

Foreword by Empower Missouri

This oral and life history is part of an ongoing desire at Empower Missouri to understand its history, pass on its legacy, and inspire future generations of change agents. Empower Missouri is a citizen membership organization founded in 1901 to promote the wellbeing of all Missourians through activism, civic engagement, collaboration, education and research. Many people have been part of the "genes" of the organization. Mary Kay McPhee is among them.

In my sixth decade, I am already losing mentors and role models to death or dementia and wish so much their stories had been saved somewhere. Understanding the value of learning from our elders, we decided to undertake this project after Mary Kay McPhee's 90th birthday celebration this year. I would like to extend a special thanks to Alice Laughlin Kitchen² who helped make it possible.

Mary Kay McPhee has seen tremendous changes in our world. I have found that she intelligently marries curiosity with the events of her nine decades to develop wisdom. It feels good to be with someone who displays poise the way she does. She embodies human dignity.

Mrs. McPhee worked with Herman and Dorothy Johnson, amazing civic leaders. Herman Johnson served as President of the Kansas City Chapter of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). As Empower Missouri president, he brought our organization through a very rough patch in the 1970s. The Missouri Human Rights Commission exists because of the efforts of the Johnsons, and I understand that Mary Kay McPhee was invited into that effort by Herman Johnson. In 2004, Empower Missouri established the Herman and Dorothy Johnson Local Advocate Award³ to remember and honor the Johnsons after they both passed away that same year. They lived through and fought against segregation in Missouri and helped achieve public

¹ For more **Empower Missouri history**, see *Missouri's Long Road to Social Justice: A History of the Missouri Association for Social Welfare [MASW]*, 1901-2000 by Roland Meinert (2000).

² **Alice Laughlin Kitchen** is a longtime Empower Missouri member and Adjunct Professor of Social Work, University of Missouri-Kansas City.

³ In May of each year, local Empower Missouri chapters review nominees from their area and select one to be forwarded for consideration for the **Herman and Dorothy Johnson Local Advocate Award**.

accommodations laws and changes in public policy on children welfare, aging, and other issues.

We at Empower Missouri hope that the stories and reflections Mary Kay McPhee so willingly and humbly shared will inspire younger advocates to engage in social change and work for social justice. We plan to include content from this document in our newsletter and share it on our website. We hope it sparks inquiry into the lives of other change agents.

We hope this narrative that Empower Missouri commissioned, and the accompanying YouTube videos, might be used in teaching, training, learning, and advocating, whether in sociology, education, history, social work, law, criminal justice, political science or other disciplines, and by the different chapters of Empower Missouri across the state.

These materials will also be part of the Empower Missouri permanent archive at the University of Missouri-Columbia, for future researchers, to dig deeper into Missouri's history and explore the stories of people who lived that history, which is still in the making. This narrative will be shared as well with libraries that have requested copies.



Jeanette Mott Oxford
Executive Director since 2012 of
Empower Missouri
and Member,
Missouri House of Representatives, 2005-2012

To reference document
Toure, K., and Farmer, J. G. (2017). *Reflecting on Empower Missouri and a Life of Service: Conversations with Mary Kay McPhee*. Jefferson City: Empower Missouri.

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Note: Front and back cover designs by Dramane Daravé.

Conversations with Mary Kay McPhee

Overview

Mary Kay McPhee of Kansas City accepted, at the age of 90, the invitation of Empower Missouri to be interviewed about her life of service. She embodies the Empower Missouri slogan of advocating for justice and empowering change. In her ethical will and the conversations documented here, she shares her life, values, and hopes.



In her early years, Mary Kay spends a lot of time with her resourceful paternal grandmother while both her parents work. By the age of 13, she travels by car with her parents to 48 U.S. state capitals, Mexico and Canada. In 1945, the year World War II was ending, she graduates from Topeka High School, which was academically integrated but socially segregated, and begins her studies at the University of Kansas. In high school and at university, she begins to see beyond the lily-white world in which she grew up. Mary Kay wants to be a social worker - to help make room for everyone at the table -, but her advisor steers her toward education instead. She teaches third grade for one year in Kansas City, Kansas, in an all-white school, while learning about inferior conditions at an allblack school from a sorority sister teaching there. While raising her son and daughter, Mrs. McPhee is

involved in the parent-teacher association, Boy Scouts, and Girls Scouts.

Working in the 1960s with Empower Missouri members and as a child welfare commissioner for Jackson County are important formative years in the life of Mrs. McPhee. These activities allow her to fulfill her heart's desire of being a social worker. She describes the aftermath of the 1968 Holy Week riots in Kansas City, after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. She describes collaborative efforts with the Johnson County Men's Garden Club to plant community gardens in the scorched areas, as part of the healing process, and civil rights activist Ella Stackhouse's classes to help community residents dry, freeze and can their harvests. Mrs. McPhee learns from and works alongside other civil rights activists like Dorothy and Herman Johnson. Dorothy Johnson worked at The Call newspaper, was a member of Empower Missouri, and directed the Jackson County Department of Health and Welfare. Herman Johnson was a businessman, President of the Kansas City Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and former Missouri State Representative. As President of Empower Missouri in 1977 and 1978, he saved the organization from financial collapse. On trips to and from Jefferson City for Empower Missouri, Mary Kay is mentored by Herman Johnson. One of the lessons she learns is to listen, to really listen

to people. This skill serves her well in her pursuit of social justice, a top priority for her, as mentioned in her ethical will.

In the 1970s, Mary Kay McPhee takes on leadership positions with Empower Missouri, serving as chairman of the Kansas City area chapter, covering five counties. She serves on the organization's state-wide board of directors from 1973 to 1976. This early experience prepares her for work on a host of other boards over the next three decades, whether city-wide, state-wide or national in nature. She becomes an advocate for board development, insisting members learn their legal and moral responsibilities. As President of the Auxiliary of the American Medical Association, with the theme of "Shape Up for Life," she once again travels the country, this time to promote public health, while her mother cares for her ailing husband. She travels to Seville, Spain to share sister city greetings and, for her own education and enjoyment, visits Australia and several countries in South America and in Africa. Setting up a pivotal meeting with the chancellor of the University of Missouri-Kansas City about the creation of its School of Social Work is indicative of how many other doors she has opened.

For Mary Kay McPhee, social welfare and social change come about through inclusive discussions, public policy designed for the common good and not just particular groups of people, engaged citizenship, solidarity, persistent advocacy, holding officials accountable, and being open to change. She is a passionate believer in education, in the broadest sense. She supports both her alma mater – the University of Kansas – and what she refers to as Kansas City's university – the University of Missouri-Kansas City. To be useful to the communities of which they are a part, Mary Kay encourages young people to find their passion. She engages with her grandchildren and other millennials. She

nourishes herself not only by staying in touch with young people and their concerns but also by meeting with other women for regular conversations through the Watering Hole. She stresses the need for kindness in leaders, the type of kindness that "holds the door and builds a ramp." She says that true leaders bring out the leader in others.

