

Kathy Mastin: My name is Kathy Mastin and today I'm talking with Barbara Mulvihill. Today is March 2, 2016 and we're in the Campbell Room of the Kansas history at the Salina Public Library.

Barbara Mulvihill: Okay Kathy umm we've know each other for quite a few years now I think but umm I never have really heard the story about uh when you were born and your early years and everything so I wonder if you could tell us about that.

KM: 'Kay well I was born in 1962 in Wichita, Kansas. Second child of my parents. Had an older sister Lori and then later on there were two more sisters and a brother.

BM: So you had a pretty big family?

KM: Yea five kids.

BM: Good...good.

KM: Yea.

BM: Well tell us about your early childhood and I mean also how did you end up in Salina when did you come to Salina?

KM: Okay well my dad was working at, at that time, was called Beech Aircraft later on it changed to Raytheon and some other names too. But uh when I was about four or five years old we came to Salina. And umm originally lived on a house on Ninth Street real pretty kinda Victorian style house. But my parents decided they needed to move something smaller when the heating bill was higher than the rent bill.

BM: Oh, yea.

KM: So moved to a smaller house, two bedrooms. And for a while there was just the three kids and later on four but when it came to the fifth kid we had to move to a little bit bigger than that.

BM: Oh yea, too small for five kids.

KM: Right. But uh...went to elementary school at sunset and uh pretty good years there...lot of good memories.

BM: Good...umm...now I understand that when you were one year old you were diagnosed with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, is that correct?

KM: I started having problems at a year old, but it wasn't until I was around six when they finally decided what it was. They were trying different things and trying to figure out what was going on but they didn't realize that children that young could have rheumatoid arthritis.

BM: Oh wow yea I didn't either.

KM: So it was a long time before they finally figured out what it was and from my understanding it was a little country doctor who figured it out. I think he was the one from Council Grove and he was the one who said, "I think maybe this is what it is." And then the more they tested geared towards that, that's when they figured it out.

BM: Oh wow that's amazing.

KM: Yea.

BM: What type of symptoms were you having?

KM: Well when I was a year old I fell into my birthday cake. I guess I was walking early and did really well and then started falling a little bit more and more; walking stiffer, more aches and pains. My mom said at one time I broke out into a rash but she didn't know whether that was associated with that or not and nobody ever really kind figured that part out. But I know throughout elementary school when I was walking I still was able to keep up with everyone, but I was a little bit slower. I just remember walking and my left hip would just give out and it would just pop, it wouldn't go down, but it would pop loud enough that others could hear it and I definitely could feel it. I'd have to stop walking for a few minutes just to get my breath back, you know, it was painful.

BM: Do they know what caused that?

KM: Oh they think it's just the muscles and stuff that was causing the hip to act that way. The muscles would pop to compensate for the muscles...the bones not working right.

BM: Uh huh, uh huh....so let's see, so you went to grade school here and then what next?

KM: I went to South Middle School rather than...at that time it was South Junior High...rather than Roosevelt Lincoln where my sisters went, just because they had so many steps there.

BM: Oh...

KM: So I went to South Middle and I wouldn't say that was the greatest experience, but we'll skip that and go on.

BM: Okay, okay.

KM: Then I went to Central and I really enjoyed that. They did have an elevator, but I took the stairs a lot of the time. At that time it was a freight elevator and it didn't always work the greatest. So you know if I handled the stairs I took it.

BM: Did you have to walk with crutches or anything?

KM: Never did use crutches or walkers or anything until I got out of high school. And then it started progressively getting worse.

BM: Oh okay...uh...did your peers except you and everything?

KM: Most of the time I think I did really well with them. Elementary school was fine. Junior high was miserable.

BM: I think junior high's miserable for all of is.

KM: It is.

BM: In my opinion.

KM: I think so yea.

BM: It's just that age.

KM: You know partly it was because well I knew some people there from elementary school that was on that side of the school district but my sister were over there. I couldn't wear anything geared toward my school colors because boy I got hassled from my sisters. And it was just difficult having them at one school and me at the other.

