

Pat Lile Interview Summary
First Person Plural Project
6 January 2016

Intro – Jo Blatti interviewing Pat Lile, retired executive director Arkansas Community Foundation, for First Person Plural project at her home in Little Rock, 6 January 2016

JB Begin with a bit of your history –

PL Born 1938, parents lived in Pine Bluff, divorced
Mother got a job in Texarkana around 1941
Both parents tragic alcoholics
Father died when I was 16
I lived with my mother until I was in third grade, moved to Hope where mother raised
Commonality with Bill Clinton – grandparents

JB Unusual for child to recognize

PL Needed security - to this day
They were in their 60s
Grandpa ran a grocery, household, school – 4th grade-high school great home base
Teachers encouraged college

5 min in

JB Family support?

PL Up to me
Providential timing, but friend & I took test
Governor Rockefeller, Arkansas Fund would send students to college in Arkansas
Best friend heading to Rhodes in Memphis
I went to Methodist Church in Hope, met president of Hendrix there
Father had died – Social Security checks & scholarship got me to college in 1950s

Hendrix where you will meet the man you will marry: succeeded, met John Lile

JB What expectations?

PL Dated & married in three years
Didn't graduate, wanted degree, no credit cards then
John accepted at law school North Carolina

10 min in

Wonderful church wedding

No job for me, no apartment
1959, two women of 130 students
PHT, putting husband through

JB What did you do?

PL Worked as a secretary on campus
We lived on my salary of \$135 a month
Great experience, wonderful friends

JB Decision to come to Arkansas –

PL Several firms wanted John – Louis Ramsay, Jr. of Pine Bluff the winner
John hesitated to head for Little Rock, father Gardner & uncle ‘Brick’ [R.A.] Lile very involved
in banking [Worthen] and development [Pleasant Valley and many other areas]
Also, we were initially to opposed to returning, opposed Faubus -

Pine Bluff was a happening place then – 28 years there
Very typical of the Arkansas Delta

15 min in

Learned so much – African American community

JB How?

PL Public schools, not many heroic
Children Gar & Gretchen vanguard integration 1968
I was a room mother
Classrooms integrated – 40% black, 60% white
(reverse now)
Intrigued by children I met

As room mother, I offered to be a Scout leader – Brownie sign-up sheet
Only white girls on the list
No black mother offered to help out
They [school/Scout officials] were horrified

20 min in

It was great – another mother helped
One of the girls I got to know – mother was Andree Roaf [lawyer and jurist, later the first woman
to sit on the Arkansas Supreme Court], father was [dentist] Dr. Clifford Roaf
Fifi [Phoebe] became a lawyer, later an Episcopal priest
My role tiny

Our son in fourth grade – football team
Blacks boys not allowed to be on team – that practiced on school grounds
I protested

Little stories show tenor – how things changed
Rita Jo Hayes helped with –
Her son James Hayes great glass artist

I’m sure June Freeman [See FPP interview with Freeman, June 9, 2014] who moved south -
She & I tended to find each other

JB Where get liberal views?

PL My mother – very good woman, person of morality

26 min in

Succession of caring black maids who took care of me – lived next to projects
My grandparents very prejudiced
Yet kept people alive & ran tabs during the Depression
Church shaped
Can't explain
My children don't share liberal views John & I have

JB Amazing

PL Amazing - gratitude
Don't discuss politics & religion – big family

JB Transition community volunteer to profession?

30 min in

PL Among last cadre - never worked for pay until 42
All happened through volunteer work with schools/church (moved to Presbyterian with marriage)
Louis Ramsey, John's law partner
Junior League & delegate – because aware of foster care & adoption issues – early 1970s

JB Here we are

PL Sharon Pallone in Little Rock formed a program –
There was national conference on child advocacy in Baltimore
Mary Sue Jacobs (Little Rock) learned that systems needed to change

35 min in

Hillary Rodham [Clinton] was very interested in Arkansas
Jim Miles, Dr. Bettye Caldwell, Dr. Betty Low, Dorothy Nayle, Judge Olly Neal, Sharon Pallone,
Jacobs, myself, [also Betty Bumpers] would meet monthly

Decided to create a nonprofit for children & families
Marion Wright Edelman [Children's Defense Fund] had lit a fire under us
\$500 from Junior League of Pine Bluff
Jo Luck for first year, Don Crary next director

40 min in

Bill [Clinton] then appointed me to several committees and commissions
Back in Pine Bluff, Chamber [of Commerce] head took me and John to lunch, introduced the idea
for Leadership Pine Bluff around 1981
I recruited for an integrated group from the beginning
Ran the program for nine years

Took fulltime position with Pine Bluff 2000

45 min in

First paying job – three years

JB What was that?

PL MRI – task forces in community, comprehensive look at community
At that point, booming city
Then folded into Chamber, community development
Consulted elsewhere in Arkansas
Husband joined Little Rock law firm – Wright, Jennings & Lindsey – I’ll commute,
I’d see wear & tear – a litigator

In 1989-90 Bill Clinton appointed me to a statewide commission on Arkansas’s Future with Ernest Cunningham [Democrat, Arkansas House, 1969-1998, representing Phillips County Speaker of House, 1987] and Nick Wilson [Democrat, Arkansas Senate, 1970-99, representing Lawrence County, later disbarred & convicted in a wide-ranging corruption scandal]

50 min in

No money
Some, including Bill Bowen [distinguished Little Rock lawyer, Friday, Eldridge & Clark firm, Clinton confidante] wanted to fold
Others on Executive Committee including [chair] Dr. Charles Dunn [president, Henderson State University, Arkadelphia] - wanted me to head – all this about 1990

JB Raise own salary?