Mrs. McPhee is humble, admits her biases, knows that the social landscape is constantly changing, and challenges herself and others to stay abreast – and



relevant. She encourages us to face and deal with racism and to better understand rural issues. She insists that the quality of public services should not depend on where you live. Pathways to justice involve working across boundaries and getting over the "Yes, but..." tendency of defending the status quo. How can justice come about without being willing to open one's heart and extend a hand, without being willing to change oneself and change society?

In addition to "Conversations with Mary Kay McPhee," this document includes a foreword by Empower Missouri Executive Director Jeanette Mott Oxford, a section on methodology which explains how this oral herstory was conducted by interviewers Joanna Grace Farmer and Kathryn Toure, a timeline of some of the events and phases in the life of Mrs. McPhee, and a review of this work by a millennial. The document is accompanied by a video, produced by Neil Tucker, of conversational interviews with this elder.

Keywords: Mary Katherine (aka Mary Kay) Paige McPhee, ethical will, Kansas City history, Kansas City herstory, Missouri Association for Social Welfare (MASW) / Empower Missouri, Topeka High School, University of Kansas (KU), University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC), Dorothy Johnson, Herman Johnson, school segregation, racial discrimination, civil rights, education, social justice, community engagement, civic leadership

Conversations with Mary Kay McPhee about her **Ethical Will**

At our first encounter together, Mrs. Mary Kay McPhee⁴ presented to us (Joanna Grace Farmer and Kathryn Toure) her Ethical Will and invited us to read it. She explained that we write wills about how we want our finances and material possessions handled. "Why not encourage people to write ethical wills about their values, beliefs, and wishes for their family and community?" she asked us. We left with a binder with her 25-page Ethical Will in it, followed by her 18-page curriculum vitae. We went straight to FedEx in the Plaza area of Kansas City to make a copy for each of us and promptly returned the original document with an extra copy for her.

Mary Kay said that she learned of the tradition of ethical wills from Jewish friends, who might not have been able to pass down a coffee table because of their mobility, but passed along concerns through the writing and sharing of ethical wills.

She strongly encouraged us to promote the idea of ethical wills. "Do not make it a monumental task. Start with one page, and let it grow. Special occasions like births, weddings and funerals can be good times to reflect and write, because memories flow. Jot them down briefly, along with lessons learned. This can help us understand what contributed to family and community and responsible citizenship and being active participants in making things better for the common good. It is a good thing for you to do with senior citizens. Like I said, start with one page, then add to it, add to it. I would have been very grateful had my grandmother done that."

Championing the idea of ethnical wills

At our second encounter:

Kathryn Toure: When we give a summary of our conversations with you to Empower Missouri, would you like your Ethical Will to be included as part of what we transfer? Mary Kay McPhee: I don't mind, you know. My message is to encourage people to do ethical wills. I think it is important to champion that idea. From a family's standpoint, it's wonderful. I wish my family had done this for me. It would have helped me understand how they became who they were, the times in which they lived, their financial situations, the world situation, the issues facing the country, local issues too and how they dealt with them, and how they became involved in what they were involved in. Those kinds of things. As well as their relationships and why they were important.

If you look at Empower Missouri, and I say this very proudly, you all have for a hundred plus years been talking not about us and them but about we. And talking about issues that cause people to come together to understand each other better. I think that's just noble. It's noble.

Joanna Grace Farmer: Thank you for the encouragement about the ethical will. I think we are both moved to encourage the idea and practice it in our circles.

⁴ born Mary Katherine Paige in Topeka, Kansas on June 22, 1927

Mary Kay McPhee: We have all kinds of wills. We pass material things down, and money. An ethical will passes down values and principles and so forth. The person writing an ethical will examines where their values came from and how they became impassioned about particular issues. It can be a simple thing. You can add to it. *Joanna*: Over time.

Mary Kay McPhee: As the memories flow. (laughter) An ethical will would have helped me understand why people in my family did what they did. What caused them to invest their gifts of self in a certain fashion. I think the way in which we share of self depends a lot on the larger environment and the times in which we live. If it's a time of war, people may be asked to self-sacrifice for that, or even give their life as a member of the military, or to work in a munitions plant, but some people might be against that, that kind of thing. I think giving might be a combination of finding your passion and responding to external forces. I hope my ethical will is a part of my grandchildren learning more about their heritage.

Listening and learning

Kathryn: In your ethical will, you listed four things that are important for you. The first was education. Why did you list education first, before social justice, health/wellness, and civil rights?

Mary Kay McPhee: Education is the common denominator for everything else. Education, education, education. When I talk abo0ut education, it doesn't necessarily mean academic education, okay. It is not just scholarly, or related to degrees. I'm talking about education in general – having an open mind, observing, asking questions, learning, and so forth. Listening and learning. Listening, listening, listening. Learning, learning, learning.

Conversations with Mary Kay McPhee about

Growing Up

Southern roots

Mary Kay McPhee: Why did you think I was from the south? I do have southern roots. My people were distillers.

Joanna: Is that right? From?

Mary Kay McPhee: Jim Beam whiskey.

Joanna: Oh, Kentucky, okay!

Kathryn: On your mother's side and your father's side?

Mary Kay McPhee: This was my dad's family. But I was born in the Midwest, in Topeka, Kansas. My father was also born in Kansas, in a small town called Netawaka, but my family had Kentucky roots, my Granddad. I can't remember the exact lineage. But they were Beam's.

Kathryn: The distillery roots were left behind in Kentucky?

Mary Kay McPhee: Yeah. Well, somewhat [looking to the kitchen] ... bring out the Beam.

All: (laughter)

Mary Kay McPhee: I have a friend, a girlfriend, Betsy Vander Velde⁵. She comes over and says, "Beam me up. Beam me up, Scottie."

Joanna: So you maintain that heritage, of being connected to Jim Beam whiskey?

Mary Kay McPhee: Yeah.

Joanna: Just like someone saying they're Budweiser.

Mary Kay McPhee: But I can't say it's made me any wiser. (laughter)

Learning from my grandmothers

Mary Kay McPhee: My father's mother, my grandmother, came from England. And those grandparents, they moved into Kansas, and she was afraid of the Indians.

Joanna: Why was she afraid?

Mary Kay McPhee: Just the stories, before she came. She was going to this little Kansas town and thought she was going to be in Indian territory.

Joanna: Wow.

Mary Kay McPhee: I'm telling you what I heard. My grandmother was the influencer in my life. Grandma. (laughter)

Kathryn: We read about her in your ethical will.

Mary Kay McPhee: I don't know what I wrote about her, but she was huge for me.

Kathryn: In what way?

Mary Kay McPhee: In my family, I was among the fortunate in the 1930s in that both my parents had jobs, so we had income. My parents would feed me at home, and then drop me off at my dad's mother's place – my grandma's house.

Kathryn: Was she living with your grandfather?

⁵ **Betsy Vander Velde** is former President and Chief Executive Officer of The Family Conservancy.