BM: Well, yea, it's just too bad you couldn't all been together. Yea, that's kind of a shame. So then you went to South High School...

KM: No, I went to Central High.

BM: Oh Central High, I'm sorry and what did you do in high school did you do any particular extracurricular activities or what was your favorite subject and that kind of thing?

KM: You know surprisingly as much as I like art I didn't take any art in high school. I didn't take music in high school. I took languages and history and things like that which I also enjoy a lot.

BM: Sure yea.

KM: Yea.

BM: I know you like history cuz you're one of my genealogy peeps.

(Laughter)

BM: So when did you graduate high school?

KM: 1980.

BM: 1980...and then what did you do after high school?

KM: For a while I stayed home and looked for a job couldn't get it. Went on to Brown Mackie, did medical technology along with other secretarial type courses. Still wasn't able to get a job even after having that degree. Just kept looking you know doing hobbies here and there between everything. And then I went on to Kansas Wesleyan and got my teaching degree and got to looking for a job again. I mean its constant struggle getting a job because they see the wheel chair and I think all they see is a big sign that says can't. They don't even give you a chance.

BM: Right, umm...didn't you say you...your teaching degree was K-8, is that right?

KM: Right K-8. When I started subbing I subbed all the way up through high school and I did even sub in a couple of college classes. So I subbed for quite a while and for the most part it was pretty good, but I just needed something that was steady.

BM: Right...Sure, sure...were you ever able to get a steady teaching job?

KM: I did but I was working on a grant so my pay was minimum wage. No insurance, nothing like that, but I did that for two years. I was working with first and second graders over at Heusner Elementary.

BM: Okay, okay...

KM: It's interesting now because one of the boys that I had then who was in both my first and then later the second grade class I now have his step son for my tutoring student.

BM: Really... *(Laughter)*

KM: He's a first grader so it's like second generation.

BM: Yea... *(Laughter)* does that make you feel old?

KM: It really does. Well what really makes me feel old was when I was, later on, working at Kansas Wesleyan, not for Wesleyan, but that's where the office was. And I would see college kids there that I had taught when they were so young. That made me feel old.

BM: Yea...I understand the feeling. I think you and I aren't that far apart in age. *(Laughter)*

KM: Yes...

BM: Well uh so when were you finally able to get a good full time job?

KM: Well uh I did work a lot of little jobs here and there I did research for different organizations I did genealogy for the people, tutoring here and there. Let's see...I worked at Target for a couple years every weekend. I would do some of their computer work and just odd ball things. But I guess my full time job...I got on with the district office for United Methodist Church and I did that for almost seventeen years; all type of secretarial you name it I did it. Really enjoyed it. Met a lot of nice people. Had six different bosses. Then when the sixth boss came she decided she didn't want me. So whatever the issue was...she decided I was gone.

BM: That's too bad...and that was your last job?

KM: That was the last job and I've been looking ever since.

BM: And that was about a year ago?

KM: Yea...just about a year.

BM: Yea...well that's really frustrating, I'm sure.

KM: Yea.

BM: I believe you have a ton of hobbies that you do and uh community activities and things like that. Why don't you tell us about that?

KM: I do. I do a lot of volunteering. I volunteer at Rolling Hills. I really enjoy out there. I work with mainly... when the students come out there for classes I'll help out with that other programs that they have going on I'll do that here and there. Do a lot of volunteering at my church helping the kids whatever sometimes filling in for the Sunday schools that hasn't been real often lately but a little bit here and there umm on the board of education, again.

BM: The Salina Board of Education?

KM: No, for my church.

BM: Oh, for your church.

KM: Right.

BM: Okay, okay...

KM: So help with that...umm...gosh where else...I mean just a little bit places here and there and everywhere. And umm hobbies gosh where do I start on that? My mom taught me when I was real young how to sew. And I really enjoyed that. Started out embroidering. And umm...from there I made my first quilt I did the fifty states and I embroidered the birds and the shape of the state and flowers, I can't remember what all's on that, but that was the first quilt that I did. And I just put it together however I could figure it out you know. And that was the first one and I got it machine quilted by a lady. And from there I just kept making more and more. Most of them are now pieced instead of embroidered. Gosh, I was trying to think the other day, how many quilts that I've made? I have a lot up in the closet that I don't have quilted, but I'd say the ones that have actually been quilted maybe around thirty.

