkansas legislature ca. 1980s, later Clinton presidential
transition team & U.S. Congress]
'why don't we' effort
At the time voter lists on paper

JB In a nutshell, what's recipe – mystique ----

MD Become mean and nasty
Basically: How many votes? Where are they? How get them?
All these independent expenditure committees – the Koch brothers, can just overwhelm a local candidate
Citizens United one of the worst things happened in this country
Connection Walter Nunn marriage

JB How?

MD [Walter Nunn] routinely played matchmaker
Invite everybody to lunch, pay for own, late 1970s
Tom [Dillard] & I married 1981 [correction 1979]

JB What in common

MD History, current events
Tom president state GOP that opposed Viet Nam and pro marijuana

JB Came of age as lots of things began to change in culture, [first] husband in military

MD Jim in ROTC, hoping it [Viet Nam] would be over

40 min

Went to Korea
Many he knew in [U.S. Army] Signal School died in Viet Nam
So much silliness in military life, esp. officers' wives teas – hat
Major's wife had to speak first, etc.
Since you don't plan to make a career, I'm getting a job

KB Remember last time hat/gloves?

MD Probably then

JB How about credit cards in your name?

MD I've always been the money manager. After grad school needed car. Before I could get used car, father had to co-sign (1972), Don't recall about credit.
In Zebulon Pike Detention Center (Colorado), which I hope you haven't had to experience, failed to budget for weekend cooks. Expectation was that female counselors would cook. Both delinquents and runaways helped in the kitchen.

45 min

Met first sociopath there. Learned quickly to focus on kid who's losing [the fight], looking for help.
We agitated enough they quickly found money

When in grad school in Colorado, Jim in Korea, were going to classify me as out of state [resident], ACLU took over our case

JB How find you?

MD [I] might have gone to them

JB My limited experience, now quick to declare 1-year residency

MD My sister Judy [Frost Pridgen] sued city of Benton twice over police promotions

50 min

Very macho situation

When promoted to sergeant, the chief threw badge on desk when she was out to lunch

No ceremony, picture

Now every department in country has women on force

JB The sister who's run for legislature?

MD Filled in. She's had interesting life, tough life

JB Easier, harder relative's campaign

MD Husband awful to deal with, overreacted to everything, usually wives

JB Hard to see loved ones -

MD One crazy woman passed out cartoons showing Judy's children as frogs

JB Not many women sheriffs
Something in the water or your parents?

55 min

MD My parents- never had a whole lot. My mother a teacher, my father valued education. Taught us to stand up for ourselves.

A friend so down in the dumps. I wouldn't be floored like that.

My boss at CADC [Central Arkansas Development Council].

I was raised in segregated society

Charles, my boss, black

I did something that angered him in a meeting

He chewed me out, 'you think you're special'

I told my mom

My mom said, 'you are better than most people.'

Told Charles: he knew my mom, they'd had dealings as fellow teachers, he respected her.

JB Coming from a source he wasn't going to argue with –
What was your experience gradually more integrated –

60 min

MD In my 20s then. 11 or so in 1957. I can remember my parents being appalled. Kids calling us nigger lovers We were in a very segregated society.
Community Action – not a lot of black employees here; elsewhere, among the few white people.
That was my experience.
Reason to give up on Baptist Church – racism, now black performers come in.

JB Another church home?

MD Unchurched, as they say

JB Family model volunteer

MD Mother did so much – home, school, community
Father worked all the time
He surprised us when he retired - Senior Center Benton , Civitan Club
Never seen him in that role
Last few years in the hospital a lot
I would do evening shift, I would interview him
As a young man, construction paper mills, Cullendale, Ouachita County, formed a pool - doctor, insurance fund

65 min

JB When?

MD 1930s
My aunt, after mother had died, my mother very smart, her father died young
Uncle Rodner [Burton], vegetable gardener, fed them, how did my mother ever go to college (teacher certificate during Depression)
Uncle Rodner, bootlegger
Tells story about [WPA] agricultural food program, beans and corn – had to open a window in school

70 min

JB If you had to pick one or two of the many volunteer programs –

MD Arkansas Advocates, children and families, late 1970s
Also later, no juvenile courts, horror stories, also change that
I also worked on political campaign that gave juvenile court system, 1980s

Being founder of Women's Foundation of Arkansas, though Pat Lile's vision of large endowment didn't happen
Done really good work

JB AARP [American Association for Retired Persons]?

MD Major advocate private option [health insurance, Arkansas legislature 2014]
Former state president, now involved national policy

JB AARP 50+

MD Whole Affordable Care, many have opposed, out of ignorance, I think, ‘keep your hands off my Medicare’
Real beneficiaries 50+, more chronic conditions and so on
My husband Tom retired before 65, several months COBRA, high risk pool
Thankfully, we could afford
Lists driver safety, income tax programs

JB National politics – private option discussed as fabulous model, locally may be in trouble

MD Scary thing, really doctrinaire folks, so much of what we see plain old racism, lot of Arkansans dislike [President] Obama

JB Educational strategy?

MD Beebe masterful, just takes a few ideologues
Kochs [brothers of Kansas] put a lot of money into Arkansas, don’t give a flip about Arkansas, their own business interests
Asa [Hutchinson – Republican gubernatorial candidate] been pretty cagey

JB People taking your place as consultant?

MD Trying to find a consultant for someone right now

JB Still do any?

MD For past 28 years...Conway, since 1986, wet/dry Conway [Faulkner County]

85 min

Judge Howard called for a special election, retired postal worker had been left off the ballot, Buddy Villines [now Pulaski County Judge] brought me in

JB What’s at stake?

MD Promised \$100,000 a year charitable giving program for 7 years if stayed in business [1986]
Been contributing all these years
If Faulkner goes wet, destroys many county line businesses
I’ve been working on ‘decline to sign’ campaign

JB Wal-Mart wants to go wet

MD Wal-Mart sees alcohol as opportunity for growth, ex. Missouri statewide
Will discount beer below cost, run small retailers out of business

JB Library [Central Arkansas Library System]

MD Sherwood, November ballot

90 min

My friends on liquor stuff, I want my life back
Faulkner prosperous, 23 liquor stores and all groceries
Sexual assault and alcohol strong relationship

Inevitable at some point these laws will change
Wal-Mart has done lots of polling, money talks

JB Arkansas Community Foundation
Process of deciding for mother

MD 70th birthday, \$10,000
My siblings and father really tickled with that
Now \$20,000
My siblings – Saline County non-profits, things she’s concerned about Churches Joint Council on
Human Needs [food pantry] Senior Center Benton, Girl Scouts, Community Health

JB Your husband and yours –

MD Sold property. Had a little cash. Had done mother’s 4%

JB Your fund, catalog Arkansas needs

100 min

MD 40% estate when we die, Tom, my stepson, will take an interest

JB How old when you and Tom married

MD Seven, His mother really nice. One big happy family, survived teenage years

JB Anything you’d like to add?

MD -

103 min