Mary Kay McPhee: Yes. She took care of me. And then I went to school from her house. I walked to school. She was the exciting person for me in those years. Everything was an adventure, an exploration. (laughter)

Kathryn: What's something fun you did with your grandma?

Mary Kay McPhee: (smile) We had alleys. We walked down the alley. And there would be, here and there, volunteer hollyhocks. We would pick them and make dolls out of them, each with a hoop skirt and a bust from a bud. And a toothpick parasol. The dolls would be in their colors and their outfits, and we would have dances. (laughter) With the hollyhocks girls. Grandma made everything a game. She was out there.

I had two very different grandmothers. My other grandmother was married three times and had red hair, and was a woman. Ok? The other grandmother also had red hair, but she was a homemaker and kept everything together in very lean times. She knew how to... stretch things. How to never throw things away: a scrap of fabric, a piece of food. Those are important lessons to us all, when we look at the waste we produce today. My hope is that we can be more resourceful, reduce our waste, and be more productive with the little waste we'll inevitably have.

Kathryn: What did you learn from your mother's mother?

Mary Kay McPhee: She lived in California, so I saw her rarely, but she was also this outthere woman in her way. It was a barrel of fun when she would come to Kansas City to visit. It was always fun, and we would make candy, go places, that kind of thing. When we made candy – divinity – we would sing. To make the candy, you had to bake the egg white mixture at the right temperature. If it was too wet, it wouldn't set.

Joanna: What's divinity? *Kathryn*: Is it like meringue?

Mary Kay McPhee: In a way. It's like a nougat.

Joanna: It must have been pretty good?

Mary Kay McPhee: Oh, (laughter) delicious, delightful. (laughter)

An only child in a two-income household

Joanna: How many were in your family?

Mary Kay McPhee: My birth family? I was an only child. Is that what you're asking? I was an only child, so I had the best of all worlds. (laughter)

Kathryn: What kind of work did your father do?

Mary Kay McPhee: He was in the automobile business. He was a car salesman. Nobody had money to buy cars. And what was he selling? Cadillacs!⁶

6 "The Great Depression sapped the auto industry generally, with the luxury market declining more steeply; between 1928 and 1933, Cadillac sales had declined by 84%, to 6,736 vehicles. Exacerbating sales performance for the Cadillac brand was a policy, reflective of the times, which discouraged sales to African Americans. Nick Dreystadt, mechanic and national head of Cadillac service, urged a committee – set up to decide whether the Cadillac brand would live on – to revoke that policy. After the policy was eliminated, brand sales increased by 70% in 1934 – and Dreystadt was promoted to lead the entire Cadillac Division. By 1940, Cadillac sales had risen tenfold compared to 1934." See Wikipedia and its sources including "The Man Who Saved the Cadillac" by J. S. Gordon in Forbes (2009), updated from 1995 version in American Heritage Magazine, www.forbes.com/2009/04/30/1930s-auto-industry-business-cadillac.html (accessed October 15, 2017).

Kathryn: In your ethical will, you talked about how your father stressed the importance of you, his daughter, becoming self-reliant. Why do you think that was so important for him?

Mary Kay McPhee: I was his only chick. (laughter) I think he was anxious to see me succeed. As any parent would be.

Kathryn: What about that self-reliant part? Those were the words you used.

Mary Kay McPhee: Basically, he was saying that he wanted me to grow up to be able to take care of myself. At that time, women were not as... visible (laughter), let's say it that way, in business, in other ways. He was saying, "Don't listen. Do your own thing. You can be self-reliant and should be self-reliant."

Ioanna: Father knows best.

Mary Kay McPhee: My mother was a dictionary person. Have I told you about her? Kathryn: I remember reading in your ethical will about her being a "word person," but I don't know exactly what you mean by that or what kind of work she did.

Mary Kay McPhee: For her paid job, she worked in Topeka, Kansas for Senator Arthur Capper⁷. She worked for the *Topeka Daily Capital*, which published *Capper's Weekly* that went out to smaller communities. My mother was the person they hired to be the contest person. For example, how many words can you make out of the letters of this word? People would send in their answers, and there was a prize. Or, add a last line to this jingle or this limerick. This is the kind of thing I grew up with. My mother was this adorable (emphasis) person. You would have fallen in love instantly with Maggie. She had a great sense of humor and made everything fun.

Both of my parents working outside the home in the 1930s was possible only because my grandmother cared for me. And that kind of synergy in the family was not unique to my family.

Crisscrossing the nation and learning on the road

Mary Kay McPhee: By the time I was 13, I had visited 48 states of the United States and been to Canada and Mexico, all in the car. (laughter) The goal was to visit the state capitals, which we did, and learn about each state we visited, and visit neighboring countries. My father was in the automobile business. We went on road trips on our vacations. When we took these trips, we were expected to learn about the history of where we were. My father was an amateur naturalist, so we also had to understand the topography of the land and as much as we could about the fauna and the

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⁷ **Arthur Capper** served as United States Senator from Kansas, 1919-1949. Before that, he served as the 20th Governor (Republican) of the state, the first born in Kansas. He chaired the National Governors Association, 1916-1918. He had attended public schools and learned printing. "He became a newspaper publisher, eventually owning several newspapers and two radio stations. The best known of his publications, *Capper's Weekly*, had an enormous readership among farm families and served as the base of his political support in Kansas." (Wikipedia) *The Kansas Weekly Capital*, 1906-1913, became *Capper's Weekly*, 1913-1986, and then *Capper's* in 1987. *Capper's* continues today as *Capper's Farmer*, a bimonthly glossy magazine focusing on rural living. See http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn78005745 (accessed October 15, 2017). It seems it was first published on July 10, 1879, as a weekly edition of the *Topeka Daily Capital*. See https://www.legacystories.org/public-archives/stories/entry/my-mother-and-the-cappers-weekly (accessed October 15, 2017).

vegetation. We were always on the lookout for flowers, trees, and birds and other animals. My father would put up some prize money, which at that time was a nickel. (laughter) He would say, for example, "Ok, be alert. There will be a prize for the first person to see a scissor-tailed flycatcher."

Joanna: Is that a bird?

Mary Kay McPhee: Yes, a bird. (laughter)

Joanna: Did you win?

Mary Kay McPhee: Well, it might have been set up to make me win. My father made it a game. We learned having fun.

Kathryn: Your father was an educator in his own right. *Mary Kay McPhee*: Absolutely and a stern disciplinarian. I didn't get away with a thing!

Kathryn: Did you actually get in trouble?

Mary Kay McPhee: I don't remember ever being paddled or switched, but there were expectations. If I started to get out of line, they would say, "Oh, my... Oh, my... we never suspected that you would do such a thing..."

Joanna: You had discussions about behavior, about how to act?

Mary Kay McPhee: Oh my goodness yes, and was very much expected to toe the line.

Kathryn: What were those discussions like?

Mary Kay McPhee: I think it would be the same for any family you know: teaching a young child what's proper, what's not proper, how you treat people.