BM: That's amazing...

KM: Probably another 30 in the closet, I'm not sure (*Laughter*)...

BM: And you say you give 'em to all your nieces and nephews when they graduate high school?

KM: Right, nieces and nephews when they graduate.

BM: Uh huh...lucky, lucky kids.

KM: I started making 'em for my foster kids when they would graduate but not too many of them graduated. I mean they would quit or move or wherever and then you kinda lose track of 'em.

BM: Well tell us about fostering. I think that's amazing that you have fostered and I'll never forget the first time I saw you in here you had three probably younger school aged foster kids in here with you. And you had perfect control over them and I was just astounded...I was so impressed. So what has been your experience with fostering?

KM: I started foster care when I had three cousins in my home for tutoring and they were taken away from the grandma and put in foster care. And I kept getting case workers and people calling me all the time saying these kids talk nothing about anything but Kathy, Kathy, Kathy. And they go to bed at night they weren't hollering for mom, and weren't too hollering for grandma, they were hollering, "I want to go to Kathy's!" And so I didn't know being handicapped whether I'd be able to even qualify, but I went through the process and I did qualify. But by the time...it's a long process you have classes and uh different inspections and different things you have to go through. By the time I got through that the kids were out of foster care and back with other relatives. So they never were in my home as a foster child, but I figured I have the license now and my house is geared towards 'em, so why not? So I did foster care for a long time and umm gosh I had, between foster and respite care, I had over 160 kids in my home.

BM: Wow!

KM: Yea...

BM: That's amazing.

KM: Some stayed just over night, some were a couple weeks...couple months, some of 'em for a couple years.

BM: A couple years, that long?

KM: A couple years, yea.

BM: That must be hard you must really get attached to them.

KM: Oh yea you do. Some of them you keep in touch with. Umm...in fact one of them just had a birthday on the 29th (*February*) and I wished her a happy birthday and it's kind of neat hearing from some of 'em.

BM: Sure. Well it sounds like you really have a heart for kids.

KM: Yea.

BM: Yea in all sorts of ways.

KM: Yea.

BM: Did you say you draw, too?

KM: I do a lot of drawing...umm...I've had some churches ask me to draw picture of their churches.

BM: Really?

KM: And I should of brought my iPad that had the pictures on it, but I spaced that one out today. But umm yea I had one church that was built in like 1870s and that church was just torn down not too long ago. And they asked me to draw a picture of that and then to draw a new picture of the newest church. So I did that and they auctioned that off. That was around the Hillsboro, Kansas area and they auctioned those two off as a fundraiser for their church house.

BM: How cool is that?

KM: Yea.

BM: Well, I'd love to see some of your drawings sometime you'll have to bring some in.

KM: I'll do that.

BM: Now, I understand that you...you...well I know you drive your own van because I've seen you. Uh and uh...I know you have your own how and have been living independently for...how long has it been since you've lived independently?

KM: Well I stayed home for a while after high school. I think I was about 20 or 21 when I moved out into an apartment had that apartment for 9 years. In fact, it's where the police station is now. So it's kinda funny, I drive the kids by and point to the jail and say that's where I used to live.

(Laughter)

BM: That's funny.

KM: But...uh...yea they were getting ready to tear the houses down to expand the jail. So I had to look around at first, I started to looking for other apartments to move to and trying finding any that's accessible is very difficult.

BM: Oh I bet that's right.

KM: So, well, let's...about renting a house and when I checked into that well let's see about buying it and I had hardly any income at the time but I was able to get a first time home loan and so that helped me a lot and I've been there almost twenty-four years now.

BM: Wow that's amazing.

KM: Yea...have a ramp on it and widen a few rooms and the doors to the room.

BM: Made it all accessible.

KM: So it works out pretty good.

BM: Well that's fantastic.

