

Viola Meadows Interview Summary
First Person Plural
11 & 12 April 2015

Intro – Jo Blatti interviewing Viola Callahan Meadows for First Person Plural project in her rural Black Rock home, 11-- April 2015

JB Your experience growing up Lawrence County, your folks

VM Father born Clover Bend, 1914 mother another small community, met in school
Married in 1923, families knew each other
Four children – my brother, I'm second, another brother & sister, they've all passed
They died young – booze & cigarettes
I'm in 90th year
They all on West Coast
My father sharecropper – farm hand 50 cents a day

5 min in

My mother used extra magazines to paper bedroom we all shared, had been a porch
I was in grade school then
Two room school, seated by last name
Memorized

JB Sisters & brothers in same row?

VM Hadn't thought about that
Not in same room with younger brother, sister
Near Clover Bend – DuVall
Where grandparents had gone to school to 8th grade
No high school, little transportation in their time

10 min in

My grandmother took in a couple of babies & the oldest child got to go to high school in Hoxie
Hoxie had a roundhouse [for the railroad]
Boardinghouse for the hands

JB When?

VM Became like sisters to me, great advisors

JB Sounds like all of you went to high school

VM That's because family moved to Clover Bend

JB Do you remember anything about the process?

VM Yes, had to apply. Both her father, his father [refers to her parents] worked with the county judge

14 min in

Helped repair roads, farmers, politically active
Didn't drink, good reputation in the community, active home demonstration

JB Clover Bend open 1938

VM We moved there in 1937
I was 12 years old [7th grade]
Building new Clover Bend school

JB Into new house?

VM No - into old house from Arbor Grove, had not been lived in, no windows, hay had been stored
We moved from Arbor Grove with man and truck country store, sold eggs & bought gasoline

19 min in

For truck, sugar, matches
Had made lye soap
Father had prepared the pump, scrubbed floors
He made my mother a kitchen sink from a gas tank
Screened doors & windows
March-November 1937
Told us we couldn't spend the winter in that house
Would be moved to the Alice French house until spring 1938
School very crowded because of the influx
We rode the school bus to Hoxie

JB School with city kids?

VM My mother a good seamstress
Today can't tell the difference

24 min in

Some of her dresses – new material
I was sensitive to it
Generally, I was so excited
History & health, hand inspection

JB Some kids – odd, even insulting?

VM If you were healthy, no odor
Baking soda, very sensitive
One boy, odor, his feet – washed him, his feet, his socks, clothes, socks - admired teacher for way handled

JB For tact?

VM Yes
I learned about Metropolitan Opera – sent me flying
When we moved into new house, no electricity

Woman would whisper into my mother's ear, pumps, electricity

29 min in

Went through freshman year of high school with kerosene lamp
Learned math from father
English teacher from Hendrix College

[interviewer coughs]

JB Books at home? Did folks encourage learning?

VM My grandfather one of two who got *Arkansas Gazette* by mail
Years later, just before Pearl Harbor, my grandfather kept saying to himself & grandmother: fall 1941
I was taught to hate Japanese

35 min in

I was fortunate to teach in an international school in Tokyo

JB Clover Bend 19/early 20 c – probably as many African American as Anglo – what about the resettlement project?

VM Let me tell you about African American as Clover Bend. The colored school was empty. My Father and his family moved into the old colored school building. The landowner moved them to a better farm. African Americans worked for Alice French. The Slayton brothers bought Clover Bend [1920s] African Americans began to move to town

39 min in

No money left in sharecropping
To Walnut Ridge, Hoxie

JB Know any African Americans when growing up?

VM No – but father always spoke so well of those people
We had a Nigerian student going to school in Pine Bluff, folks put up a student
I was so protected in these rural areas – not exposed

[phone rings: they'll call back]

44 min in

JB Thinking about your own education - you & siblings – parents stress education?

VM Oh yes- if you've got that no one could take away
In college 2 years, dropped out one year to teach
Next year, time to go back
Three children, 40-acre farm
Father bought tractor & rented another farm

Built a trailer for us to live in – fit on a cotton wagon
We picked 3 bales of cotton to pay fees

51 min in

JB How get the rest of it?

VM Lots of jobs – florist shop, cleaned & polished floors, babysat
All the way through – never had enough money

JB Lot of your friends in similar situation?

54 min in

Describes college jobs with Dr. Kitts [Minute Rice] & Dr. Scher [White Rodgers] which
included cleaning rat cages
Major wardrobe: navy blue sweater from brother in navy, 2 skirts mother had made

JB Many working way through?