Listening to the radio and reading

Kathryn: Growing up, what was your relationship with reading, with the written word? *Mary Kay McPhee*: We listened to the radio, not the television. I remember as a child listening to reports of the war in Europe, that's what World War II was called here, until the United States become involved. I was still a youngster. I thought troops would show up in town any day. I guess I didn't yet have a good sense of geography at that time. As far as reading, I read pretty much everything my teachers recommended, but also, you have to know that people in my family were readers.

Kathryn: Did you receive the newspaper, or did you go to the library? Did you receive the newspaper at home?

Mary Kay McPhee: Oh yes, oh yes. We had delivery people.

Kathryn: Did you read it or did your parents read it?

Mary Kay McPhee: Yes. I read the papers, but did I tell you about my granddaughter, one of them? When she was three, she announced to her parents: "Well, I can read." "Really?" they replied and gave her a book, a kiddy book. They thought she had memorized it, so they handed her the newspaper!

Kathryn: Fabulous. Would you go to the library? Was there a library nearby or not?

⁸ Photo of **scissor-tailed flycatcher** (Oklahoma state bird) in flight by Ken Slade on Flickr (noncommercial use permitted with attribution).

Mary Kay McPhee: Sure, I would go to the library. Also, I had books from my parents' childhood. My dad grew up with the Rover boys and I have the Rover Boys books⁹.

Joanna: You still have the books? *Mary Kay McPhee*: I have them.

Joanna: Wow.

Topeka High School, segregated socially but not academically

Mary Kay McPhee: As you know, I grew up in another city, not Kansas City, during a time of segregation. I only knew people that looked and acted like I did.

Kathryn: Because elementary schools in Topeka were segregated at that time?

Mary Kay McPhee: Elementary and middle schools were segregated¹⁰. It was only when I got to high school, and everybody went, that I had a different experience. I went to Topeka High School¹¹. It was interesting. In Topeka, there was only one public high school, so it was not segregated academically, but segregated socially.

Joanna: What does that mean?

Mary Kay McPhee: It means that the classes, the football team, etc. were not segregated. This was a time of segregation, but our classes were not. But (emphasis in voice), when I

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say it was socially segregated, in other words, basically an African American and a Caucasian probably wouldn't date each other, okay. That (emphasis in voice) social thing.

⁹ Thirty **Rover Boys titles** were published between 1899 and 1926 (before Mary Kay McPhee was born) and remained in print. (Wikipedia)

¹⁰ See "The **Segregation of Topeka's Public School System**, 1879-1951," by T. Rosenblum, National Park Service Historian, www.nps.gov/brvb/learn/historyculture/topekasegregation.htm (accessed October 15, 2017).

¹¹ The Topeka junior high schools were integrated in 1941. "**Topeka High School** was **integrated** from its inception in 1871 and its sports teams from 1949 on." Source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brown_v._Board_of_Education (accessed October 15, 2017). The 1941-45 Topeka High School yearbooks consulted at the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library show pictures of the Ramblers basketball team and their cheerleaders (both comprised solely of African Americans) and show African Americans on the school football team. There were social/service clubs for African Americans and a "Colored Advisory Council" comprised of students. Note that the 1945 Topeka High School yearbook lists 91 former students who died in service in World War II. See www.classmates.com/yearbooks/Topeka-High-School/73376?page=0 (accessed October 15, 2017).

Joanna: When you operated outside of Topeka High School, what other high schools did you associate with? Were all the high schools like that? Or you said Topeka was the only high school, so who did the football team play in Kansas?

Mary Kay McPhee: They played segregated teams.

Joanna: So either white or black or both?

Mary Kay McPhee: I think both. Whoever belonged to their leagues. You're asking me, but I'm not a sports person, so I don't know.

Joanna: That's really interesting. I've never heard of that before. Mary Kay McPhee: One thing we had that you may find interesting is that every year we had a king and queen of the school. But there was a Caucasian king and queen and an African American king and queen. The Latinos didn't have one... well there weren't that many Latino students then. At all-school dances, the Caucasian king and queen would go



Class of 1945 Topeka High School yearbook cover, from classmates.com

down, and this was all on the campus of the high school, and do a ceremonial dance



for the African American group, and the African American king and queen in turn came up and did a ceremonial dance for the Caucasians. (See Annex 2) Can you believe it?

Kathryn: What about the voting? Did you vote for both groups? Or did the whites vote for the whites and the blacks for the blacks?

Mary Kay McPhee: (indicating no to the first question and yes to the second, raising her hand and adding with a smile) I was once Queen, the Caucasian queen¹².

Joanna: Do you have any memorabilia from your youth, like yearbooks for example? Do you still have those?

Mary Kay McPhee: I think my family has

Mary Kay McPhee: I think my family has those.

Joanna: Would they be here in Kansas City?

¹² "Mary Kay Paige – attendant to the Homecoming Queen, then Aviation Day Queen, and finally Queen of the All-School Party! Mary Kay has been a participant in student government, Junior Red Cross, and dramatics, yet she has kept the grades on a high level. You may well be proud to call her Queen." (1945 Topeka High School yearbook, p. 30)

Mary Kay McPhee: I think the person that has them in my family is in Seattle, but I'll have to ask them.

Alice Laughlin Kitchen (long-time Empower Missouri member who attended one of the conversation sessions): Were you at Topeka High when *Brown v. Board of Education* went to the U.S. Supreme Court?¹³

Mary Kay McPhee: Well no, I had already graduated.

Alice Laughlin Kitchen: Did you know any of the Browns?

Mary Kay McPhee: Yes! I know Cheryl Brown Henderson¹⁴. She lived in this building for a long time. She was one of three daughters [along with Linda and Terry, of Rev. Oliver L. Brown] cited in the Brown versus the Topeka Board of Education case. Cheryl's moved to Florida now.

Kathryn: We're going to include a portrait of her sister, Linda Brown Thompson, in a mural in Liberty, Missouri by the way.

Mary Kay McPhee: Are you now! Are you now?

Kathryn: Yes, at Garrison School, established in 1877 for black children.

Alice Laughlin Kitchen: Did you also know Esther Brown¹⁵, from Merriam, Kansas?

Mary Kay McPhee: Oh yes! I knew her through mutual friends. I had a lot of Jewish friends. And I know she started the Panel of American Women.

Kathryn: After hearing from Mamie Hughes¹⁶ about the Panel of American Women, founded to communicate and mitigate the effects of prejudice on all people, I researched it at the State Historical Society of Missouri and found the Panel spread across the nation in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

Mary Kay McPhee: It did?

Kathryn: The Panel of American Women existed even in Canada!

All: (laughter)

Kathryn: Did you grow up Catholic? Jewish? Or?

¹³ "In 1951, a class action suit was filed against the Board of Education of the City of Topeka, Kansas in the United States District Court for the District of Kansas. The plaintiffs were thirteen Topeka parents [12 mothers plus one father: Mr. Oliver Brown] on behalf of 20 children... The Topeka Board of Education operated **separate elementary schools** under an 1879 Kansas law." Source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brown_v._Board_of_Education (accessed October 15, 2017). Mary Kay McPhee graduated from high school in 1945 and from the University of Kansas in 1949, a few years before the class action suit. The case of *Brown v. The Board of Education* was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1952 and decided in 1954. It combined five cases, including the complaint against the Topeka Board of education, and represented nearly 200 plaintiffs.