KM: Yea I like it.

BM: Yea it's fun having your own place.

KM: It is.

BM: How did it come about that you were able to get your van and everything?

KM: Yea uh I had a car and it was just getting more and more difficult for me to get in and out. And trying to just walk was getting more difficult. So I knew I was going to have to start using a wheelchair. Which if you're gonna have a wheelchair you're going to have to have a way to get around.

BM: Sure.

KM: So I checked with a lot of state agencies and other places in order to be able to get the van and the lift and all that. The first van it took a lot in order to be able to do that. I had my church help do a fundraiser in order to pay for the expenses of that. Had that van for a long time and now I have this one and it's a 2003 so it's already thirteen years old.

BM: Yea it's amazing how fast they get older.

KM: Yea.

BM: Umm...let's see...uh...you have a little dog with you named Riley.

KM: Yep that's Riley. He is a Wee-Chon a Westie/Bichon.

BM: A Westie/Bichon.

KM: I think he's about nine years old now.

BM: Yea and he's a therapy dog?

KM: Right he's a service dog, he qualified for it. Does what I need him to do, not always that cooperative sometimes, but for the most part he works pretty well for me.

BM: What types of things does he do for you?

KM: He picks things up for me.

BM: Okay

KM: Yea a good companion...*There he sits up (Laughter)*... Yea he's a good companion, great to be with. He loves to travel. Loves the library.

BM: Yea

KM: As I said he barks when we pull in, but once he gets inside he's nice and quiet.

BM: That's neat.

KM: Yea. Yea.

BM: Well...uh...you're family lives here in Salina still?

KM: My mom lives here with her husband and umm have a sister with her family that still lives here. But everybody else is either in Florida or Topeka.

BM: Oh okay...Florida...wow...so they're a long ways away.

KM: Yea went there to see 'em once...I'd like to go back. But it'll be awhile.

BM: Yea yea...are they...umm...pretty supportive of you?

KM: I think...for the most part. You know growing up they were always there to help me out. They were there to pick on us you know brothers and sisters pickin' on each other...that's normal.

BM: Well yea that's normal.

(Laughter)

KM: Yea...but you know as we get older you know...you know everyone's time consumes whatever they've got going so it's hard to keep in touch but we do it's difficult.

BM: Sure especially if they've moved away and everything.

KM: Yea.

BM: Umm...well I was going to ask you...sounds like you've been through a lot and I was wondering what have been your greatest challenges in your life so far?

KM: Biggest challenge is getting a job.

BM: Getting a job...yea.

KM: You know this past year looking for a job and I've put in well over 260 applications and I've done 55 or so interviews. And I don't have a problem getting the interviews, but like I said once I get there they

see the wheelchair and they just shut their minds off. I could go to a lawyer and I know I've got a case on some of them that I could sue for discrimination but I hate to do that.

BM: Yea...yea.

KM: You know you would think that people were a little bit open minded in today's society, but they're not.

BM: I know I know...I guess it just takes a long time to overcome prejudices. But yea that makes it really hard for you....

KM: It does.

BM: ...to get a job. I know you want to be self-sufficient...

KM: Right.

BM: ...and everything. And you have...you have every ability in the world to be self-sufficient...

KM: It's just getting others to believe it.

BM: Yea it's getting others to believe it...that's right.

KM: Yep...that's been my biggest challenge.

BM: So frustrating. Umm...what are you the most proud of in your life?

KM: Hmm...probably just that I've been able to just keep on going.

BM: Yea and you do. You know you were in here the other day and I was talking with and you said, "Well I gotta go! I'm gonna go tutor some kids." You know so...you do keep on going.

KM: I do. Sometimes it's difficult, but you know I'm not going to sit at home. I'm not going to sit still. I've got things I wanna do.

BM: That's right...that's right. You've got a life to live.

KM: That's right

BM: Yea. I find you inspiring. You've done more with your life despite your disability than most of us have who are you know...don't have a disability.

KM: I saw a bumper sticker the other day on a car in front of me and it said, 'It's not that I can and others can't it's that I will and they won't.'

