

Ruth Hawkins Interview Summary
First Person Plural
28 January 2016

Intro – Jo Blatti interviewing Ruth Hawkins, director Heritage Program, Arkansas State University, Jonesboro in her office, for First Person Plural project, 28 January 2016

JB Start with your background – Missouri farm

RH North St Louis County, second of twelve children
Mother worked at rock quarry, degree business administration
Seven boys, five girls
First two years college – Columbia College [known as Christian College prior to 1970] in Columbia, MO, girls' school, A.A.
Transferred to University of Missouri, journalism, 1969, high school mentor encouraged major
Married same year, husband in navy
He was from Cardwell, MO – boot heel

JB I went to Stephens [also in Columbia]

RH All meals formal, husband was a waiter at Christian College [aka Columbia College]
We married in 1969, to Norfolk, VA, the Tidewater area
My first job as a television reporter, then to print

5 min in

Then to public relations for Newport News school in relation to integration order

JB 1970s?

RH 1974-78
Husband out of the navy, also in newspaper business, *Times Herald* of Newport

JB Women in the newsroom?

RH Women only believable as weather girls
NBC & ABC affiliates had just hired first women reporters
I applied at ABC – hired as reporter – everything man does

JB What mean by that?

RH On own, middle of night, carry own equipment, on call every sixth night
1978, husband decided that he wanted to farm with father in Missouri
I had good job –

10 min in

You better –

JB Commuter marriage?

RH No – saw maybe once
Before Face book, etc
Tough, started looking
He farmed Cardwell, Paragould
There was an affirmative action position at ASU, chair of school board has been designated to write Virginia desegregation plan, asked me to work with him
I knew the language, territory
July 1978, been here ever since
Moved to the director of public relations, then to human resources, then to special assistant to the president [Ray Thornton]

JB How make the transition to historic sites?

RH Interested in everything – public relations & development
Until 1980s, public universities didn't have to do much fundraising
Early to mid-90s that changed

15 min in

Will support ASU if you are making a difference on the Delta
Started looking at Delta By-ways programs – scenic routes, cultural, historic, archaeological significance
Pots of money at the time

JB For projects –

RH Yes – broad support. Rodney Slater at the time administrator of the highway program, had been at ASU. Met him in [Washington] D.C. Crowley's Ridge project -

20 min in

In the Delta – it's really an anomaly – 500 volunteers, 8 counties. Tourism potential - four parks, Delta Cultural Center. North end – no signature attraction – anchor Ernest Hemingway/Pauline Pfeiffer.
House for sale – never the intent
ASU as catalyst
Came back – can we acquire?
Sherwin & Barbara Hamilton of Crockett Oil
\$1 million price tag, fundraising committee \$250,000
They said, 'We don't like fundraising, asking for money'; they did \$250,000, 3:1 challenge

25 min in

Managed to get the project done
Never realized how much fun research is
Worked with Claudia Shannon on restoration, traveled all over the country
Acquired in spring of 1997
Opened in 1999, Hemingway's 100th birthday, broke our necks
Fulltime to that kind of project

Went to Les Wyatt [then president ASU]

Want to be director of Delta Heritage Initiatives

JB Identity other initiatives?

RH Just wanted to assist with development of heritage in the region
He said you need to do this
Great River Road route – Minnesota to Louisiana – 10 states, 10 counties in Arkansas
2001 designation

30 min in

People started coming to us
Mainly said no – didn't have operating
But then – Lakeport plantation

JB Developed a checklist?

RH Yes – has to be a site that tells a significant national story, an asset to Arkansas, needs to preserve
a real interpretive message
Ex. Hemingway, intellectual & creative life, family story
Southern Tenant Farmers Union – first union black & white farmers
Lakeport – westward movement cotton empire, influential political family

35 min in

'the family' in Arkansas

JB Pushing on into Texas –

RH Robert Johnson, Civil War legislator; Benjamin Johnson, district judge in Little Rock
Slave labor did the work, many became tenant farmers, became part of exodus to the north
Now returning to retire
Oral histories, Arkansas home
We don't own the Japanese-American cemetery at Rohwer, great co-operative effort
Dyess – among earliest & most successful resettlement colonies in 1930s
At the time of segregation – stories that need to be told

JB You gave brief précis of St Louis County farm family, mom college

40 min in

Men's women's roles

RH Our parents never different
All learned to drive the tractor
Very organized, father lined us up, marching orders
I'll never forget, he had given me a list; I hadn't accomplished one-third
I learned very quickly, don't just mind – delegate