¹⁴ **Cheryl Brown Henderson** started the Brown Foundation. See http://brownvboard.org/content/cheryl-brown-henderson (accessed October 15, 2017).

¹⁵ **Esther Brown**, a Jewish woman, "organized meetings of African-American parents and tried to convince white parents to join her cause" for better schools for African Americans. This work led to the 1949 Kansas Supreme Court decision, in *Webb v School District No. 90*, which "held that blacks had the right to attend the new, previously all-white, South Park school" in Merriam. Her "next target was Topeka, where she assisted in an effort that had been launched by the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] to integrate the city's elementary schools. See "Meet the Browns: Esther Brown and the Oliver Brown Family," www.famous-trials.com/brownvtopeka/661-meetthebrowns (accessed October 15, 2017).

¹⁶ Among many other responsibilities, **Mamie Hughes** served two terms on the Jackson County legislature, 1973-74 and 1975-78, and served as Ombudsperson during the construction of U. S. Route 71.

Mary Kay McPhee: I grew up, I'll say, with a Christian background, but my family was not big in the church, okay, so that's why I belong to All Souls Unitarian Universal Church today. If it works for you, it's okay with me. (laughter)

Conversations with Mary Kay McPhee about

University Life

Learning from war veterans at the university

Mary Kay McPhee: The university helped me better understand societal issues. When I started at the University of Kansas, in Lawrence, in the fall of 1945, veterans – men and women of all colors – were returning home. The war machine was gone, Rosie the Riveter was asked to return to the home, and there were still not enough jobs for all the veterans, so the government sent many of them to school¹⁷. I was a beneficiary of that, as were others who listened to them in class discussions. We heard mature voices, not just those of 18-year-olds, away from home for the first time.

It was really a gift to hear various perspectives and engage in more in-depth discussions when an issue came up in the classroom. We listened to the hopes and dreams of people who were seizing an opportunity they had not dreamed of, to have an education and a career, when a lot of us just felt it was our right, not really understanding the role of our heritage and situations of privilege.

I really began to understand things as I never had before

Mary Kay McPhee: My eyes were also opened when I worked as House Manager with the House Mother of my sorority. It was an elected position, and I worked with the staff in the house, mostly African Americans. I worked with them every (emphasis) day.

I remember the man who ran the kitchen. He was a family man – a husband and a father – working on his PhD. Running the kitchen earned him money for his studies. I got to know him very well. We became friends. I really began to understand things as I never had before... it was an amazing opportunity for me.

I also remember the "upstairs maid." She sure did keep those sorority girls, um... let's say, tidy. Some of them, you know, were sloppy. And that was an inconvenience for roommates. What the upstairs maid did in such a case was put all the sloppy girl's belongings in the hallway. And when the girl arrived back at the sorority house, she would have to arrange them neatly.

I wanted to be a social worker...

Kathryn: I was wondering... because I also went to the University of Kansas (KU). You went when only about 5% of women (and 7% of men) in the country were going to university, compared to 32.7% of women (and 32.3% of men) in 2015. Could you tell us more about your time at KU?

Mary Kay McPhee: When I went to the University of Kansas, I wanted to be a social worker. Being from a southern family, I was acutely aware of racial injustice in our country. And as a child of the 1930s, I had seen families struggling with the effects of

¹⁷ "Nearly 8 million serviceman and servicewomen were educated under the provisions of the GI Bill after World War II. But for blacks... the promise of the GI Bill went largely unfilled." By 1946, only one fifth of the 100,000 blacks who had applied for educational benefits had been registered in college. See "Never a Level Playing Field: **Blacks and the GI Bill**" by H. Herbold (1994), *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 6, pp. 104-108. https://doi.org/10.2307/2962479 (accessed October 15, 2017).

the Great Depression and people helping one another. There was always room at the table.

I wanted to work in that spirit – of helping your neighbor. But my advisor, a man, said I would become too involved, that I would not be able to leave the stories of people at the doorstep and would therefore be ineffective, so I instead studied education and became a school teacher. My advisor said, and rightly so, that I could fulfill the need that I felt in doing volunteer work. And that's what I did. It was the right advice. It was a strange time. The veterans were coming back, and some baby boomers were already ready to go to school. (laughter) So teachers were needed.

Joanna: There was something going on. You wanted to be a social worker in college, and your advisor said that wasn't a great idea, so you became a teacher. You decided to follow your advisor's advice and your heart and your passion at the same time. You still became a social worker in your own way, by becoming involved in Empower Missouri, called the Missouri Association for Social Welfare (MASW) at the time, and many other organizations and causes.

Mary Kay McPhee: Yes indeed.

What is a social worker?

Kathryn: For you, what is a social worker?

Mary Kay McPhee: Somebody with a listening heart. Someone who is a connector, who facilitates the coming together of people to meet the needs of the community.

Meeting Bill McPhee

Kathryn: I was also wondering how you met your first husband.

Mary Kay McPhee: Bill McPhee. This was the end of World War II, in 1945, the fall. He, Bill McPhee, lived in California. He was in the Naval Reserve, as an 18-year-old. They sent him along with several others to the University of Kansas (KU), to go to medical school. That's how I met him, through KU. He was a senior member of his social fraternity. On the KU campus at that time, the goal was to have every freshman man in a fraternity meet every freshman girl in the sorority. So we organized and attended hour dances, and so forth.

Kathryn: Hour, h-o-u-r?

Mary Kay McPhee: Yes, h-o-u-r. The dances were an hour long. (laughter) Records were played, and we changed partners regularly. That's how I met Bill McPhee. He brought his freshmen over to our sorority. (laughter)

Kathryn: And you married after finishing studies at KU?

Mary Kay McPhee: We were still both students there. He was in medical school. And I was finishing up. We were married in my senior year.

Conversations with Mary Kay McPhee about her

Civic Engagement 18

Teaching in Kansas City, Kansas

Kathryn: When you left the University of Kansas and started teaching, where did you teach?

Mary Kay McPhee: You'll find this interesting. I was qualified to teach English and Rhetoric in high school, but the Kansas City, Missouri school system was five-star at that time. And they only hired you if you were someone with an advanced degree or were, what do I want to say, an established teacher, and I of course was neither.

Elementary teachers were needed, so I taught school in Kansas City, Kansas. I became an elementary school teacher, and I had 46 nine-year-old's in my class! Now think of this... 46 nine-year-old's... But it was a different time. The parents and the schools worked very closely together.

At that time, my husband was an intern at St. Mary's Hospital here, and he made \$50 a month. We lived with the nuns in hospital housing, which was connected to the hospital, on the upper floors. The nuns would come and go. We were close friends with them, and they would hear the story of the elementary school where I taught.