VM First two years, with girls in the 4-H house
That when I made 10 cents an hour
House mother was so nice to me - knew who needed babysitting

JB What happened after university - what choices, planning on home economics?

60 min in

VM Oh yes - loved my teachers. Made \$100 more than English teaching, etc.
Word got out
I didn't make very good grades first six weeks – working too hard
I used to walk across Old Main, giving myself a really good lashing
Students from Little Rock, Jonesboro broader backgrounds
Don't pretend to be such an intelligent person – have lived on multiple continents

JB Did get an education

VM Husband & children went to university
Husband doesn't involve himself on local level

JB How connect?

VM Black Rock – I was teaching, he was with the Veterans Administration – GIs
After I came back from Japan

JB What made you want to go to Japan?

1 hr 9 min in

VM This is why: I had been in India for a year – my first superintendant in Black Rock, I moved to
Hoxie with him

The way I got to be a Fulbrighter: I had a rural background

JB How got to India?

VM Heard me comment on successes in adult education in Black Rock

1 hr 14 min in

Interpreted as the views of a new teacher – looking for support/communication from administration

17 Americans in group to India, 3500 Indians here
I got gold in all my teeth 1953-54
Bought my ticket around the world
25 years old – nothing but a suitcase, trunks took 6 months

JB Where?

VM New Delhi [Lady Irwin College] and also Meerut [city 35 mi north of Delhi] junior college [Howard Plestud Higher Secondary School], Methodist school, Saturday, teach teachers
Had experienced GIs, peanut butter

1 hr 20 min in

Opened my mind – roasted peanuts, store it, travel by train
Brass cups, cut pinwheels up, they were so happy

Traveled a lot – Christian holidays, Muslim holidays
Very little time to teach
One of most valuable opportunities
Out at Meerut at first, then New Delhi

1 hr 24 min in

Rode a bicycle, wore a sari

JB How decide on adventures as couple, husband?

VM I had been dating a fellow in the Japanese Embassy, corresponding with husband to be –

PAUSE IN RECORDING

End of Part #1

Start of Part #2 – evening of 11 April 2015, Meadows home Black Rock, Arkansas

JB Took a break – how to international development?

VM We were in Osceola, Arkansas with USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture]
Opportunity to go Ghana – accepted immediately – not open
Opportunity Sudan
Husband to Washington, D.C. for orientation

Khartoum, then southern part of country
I stayed in Khartoum 3 months, apartment across from American Embassy
He came back & forth
Tropics – no cold weather, no air conditioning

5 min in

British before us bananas & mangoes in garden, running water
Small generator, almost enough to carry the iron
Chicken from Denmark by boat via Nile, bacon in a can
Lots of fruit, vegetable garden that Howard [husband] planted
Back end of nowhere
Only visitors – projects
Did a lot of cooking – T burner [gas grill/stove], roasted coffee
Group grocery store run - down in the village, about once a week – Howard, Matthew [young son] & I, coffee, flour

10 min in

I made all the bread
Merchant put candy bowl in front of Matthew – no place to put it!
Local market, mostly women, bucket fried termites
I didn't want to eat
Finally tasted en route home - hors d'oeuvres, hot, right out of pan, delicious

14 min in

My husband's work quite interesting
One week would be home, then away
When turn off the Petromax lamps – have to ring the bell for servant to turn off generator
Roads terrible, didn't enjoy travel
I always studied language – learned kitchen language – to greet, thanks, food names, very basic
Then accepted if kind
True in Afghanistan, Nigeria

JB When traveling world, doing something part-time, fulltime?

VM Afghanistan, Nigeria – many spoke English

19 min in

Good to be away from the children a bit -
Friends kept the children while we retraced honeymoon trip in Europe
In Libya, boonies
Would go to Tripoli, Swedish family who lived on the sea – kept kids when we took trip
Missed them terribly – so hurt that son passed by when we returned

JB Nigeria teaching

VM Children, child health
Church in the village where we lived

24 min in

Invited women through that
So impressed to see them travel,
Children on women's laps, rush to side of building when children wanted to use bathroom
Showed underclothes, bloomers, sanitation, nutrition
Village chief – American Cadillac, 2-3 additional people, refreshments, pastries, date pie

29 min in

Servant helped us, knew local customs
My son uses servant's name as password
Peace Corps fellow – lonely young man, breakfast with us on weekends
Story of negotiating motorcycle to do his job

34 min in

JB Growing up – role of religion

VM Dad Free Will Baptist, parents became Methodists

JB Go to church on Sunday?