PL Yes – but how leave Pine Bluff?
We decided we would do it - hard move.
Five years devoted to that project
Clinton ran for president
Jim Guy Tucker succeeded him

JB Work of the commission?

PL Modeled on Oregon – benchmark on many levels
Probably way too ambitious
Five people on staff

55 min in

National people thought Bill & Jim Guy close – not true
Nick Wilson having problems – I knew nothing of those
Issued a landmark report
No support from Jim Guy - no hard feelings

56 min in [pause]

Two days later went to work for Family Services
Mary Dillard [See FPP interviews July & September 2014] connection
Helped lead search – no formal qualifications for job
Where I first sat in front of a computer

JB About 1996?

PL I was 56, 57 - will I work again?
Division of Volunteers opened up – didn't get it
Downtown effort – didn't get it

60 min in

Martha Ann Jones, Arkansas Community Foundation called

[pause]

I started affiliate of Arkansas Community Foundation with her in Pine Bluff
Invited to 20th anniversary committee meeting, asked me to stay after
Confidential – resignation imminent
Very difficult time personally & professionally
Wanted to locate successor, interim

JB Interim?

PL Very depleted, we don't talk about that
Are you sure?
Sloan Rainwater of Jonesboro, then chair, opened applications to public
Leon Matthews, United Way, offered me a vice-president position; I had worked with him as a
volunteer chair successfully, 1988-90

1 hr 5 min

Church pastor called with an offer -
I decided to apply and got the Arkansas Community Foundation [ARCF] job
Added board members, computer infrastructure
Waited a year to celebrate 20th anniversary
14.5 million to 129 million - eleven years later
Now doubled again
Set up affiliates around the state (26), great Arkansas story
Don Monroe [Hot Springs manufacturer & philanthropist] hope to see Arkansans use the word
philanthropy

JB Heart of what interests me –
Who has influenced?

1 hr 10 min in

PL Louis Ramsey, other white male leaders – didn't know how inclusive they were
Little Rock still learning

Recent situation at arts center – top down [refers to 2015 political discussions of center location, LR or NLR]

Refers to a teacher who alerted her to vitamins and nutritional issues while in high school

A church colleague

Don Monroe of Little Rock & Hot Springs

Just Communities [formerly the NCCJ]

Olivia Farrell – the Women’s Foundation

JB Oft-repeated story – women honored in *Arkansas Business* 1970s & 80s

PL Community foundations around the country, women developing money/resources of their own
Martha Ann Jones very aware of that, meetings around the country
Goal of mine from the first (1996)

1 hr 15 min in

Olivia Farrell looking for some way out of the honorary luncheon

What are needs in Arkansas?

What role can women play?

Education/career paths/philanthropy

Mary Gaye Shipley [owner, That Bookstore in Blytheville] chair, ARCF board at the time

The three of us launched what became Women’s Foundation of Arkansas [WFA]

1998, Janice Woods, speaker from Women’s Foundation of Texas challenged us

Took three years after that

ARCF and *Arkansas Business* partnered flickering flame

1 hr 20 min in

Hard time for the community foundation, we needed to move WFA out

Community foundations typically don’t ‘own’ programs

JB Past couple of years, having a tough time

PL Higher profile thanks to Lynnette [Watts, executive director, retired 2015]

I helped start several nonprofits in Arkansas

What’s so needed for WFA is money/resources

Long way from women making significant gifts without being attached to events

1 hr 25 min in

It [WFA] didn’t have capacity to follow up with founding members

Ex. Philander Smith College, Children’s Hospital

Confident Lynnette turned over every stone

Too much focus on events in fundraising in general – getting something in exchange for donations

Goals of community foundation – super wealthy – donor advised funds

Super wealthy rarely do so: want total control

In another generation or so –

JB Maybe millennials?

PL Maybe so

JB WFA – changes you've seen status of women

1 hr 30 min

PL First paid job as a typist, no credit card
First credit card, sent two, cut it up
Didn't want to use it
Called bank for number when I needed it

Second in my name, neighbor suddenly widowed had great difficulty
Taken for granted that I was a 'kept' woman
John's firm on top floors Simmons Bank [in Pine Bluff], benefitted from relationship

Intentional about relationship with women
Olivia & I, black woman named Pat Gray [social worker & consultant?] via NCCJ [National
Conference Christians & Jews]
Little informal program – Good Old Girls, about forty

1 hr 35 min

Later part – Karen Flake [market researcher, Little Rock & environs] & others –no
administration, no by-laws, dinner once a month
Both in 1990s

JB Very wide-ranging conversation. Anything want to add?

PL Must get college degree. Personal recommendations & relationships matter. Build the fabric of
society.
If people convinced you care about your/their success, they will work with you.

Been a pleasure

1 hr 39/40 min

OFF