There was no cafeteria at the school, okay. The youngsters had to go home for lunch and then come back. But some didn't have food, so these darling nuns would give me food packaged in little brown sacks to put in my teacher's closet. If somebody didn't have lunch, it was there for them.

Joanna: Makes me think of the kitchens the Black Panthers set up in the 1970s, to serve breakfast to children before they went to school.

Kathryn: You were teaching in about 1949 and 1950? In a segregated school in Kansas City, Kansas?

Mary Kay McPhee: It was interesting, when I was at the University of Kansas, I belonged to a social sorority and to an academic society. The academic sorority was very diverse, okay. There were Caucasians and African-Americans.

At the first all-school meeting of teachers organized by the superintendent in the school district in Kansas City, Kansas, where I was teaching, I met up with one of the gals who was African American and in this professional sorority with me. We connected again. We talked and talked and talked. We told each other stories. She had as many students as I did. I was in this new school which didn't have a cafeteria, but it was a new school, okay, named Parker School.

Listen to what I'm saying. You're not going to believe this. This was a time of segregation. I couldn't believe what she was telling me. She had taken some pictures and showed them to me. In the classrooms at the school where she taught, there were lightbulbs coming down with no shades. And there was no indoor plumbing. The

¹⁸ "Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes." Definition of Tom Ehrlich, www.nytimes.com/ref/college/collegespecial2/coll_aascu_defi.html (accessed October 15, 2017).

school had outhouses – outdoor toilets. I could not imagine that all this would be allowed, in the same school district. Yes, I was exposed to inequities, to issues that needed attention.

Kathryn: In Kansas City, Kansas in the late 1940s... You and this other teacher were sorority sisters?

Mary Kay McPhee: We were. Yeah.

Empower Missouri is totally invested in the wellbeing of people

Mary Kay McPhee: Empower Missouri has been there since 1901 facilitating dialogue and listening to all sides. I think Empower Missouri looks to the welfare of all citizens. Diversity and cultural competency are two of the organization's strengths. You encourage people to think and act innovatively. You do so with compassion, honesty and a listening ear.

Community input is so vital, and you're good at that. You do it with civility and respect. You encourage conversations about the issues, from one point to another point and anything in between. You ask, "How can we collaborate in making a positive difference in the community?" You're able to assemble thoughts and translate them into political clout. There were very few other groups with a variety of concerns that could do that – maybe there are more such groups now.



You have the mix. You listen to multiple voices. The trust level and the respect is so high. When MASW, now Empower Missouri, speaks, people listen. The historical roots are a selling feature. The founders of Empower Missouri were totally invested in these values.

Through Empower Missouri, we share stories of hope and optimism, but also of anxieties and frustrations. We bring our curiosity, our inventiveness, and our humanity to the table, to the telephone, to our state representatives, whatever the case may be. We do all that with warmth and humor. Empower Missouri pushes us uphill when need be. Empower Missouri helps us keep a moral perspective when we address the challenges of our times.

Kathryn: Can you tell us about your earliest involvement with Empower Missouri? *Mary Kay McPhee*: I knew about Empower Missouri – well, then it was the Missouri Association for Social Welfare or MASW – through people like Inez Benson. She was the executive for the local Planned Parenthood, and she was an Empower Missouri

person. And through Herman Johnson¹⁹, Dorothy Johnson²⁰, Ella Stackhouse²¹. I could go on and on and on. These people were strong members of Empower Missouri. Empower Missouri had grassroots involvement in the St. Louis area as well. I never met this woman, but she was a civic volunteer heading that up. She was influential.

Jeanette Mott Oxford of Empower Missouri (later by email): Janet Becker²² was very influential in the St. Louis area. Adelaide Schlafly²³ as well. Elaine Aber²⁴ was a long-time Empower Missouri leader, but she was from mid-Missouri.

Kathryn: I understand you met some of these people who were involved and admired them. What was your motivation for becoming a member?

Mary Kay McPhee: I truly am in my heart a social worker. Okay? Involvement with Empower Missouri, then called MASW, was one way to attain my heart's desire – to build community and be of service.

Kathryn: What specific work did you become involved in?

Mary Kay McPhee: In 1968, after the riots in Kansas City²⁵, following Martin Luther King's assassination, Empower Missouri, Herman Johnson, Ella Stackhouse, and others were

¹⁹ **Herman Johnson** (1916-2004) graduated from Cornell University in 1938. As a Tuskegee airman, he "worked for General Benjamin Davis who set an example for the integrated Armed Forces." After the war, he became "Administrator of the historic Freedman's Hospital, the teaching hospital of the Howard University." In Kansas City, he became a businessman and with his wife founded the Local Investment Commission (LINC). He headed the Kansas City chapter of the NAACP and was a Missouri State Representative, 1968 to 1972. See www.landonrowland.com/Johnson%20Herman%20tribute.pdf and www.house.mo.gov/billtracking/bills041/hlrbillspdf/1215C.03.pdf (all three accessed October 15, 2017).

²⁰ **Dorothy Johnson** (1916-2004) directed the Florence Crittenton Home for Negro Girls for five years and "served on the boards of leading civic organizations in Kansas City... including the YWCA, the City Committee and Council on Human Relations, and the City Children's Committee." Source: https://emilytaylorcenter.ku.edu/pioneer-woman/johnson (accessed October 15, 2017). The Kansas City Chapter of Empower Missouri presented her with the **Social Worker of the Year Award** in 1977. The Central Exchange of Kansas City, Kansas recognized her as Woman of the Year in 1990. See https://emilytaylorcenter.ku.edu/sites/emilytaylorcenter.ku.edu/files/johnson-article.pdf (accessed October 15, 2017).

²¹ Introduced later in this document.

²² Janet Baker passed away in 2017. The **Janet Becker Award for Housing Advocacy** was established and awarded at the Empower Missouri Annual Conference in October 2017. (In *Empowering You* – July 2017 Newsletter, of Empower Missouri)

²³ **Adelaide Schafly** died in 2012, at the age of 97. She "lobbied for passage of Missouri's first public accommodations law and was proud to see it enacted before Congress passed the 1964 Civil Rights Law." Source: www.stltoday.com/news/local/obituaries/adelaide-schlafly-champion-for-social-justice-dies-at/article_ac01536a-b335-54cf-9f2e-3a491e71d2ed.html (accessed October 15, 2017).

²⁴ "The **Elaine Aber Humanitarian Award** was created by the Empower Missouri State Board in 2001 to honor Mrs. Aber's longtime work in social justice. She was a member of Empower Missouri for 45 years. Born in Mount Sterling, Missouri, she spent her adult life in Jefferson City and became a lifelong champion of human rights. She worked for the creation of the Missouri Commission on Human Rights in 1957 and the Public Accommodations Law in 1963. She was the first white woman to enter Lincoln University and was a dedicated volunteer leader in many area charities." (The Elaine Aber Humanitarian Award Nomination Form for 2017)

²⁵ Riots took place in over 100 cities in the United States after the April 4, 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In Kansas City, such riots intensified on April 9, when the Kansas City, Missouri schools

very interested in helping to rebuild the center city. For that, Herman had the political clout. The rest of us were foot soldiers along the way.