VM Not every Sunday, important to visit grandparents on Sundays
After moved to Clover Bend, settled in a community, became regular
Baptized at 15
I usually go to church, better week

When I went to university, home in Wesley Foundation [student youth group] – drama, church, etc.
Always felt blessed, people helping

40 min in

Ex. recent PeeWee tournament at Clover Bend [restoration], found a way to support referee cost via fundraising
Always works out
We need \$20,000, \$50,000 – if you don't ask, don't get
Over a million in grants in past five years
Cheated by architect/contractor five years ago, has to be redone

JB How did you get involved with Clover Bend [restoration]?

VM I hear you like home economics
4-H House, \$19 a month, students did all the work in the house, made friends

44 min in

JB How connect Wesley program?

VM Pastor made donation and sent a letter; I received an invitation

Very few people go to church regularly
I'm an idea person
Most ideas come to me going to Little Rock [in car]

Discusses activities for students in teaching days

49 min in

JB Back to Clover Bend

VM They were going to close the school in 1983 - interested, but didn't lift a finger

JB Teaching?

VM Teaching at Black Rock, children in college
Reason I got involved – decision to sell the buildings
Tom Baker [AR House Dist 78, 1979-93] was legislator at the time, Nick Wilson [AR Senate 1970-99], scandal, but wonderful legislator did what he could for us, legal

Half of farmsteads remained at that time
My parents moving into town at that time [1980s]

54 min in

JB Their farm [parents] tripled in size by that time

VM Yes – they used the money to travel
Tom Baker president [of Clover Bend] at that time
Organization to interpret & present the history & values – oldest community in Lawrence County from settlement period

Asked me to be secretary, I inherited a job others had left

JB What is your technique?

59 min in

VM You talk to people and tell them what you have
Easy for me to do

JB Where did you learn this? Either of your parents?

VM I don't know. My parents didn't do this sort of thing
In teaching, have to come up with money for trips, school doesn't have it
Osceola, Howard's job didn't pay much
Needed extra funds, I decided I could sell World Book

63 min in

Field Enterprises in Chicago – best teaching techniques

Have to have good product
Not everyone cut out to do that
Some board members –
I was Hillary Clinton coordinator north central Arkansas –

68 min in

Went to White House
She – Hillary – key person Children’s Hospital, home economics kids all over state

JB Switch – many in your respective families no longer in north Arkansas

VM No living to be made here - World War II – salaries were so low could hardly make it
Describes her flour sack dresses for teaching summer school, worn alternately

My mother became a beauty operator after we all left home

My primary job – teach mother’s good ideas, goals for family

73 min in

JB Your mom set that example?

VM I was raised well – learned how to do things, hands moved all over, beautiful work
Story of arbor, wisteria vine at daughter’s house

JB How did you & husband decide to come back to area?

VM I had parents here, his were gone. We loved the area, dyed in the wool Democrats
Dinner parties in Kabul [Afghanistan] ‘We don’t know: Florida, Wyoming, Washington, D.C.
Haven’t decided’
We knew we were going home
He not as concerned with contributions to community [in retirement]
Deep roots here

78 min in

Discussion of history of Clover Bend resettlement project: Eleanor Roosevelt connection,
New York state pilot in mid-1930s
Father never in jail, repeats that parents on both sides close to county judge
Hal Moody, Clover Bend boy worked in legislature, coming to visit shortly

[Moody, 1920-2010, represented Lawrence County in the Arkansas House of Representatives
for two terms following WWII and went on to be chief clerk of the House, then secretary of the
Senate until retiring in 1995.]

83 min in

Moves to Hoxie teaching experience following WWII

Work on her Master's degree in mid-1950s, describes driving Charlotte Trotter, teacher in Hoxie African American school, home to Little Rock on weekends while en route to graduate classes

88 min in

Talks at length about Hoxie superintendant, preparations for integration of school

93 min in

Story of home economics curriculum struggle

JB Teaching and going home -

VM Better training – tremendous improvement, handling conflict

Everything is political, schools most of all [voice drops]
Administration will block at teacher –

98 min in

Nothing against charter schools
Good people to be plumbers, welders
Not becoming the kind of state we need to be
Nothing easy about good work –
Re: parks & tourism – does every school/park need a superintendant?

103 min in

Conversation with Richard Davies [then head of Arkansas Parks & Tourism] put Clover Bend in the system
Working to put Clover Bend in hands of an institution

JB A lot of territory, anything I've not touched on?