JB I learned an enormous amount about the projects – but not about you in the book [*Unbelievable Happiness and Final Sorrow: The Hemingway-Pfeiffer Marriage* by Ruth A. Hawkins, University of Arkansas Press, Fayetteville, 2012]
He was a very high maintenance husband

RH Change - so much so quickly
The roles were different, the man's job came first

45 min in

Following the wife's job
Now if the man stays home, acceptable

JB Universities – dual
Women who were older – subject to nepotism rules

RH People my age right on cusp
Still expected to cook
Back in 70s, early 80s, when I got a promotion several women got upset; other men had families to feed
Some of that still existed

JB When evaluating Virginia-Missouri move, did friends think odd of you?

50 min in

RH Newspaper kept job open: when Van coming back?

JB Speaks to a different newspaper employer/economy –

RH I moved to Paragould, I commuted to ASU

JB How much commuting Van & his dad?

RH 30 miles maybe

JB ASU sites, such a higher profile – Cash, Hemingway
How do all that – endowments?

RH A struggle every year – different economy when started

55 min in

Had access to GIF [General Improvement Funds] funds and other sources
Grants started drying up, have worked every year on on-going funding
Never know from year to year
Working with communities
- Educational laboratories for ASU
- Economic catalyts

Evidence that tourism revenue up in our counties, our sites contribute

My on-going challenge –

JB Cash [site in Dyess]?

RH 10,000 visitation
Ultimate goal 30,000 visitors – small space, can't accommodate much more

You're right about those two – use as hook
Hemingway as hook for Pfeifer
Cash for New Deal
Lakeport
Southern Tenant Farmers Union – favorite for many

JB Haven't been to STFU, look forward
Love Lakeport, in part because of the spareness

1 hr 5 min in

RH Story there: who lived & worked on plantations

Another criterion: have to be different
'We have another boyhood house museum...'
Don't need two of a kind –

All of our sites are related to agriculture

JB Understand that you are interested in the *Sultana* site [Civil War steamboat wreck]

RH Largest maritime disaster in history of this country
Very excited

1 hr 10 min

We don't feel we can take on additional sites
Town of Marion, I'm on the committee
Temporary museum on courthouse square
Working with design firm, major building, significant museum

JB Not likely to be ASU

RH We will be affiliated

JB People who've influenced you?

RH Really tough question- so many, fortunate
Administrators ASU given me leeway to explore
Gene Smith, president a long time
Appreciation this region – fast or scenic way?
Originally from Forrest City

Would tell me what he knew mile by mile

Les Wyatt – allowed me flexibility to explore areas of the university don't usually get into

1 hr 15 min

My husband & son

Son - now a lawyer in town, early 30s, he has been very supportive of my work
I started working on my doctorate [Ole Miss] when he was seven months old

My husband always picked up the slack

My parents never believed in any limitations - male/female, rich/poor

Those are a few

JB Anything you would want to return to?

RH One thing I was thinking of – women in the workplace

Very fortunate, can't think of direct discrimination

Not a factor in money – equal pay

Never felt that men promoted over me

Sometimes people's attitudes: I might go to a meeting – people might talk to a man who worked for me

JB Your strategy?

RH I never had to – team

'I'd have to defer to Ruth, the boss'

Not so much any more

In the early 1980s, unusual

1 hr 20 min in

The other thing with women: bloom where planted

When mentoring, what skills? Not so much job description

Diana Sanders at Hemingway-Pfeiffer dropped out of nursing school, raised family, did books on family farm operation

When interviewed, one smart woman

Eventually, special events for university

Hemingway-Pfeiffer policies & procedures, tours & operations manager 'til 2012

Got bachelor's degree

1 hr 25 min in

She had skills & talent

RH Really want to get ahead – big picture, what not getting done

Whole new job

JB Hard to see pay discrimination easily, 25-year-old studies, more recent ones - aggregate information suggest still occurring

RH I agree.
The positions I've been in, I see those inequities. When is it going to change?
In J school [journalism school] at the University of Missouri, professor then, women should not
be in radio/TV journalism – discouraged women. No news jobs there

I went into print news – yet, where was my first job –

1 hr 31 min in

JB Tells similar story about encouragement to go to law school & do 'scut' work
Compares to nurse/teacher stereotypes

RH Nurse/teacher – none in my family
Cream always rises to the top

1 hr 37 min in

OFF