Empower Missouri collaborated with the Johnson County Men's Garden Club, in Kansas, to give us seedlings – tomatoes, zucchinis, peppers, cucumbers, those kinds

of things – for the scorched areas. The city had cleared away rubble in those places, and we helped with community gardens there, working with the faith community of the inner city, including members of various faiths. We worked to help heal some of the scars.

Working with Dorothy Johnson²⁶

Mary Kay McPhee: I became very involved in social issues in the 1960s, when I was appointed to the child welfare commission for



Jackson County. I worked closely with Dorothy Johnson, who was also appointed as a child welfare commissioner and later directed the county's Department of Health and Welfare [1973 to 1976]. Dorothy and I became friends. She and I were among the few women of our generation who had been to college. She graduated [in 1937] from the University of Kansas (KU) with a degree in journalism, but she was ahead of me, and I did not know her when I was at KU. She worked as a journalist at *The Call* and returned to KU to earn [in 1960] a master's in social work. She and her husband, Herman, were social reformers, quietly working on culturally and socially desegregating Kansas City.

If you want to look up Dorothy Johnson, KU has some of her documents. I think the Lucille H. Bluford Branch of the Kansas City Public Library here also has some of her story. I can remember when Dorothy, this was after Herman died, was moving out of their house into a nursing home. I was one of the people there – there were several of us – to talk about what happened to their documents and memorabilia, their bios, all those things. So to find out more about Dorothy, you could go to the Lucille

were not closed for the funeral of Dr. King which was held that day in Atlanta, and when police used tear gas on students and others gathered near City Hall to demand the closure of the city's schools. The Governor of Missouri summoned the National Guard, and the Mayor of Kansas City declared a state of emergency and issued the first curfew in the history of the city. See "1968 Kansas City Holy Week Riots" as reported by WHB News, www.youtube.com/watch?v=_jR293AltS4 (accessed October 15, 2017). See also brief explanation and multiple references (books and oral histories) prepared by the Missouri Valley Special Collections of the Kansas City Public Library, www.kchistory.org/week-kansas-city-history/and-then-it-happened (accessed October 15, 2017).

²⁶ **Dorothy Johnson** was a member of Empower Missouri from the 1940's. She helped organize its first fully integrated annual conference at the Elms Hotel in Excelsior Springs in 1953. (2017 Nomination Form for the Herman and Dorothy Johnson Local Advocate Award)

Bluford Branch of the Library here in Kansas City or KU's Kenneth Spencer Research Library in Lawrence. Maybe both.

Alice Laughlin Kitchen: Prior to the Legislature of 1972, I believe, Jackson County was governed by a three-seat legislative body called the Jackson County Court. Administrative judges governed; they were not judicial positions. Before serving as U. S. president, Harry S. Truman served as presiding judge for Jackson County, Missouri, in the 1920s and 1930s, at the beginning of the Great Depression. ²⁷

Mary Kay McPhee: So it must have been the Court that appointed Dorothy and me as child welfare commissioners.

Speaking of Harry Truman, I ran into him, so to speak, several times, on the elevator. (laughter) This was at a club downtown. Women at that time entered by a different door.

Kathryn and Joanna: (eyebrows raised in surprise)

Mary Kay McPhee: Do you not know this? This was the University Club, I think that was the name of it²⁸. There was just one level that we [women] went to, where they served the food. They had gyms and other things there for the guys. But we didn't get off on those floors. (laughter)

Kathryn: You would see Harry Truman on the elevator?

Mary Kay McPhee: He would be on the elevator. He was always (emphasis) polite, always. And he would get off and hold the door, that kind of thing. He was a gentleman. It's not like I knew him, okay, no, I didn't.

Learning from Herman Johnson

Kathryn: You mentioned how you also worked with and learned from Herman Johnson.

Mary Kay McPhee: In my ethical will, I talk about my mentors, and there's a lot in there about that. I was a child of the 1930s in Topeka, Kansas, so I had a lot to learn. This was a time of segregation and so forth. Believe it or not, I didn't ask questions. I told you that my high school in Topeka was academically integrated and, perhaps like some of Kansas City life still today, socially segregated.

"Humanity for [my parents] was so natural. They viewed everybody as a child of God...
Everybody was equal in their eyesight... If you want a thriving community, you can't do it alone. You've got to work together, live together and grow together. Then you will thrive together."

Tara Johnson about her parents; she calls Mary Kay McPhee "Mom"

Herman served as a city councilman and

was an extremely well respected real estate man. He had been a Tuskegee Airman and continued to go to periodic statewide meetings of the Airmen. I begged to go to a meeting, and he took me.

He was known as a mentor to Kansas City, and he certainly mentored me, on drives to and from the state capital in Jefferson City. He was the President of Empower

²⁷ www.jacksongov.org/597/Executive-Legislators-1973---1998 (accessed October 15, 2017)

²⁸ The **University Club** was apparently absorbed into the Kansas City Club, which was created as an alternative to the numerous pro-Confederate social clubs in Kansas City. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kansas_City_Club (accessed October 15, 2017).

Missouri, then MASW, when I was responsible for following and advocating for child welfare issues in five counties in the western part of the state. We had to travel to Jefferson City once a month. I had plenty of time during those almost three-hour drives, over several years, to benefit from his mentoring. And he had high expectations of his mentees. He pointed out avenues for standing up for social causes and for fighting against injustice.



What Herman did for me was to make me understand how we needed to be more inclusive and that one of the ways to do that was through **Empower** Missouri. Conversations started years, decades before us, and needed to continued - to talk about diversity and about public policy, and how to change it. He of course was one of the fulcrums when he was in Jefferson City, and locally. Herman helped me understand how we could influence the state to understand urban issues. A lot of the time, the state was

dominated by rural concerns. Legislators didn't necessarily understand a lot of the issues of people in urban areas. Herman was one of our voices in Jefferson City, whether as State Representative or as Empower Missouri member or President.

After the 1968 riots, Dorothy and I wanted to go to areas affected, to talk with people and better understand their situations, especially in relation to the welfare of children. Herman was not about to have Dorothy and I do that on our own. He agreed to go with us. That made all the difference in the world, of course, to have that wonderful man accompany us. (laughter) We saw that the communities were coming together for the welfare of the children, and that the community-at-large was trying to be supportive. For me it was an education in speaking and working across boundaries for the wellbeing of community. What Dorothy and I as child welfare commissioners and what Empower Missouri did was to be vehicles for collaborative ventures, so that everybody wasn't doing the same thing with the same group.

Herman was really a groundbreaker. For the Civic Council here, for the businessmen. He had the credentials and, what do I want to say, the demeanor (laughter) to really bring people together, not to cast stones or to make people feel badly about their behavior, but simply to say it's a new road and here we go.