VM Delta Kappa Gamma, honorary society teachers, very active this area, state

Home economics, state & national

Very active church group, lay preacher
Move on among commitments

Always active in community circles, one of most important things

108 min in

Thoroughly enjoyed my life – hope I haven't disturbed too many others

109 min in [1 hr, 49 min in]

PAUSE - end Part #2

Beginning Part # 3

Intro – Jo Blatti third session with Viola Meadows for First Person Plural project, on-site at Clover Bend restoration in Black Rock, Arkansas, Sunday afternoon April 12, 2015
[in resettlement house, same pattern as Callahan family home]

JB Family accepted in 1937, year before official opening
Describe house – wooden house

VM Three bedrooms, double beds in all three
Living room, kitchen & back porch
Never had a house with closets, all the bedrooms had closets
Father made dining room out of a bedroom when we all left home
Mother acquired propane cook stove when I was in college
New dining room table, raised chickens & eggs – good manager

JB Source cash income for family?

5 min in

VM Rolling store in truck, sold eggs to rolling store
Took 5 cents to walk over bridge, made a nickel to walk over bridge to 4H meeting
Tasted first banana [pudding] at that meeting

JB Banana pudding such a beloved Arkansas dessert

VM Nobody had money then

JB Where was the Callahan farm from here?

VM Approximately 2 miles from here on the Black River, about one-fourth mile to the old school
1938-39, I was a 9th grader in Hoxie school
Walked to school, on dirt road & many functions
Neighbor had no children, had automobile

10 min in

He was trying to splash us with water, puddles
School bus made 2-3 runs, then there was a second bus

JB Your folks stay on the farm rest of their years?

VM Moved into town – health, early 1980s
80 acre plot, cattle on that farm
All summer long, cows to milk, four, milk to drink
The rest went to Hoxie, railroad to Springfield, nearest creamery, extra income
Pigs, chickens, extra income

15 min in

We didn't do much with beef - couldn't keep [preserve]

Mother, 'grab that pullet'
I would wring neck, take insides out, claws off [unless company, then children ate]
Canned pork quite well, dollop of fat
Brother: can you make gravy like Mom
Would use pressure cooker, never got it quite like hers –

JB Memory of her cooking-?

VM Memory – can't ever remember not liking –

20 min in

JB Husband's family: potatoes to order –

VM A grandmother - they'd have 'weaning' houses, living with bride
When I was a senior in high school, worked in Clover Bend store,
Lunch room huge army type cooking, CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] type feeding at lunch
School kids

JB How much pay for lunch?

26 min in

VM Beef, lean, with rice, vegetable soup
Don't know, probably 15 cents, 20 cents, 25 cents
Had good cooks in the community, spaghetti, etc.
Peanut brittle

JB Teaching Hoxie, working on master's – new African American teacher

VM Such a pleasant person, talked about school [Charlotte Trotter]
She taught all eight grades; she was very creative

When I picked her up, boards over mud

35 min in

JB How long to Little Rock?

VM 3.5 – 4 hours to Little Rock, two lanes all the way
I used car a lot in home visits, no mileage allowance
Men in agriculture got paid for mileage
When I came back [from overseas] I let it be known that women deserved mileage

JB How'd that work out?

VM Not too much -

JB What about the African American teacher?

VM Not to home, just: 'let me out here'
Had a pretty good salary in Hoxie

35 min in

JB African American teachers often paid less in 1950s

VM Not that – that got a bachelor’s pay, just as I did
I know she was being treated fairly
She was there during – Hoxie integration
Have you seen -?

JB The documentary – yes

VM Kids playing together & having a good time
I left Hoxie school in September for new job in Japan
He [superintendent] kept me informed through letters
He was crucified, lost job
Sort of ruined the name of Hoxie for awhile

40 min in

JB We’ve talked long & hard about many things. More about the house?

VM Heaven to have the house nobody else had lived in
Grandparents had nice homes, but –
We kept it so clean
One of the most successful projects
School nurse, doctor in Portia, \$16 a year, hospital & doctor coverage [early form of medical insurance]
Lifted us to another level, inspired us
Mother clean in personal ways & home
Neighbors – dirty dishwasher
Not at my mother’s – no flies in the house
Back porch in the summer, quite a treat

JB Where the dish water?

VM We had a sink

45 min in

Pump on the back porch
Then 2-3 months later, electricity & an electric pump
I have a lot of what she [mother] had
Willingness to speak up, all problems solvable

JB Good place to end

VM You know who I am, not the first interview, not the last
Always enjoy speaking about experiences
Once you tell, helps you remember

JB Thank you for sharing

VM Don't have your title yet, but love to have that –

53 min in

OFF

Total – all three sections of the interview 4 hours, 6 min