BM: Yea, that's right.

KM: And I thought you know that's very true.

BM: It's the will it's not you know...

KM: Some people who are perfectly capable of working don't and they'll get disability or whatever and just stay home. I know some people that way. I don't mind getting disability but I would like to be able to work

BM: I know you want to be able to be self-sufficient and I know...I don't know about you, but I find it gratifying to have a career and to contribute to society and all of that

KM: Right. Definitely.

BM: So...umm...you were talking about wanting to have a job so you could fulfill some dreams. What are your dreams?

KM: Well, I had been planning to go to Ireland and do some other traveling, but a year without a job I had to use that money to support myself until I got some disability coming in or til I got a job. So that kind of went away very quickly.

BM: Yea. Sure.

KM: But we'll see.

BM: Yes. Well, is there anything else you'd like to talk about or any other things you'd like to tell us?

KM: Well, I guess my genealogy I spend a lot of time doing research on that.

BM: Oh yea. *(Laughter)*

KM: I grew up with grandparents who like to talk and tell stories and you know how you wish you'd written stories down what they were telling you back then. And some of 'em I did and then others I know I didn't. Prolly won't ever remember them, but write down what I can remember.

BM: Yea. Does your family appreciate that what you're doing with that?

KM: I think they eventually will. I don't know that they completely understand. You know when I try to talk, especially to the one sister she's like okay whatever and then she's on to her own topic but I think eventually it will be appreciated.

(Laughter)

BM: We hope.

KM: Yea, we hope.

BM: You and I are both in the same boat we don't have kids and we hope our families...

KM: Right.

BM: ...they will appreciate it.

KM: I know I have a lot of cousins that keep in touch because of genealogy. I've contacted them and some of them all along had been doing research but we didn't know about each other until we suddenly came acrossed. And then...so we've been helping each other out some.

BM: That's so fun isn't it?

KM: Right.

BM: To meet new family.

KM: Yea and some of them I have they've come here to Kansas and I've shown 'em around the homestead area.

BM: Wow.

KM: Last summer one of my cousins who is...gosh I wanna say he's...in his 90s now, but I can't remember for sure. He met me here in Salina and we drove to the homestead and looked all around and he told me histories and stuff that I never knew about.

BM: Oh, isn't that fun?

KM: So that was so neat. I enjoyed it.

BM: I know that's something we share I've gotten in contact with long lost relatives and they've given me information I never would have found if I hadn't of met them. So...

KM: I have a cousin in Virginia workin' on a certain part of our family. She says just as soon as she can get over this one little hill that she can't seem to get, then she's gonna have me go there and she'll show me all around. Where our family originally started in Virginia and kinda show me some of the history in that area that I've only see on paper. And she's actually there and can go to the places.

BM: Oh, yea, that'll be fun.

KM: Yea.

BM: Where is your homestead here?

KM: Around the Lost Springs, Lincolville, Council Grove area.

BM: Okay.

KM: Yea.

BM: How far back did your ancestors immigrate there?

KM: Around 1860.

BM: 1860. Very early.

KM: Really early.

BM: Just a few years after the Kansas territory opened.

KM: Right. One family came and they had a group of fifteen kids one of them died. And then in the meantime they adopted two kids that had lost their parents on the trail and so got some of that kind of history in there. Others that came...he was single and he came here and ended up raising a big family. So got a lot of interesting parts of the country out there.

BM: Yes. Well it sounds like they were people with grit...

KM: Yea, had to be.

BM: ...sounds like you have inherited their grit.

KM: Yea, ya have to do that.

BM: I think so.

KM: I mean you're kind of stuck otherwise.

BM: I know. I know

(Laughter)

KM: Yes. Yep.

BM: Well, anything else you'd like to add.

KM: Hmm...not that I can think of.

BM: Okay, well, sure appreciate you coming here and speaking with us today

KM: Thank you.

BM: And I wish you all the luck in the world on your job hunt because it sounds like you would just be a fantastic employee and whoever ends up getting you will be lucky so...

KM: Thank you.

BM: Thank you.