

Jo Evelyn Elston Tape Summary
First Person Plural Project
11 February 2012

Intro – First Person Plural

JB Growing up in Chicago

JE Maybe 12 years old, Mom marrying another
Sister, brother & I to Parkin, Arkansas
To father's mother

JB Twelve years old, rural

JE Rural, segregated, cultural shock
Bankers sway over her [grandmother's] life
Horrible time to experience
Been here ever since
Probably chose some place West

JB Memories as a 12-year old?
Segregation as a young girl

JE Most surprising, grandmother in 50s, 60s
'yes, ma'am' to kids 6 years old just because white

5 min in

JB 1950s?

JE Stayed in Parkin, went to uncle's Greenwood, Mississippi, better schools
Finished 8th grade Greenwood
After high School UAPB [University Arkansas - Pine Bluff]
Then Fayetteville M.A.

JB If you can remember little of family – experience

JE No segregation [in Chicago]
38th & Michigan, pretty nice integrated area
Never in my mind, staff [of school] integrated
Neighborhood not integrated
Had been white, became black

JB What did family say?

JE In Chicago, while visiting, loved trains, Traveler's Aid

JB You kids traveled by yourselves?

JE All blacks separate cars, put things together

Most ludicrous

JB St Louis?

JE I think it was
My recollection crazy, it didn't add up

11 min in

Arkansas in your face
My cousins in school – summer

JB Out in October for cotton?

JE We went to school with them
School they attended pitiful – textbooks, schoolhouses, big house, one room

JB Grade eight?

JE One teacher, materials and supplies totally inadequate

JB Greenwood?

JE Segregated- much, much better
High school in Arkansas
Parkin by that time, new school
School relocated, better than before
Totally unequal

JB M.A. right out of college?

JE Not long after. Had job, Fayetteville in summer UALR branch near MacArthur u Park

JB Strong education message

JE Parents went to high school
Mississippi to Arkansas to Chicago
Expectation do well in school

15 min in

I loved school
Way to fulfill needs – talk and doing things
Strive

JB Particular teachers?

JE Fourth grade teacher – Mrs. Raymond, once you crossed threshold, consistent messages

JB Two sisters and brother, all kids same chores?

JE Mother worked, whatever needed
Even more structured in Arkansas
Grandmother and father in small town
Teacher always right
My dad real strict taskmaster, never lived with him Army/Navy

20 min in

Remarried with second wife
His family, our grandmother
More involved

JE Discusses role of teachers who mentor in schools, clubs, student council
Importance to kids who are not affiliating
Change in schools – adults do less
Identifies teacher unions as a moment when that kind of volunteerism became less common
Less ‘missionary zeal’

JB A job?

JE More & more
You can’t require people to volunteer

JB Cultural shift?

JE People less community
You take care of yours, I’ll take care of mine

25 min in

JB Your experience, try to find a place to make a difference?
Youth & Family Services?

JE Circle of people you run with, as you meet people, work with them

JB Mission of organization?

JE Provide services to youth and risk kids – some kind of stability, abuse homeless, emotional problems, respite
Numbers growing, not enough organizations to serve
First objective to prevent
Usually don’t come to attention until harmed

30 min in

Family not there, mother struggling
Center there, trying to heal
Attracts me to those organizations- the brokenness

JB Success rate there?

- JE Oh, yes- see need, not enough, triage, worst problems
Insurance or Medicaid
- JB Your involvement policy? Financial volunteer?
- JE Committee public relations – word out, get story out, Little Rock and elsewhere
- JB Arts organizations UALR [University Arkansas – Little Rock]
- JE Friends of the Arts, board, support art at UALR
Get UALR more involved public schools
Inevitably fundraising
15 years, music, performing

35 min in

- Scholarships to departments
A passion you can see
- JB For students UALR and public schools?
- JE For arts students, encourage arts
Draw kids to university, two-way street
Fledging opera fan, opera club
- Cross pollinate
Most involvement – symphony guild, meal for symphony member
Volunteer to usher at performances
Programs in schools and for kids

40 min in

- JE That message came from the church – God’s work
Convert to Catholicism
- JB Convert as an adult?
- JE Yes, as adult, children raised Catholic
- JB Really talked so much about different ways of working with kids
If could wave a wand - how organize?
- JE All politics is local
Where you are & build grassroots
World of caring people
How change family system – fractured
Fewer church affiliations
- Kids learn what they see
Overshadowed by other stuff
Your responsibility to help others

Start with family

45 min in

Church attendance dwindling

Work on different levels

It has to start with kids, to help to serve

JB Anything I've asked you'd like to add?