Kathryn: Did the work after the 1968 riots lead to any policy changes of which you are aware, or was it more ensuring good coordination for child welfare on the ground? *Mary Kay McPhee*: I don't know if it led to policy changes, but there was heightened awareness from people in political circles, and people in philanthropic circles, simply saying, "Okay, these are our children, and we need to be there for them."

Alice Laughlin Kitchen: We did end up with the Jackson County Department of Health and Welfare, which, like you already mentioned, Dorothy Johnson headed up for three years in the 1970s. The "welfare" part of the work was somewhat parallel to state functions and considered redundant, because now it is just the Department of Health.



Mary Kay McPhee: In relation to the Johnsons, I also wanted to say, in case you don't know, there is the Herman Johnson Scholarship²⁹ committee. I still serve on it. We personally interview candidates. Tara Johnson, the daughter of Dorothy and Herman, travels to Kansas City for the meetings. We stay in touch with scholarship recipients. It's a very personalized approach. The members of the committee do good work.

There is also a building named for Herman and Dorothy on the campus of the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC)³⁰. When that was

dedicated in 2009, I was one of several speakers. It's my understanding that this was the first UMKC building named after African Americans.

Dorothy Johnson had her career, and Herman Johnson had his. They each had a sphere of influence. And together they were this absolutely dynamic couple that made worlds of difference. Through my relationship with the two of them, I began to see things through a different lens. I think they were both pioneers in



diversity and inclusion. It's a tough field to hoe. And we need lots of fertilizer.

²⁹ The UMKC **Herman Johnson African-American Scholarship Fund** has been offering scholarships since 1987, and during the 2015-2016 academic school year was assisting 23 students (new and renewed awards) with scholarships. (UMKC web site)

 $^{^{30}}$ The **Herman and Dorothy Johnson Residence Hall**, 5000 Oak Street, KCMO, 64112, is LEEDS (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified. See

http://info.umkc.edu/housing/housing/johnson-hall (accessed October 15, 2017). In an 8-minute YouTube video titled "Giving Back: The Herman and Dorothy Johnson Story," Tara Johnson shares about her parents: "Humanity for them was so natural. They viewed everybody as a child of God... Everybody was equal in their eyesight... If you want a thriving community, you can't do it alone. You've got to work together, live together and grow together. Then you will thrive together." Source: www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfWXq1brRDA (accessed October 15, 2017).

Learning from other mentors

Kathryn: Did you want to say a word about Ella Stackhouse³¹, whom you mentioned earlier and who is also mentioned in your ethical will as one of your mentors?

Mary Kay McPhee: Ella, she's so impressive. I loved this woman. She earned her PhD I think in home economics. When the central city was ravaged by riots, she with others helped form coalitions and worked alongside groups including Empower Missouri to help mend the scars. She worked with people from all neighborhoods and all walks of life to grow their own food. Some people thought food would be stolen from the community gardens, but she said not to worry. After the harvest, we had classes with Ella. We all learned how to preserve the food, freeze it, dry it, can it, and so forth. People were invested. We shared recipes and so forth.

We worked and learned together. It feels good to eat and share food you have grown. The faith community was involved... churches of all affiliations. They came forward big time, big time. (laughter) The efforts crossed the state line, into Johnson County, and other places. It was a truly cooperative thing, and Empower Missouri was vital in that, vital because of relationships, because of members who could make a phone call, and tell a story. People listened. They became involved.

Joanna: It sounds like she was working to help empower the community, as part of healing.

May Kay McPhee: Oh yes, oh yes!! Absolutely.

Empower Missouri allowed me to learn

Kathryn: Could you say more about your roles with Empower Missouri? Your CV mentions how you were the Chairman of the Kansas City area (five counties), from 1973 to 1974, and a member of the State Board of Directors from about 1973 to 1976.

Mary Kay McPhee: For me to have been asked to be a member (southern accent coming through) and to be a productive member of Empower Missouri was quite an honor. It spoke to me about issues that were important. It enabled so many meaningful and fruitful relationships for me. I was somewhat of a neophyte. But the long experience and successes of Empower Missouri taught me a lot, and for that, I am eternally grateful. It gave me an opportunity, in various ways. And you still do that. You have monthly meetings, where various voices are heard, in ways that, I'll say, sometimes politicians don't hear them. The stories are very personal.

Kathryn: What do you mean, very personal?

Mary Kay McPhee: People are telling their personal stories and being heard and not necessarily quieted. (laughter) Now that's delicate!

All: (laughter)

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³¹ "A well-known figure in the state died in 1989. **Ella B. Stackhouse**, a 1944 Lincoln University graduate, became the first African-American woman hired by the state as an extension home economist. During her active career in two Bootheel counties she served as mentor to many young people; she also founded the Negro Home Economics Scholarship Fund. Later she worked in the Kansas City area as a volunteer in the crusade against hunger." Source: Missouri Almanac, 1993-94,

https://law.wustl.edu/Staff/Taylor/WOMEN/MOOFFMAN/mooff1/1980sp2.htm (accessed October 15, 2017).

Kathryn: We know you received the 1989 outstanding service award for bringing needed services and public policy changes – and as an example of leadership that both improves and reconciles communities.

Mary Kay McPhee: Do I have a copy of that? (laughter)

Kathryn: I took it straight out of your CV. (laughter) I also know you and Bill Pfeiffer, Sr. were invited to the home of Alice Kitchen on

August 10, 2011, when you received the Local Advocate Award. I heard about \$10,000 was raised that evening for the work of Empower Missouri. Here's a copy of the invitation (see Annex 3). I know you've been honored many times...

Mary Kay McPhee: Let me get my glasses. (pause) Well, I know Alice Kitchen³² has done and continues to do a lot with and for Empower Missouri.





Alice Laughlin Kitchen: By the way, to the 2011 event we invited Raymond Salzman³³, local impersonator of former U. S. President Harry S. Truman. He brought the famous newspaper with the erroneous front-page article "Dewey Defeats Truman" in the 1948 presidential election. He went on to impersonate Truman "sharing stories from his days as Jackson County Judge."

Social welfare and public policy

Mary Kay McPhee: I love it when neighborhoods organize in relation to the health and wellbeing of the community and discuss how they will be impacted by certain issues. We need more of that. Getting the vote out is also important. We need for people to go to the polls. Every time there's an election, civic leaders beg us to go vote, yet many of us don't. When the faith community came out and had buses to take people in their neighborhoods to the polls, they were criticized. Can you believe it?

Kathryn: They were just providing transportation.

Mary Kay McPhee: That's all, right. They weren't telling people how to vote. They were taking them to the polls to simply say, "Your voices need to be heard." But they were highly criticized for that.

Joanna: I have a question about public policy. I will give away that my bachelor's degree is in public policy studies. What is your definition of public policy?

Mary Kay McPhee: You know, I'm not sure. (laughter) I'm not sure how to answer the question. But to me, public policy involves how people in a certain group, let's say Kansas City, or a county, a state, or the nation, discuss issues and give the right to vote on the issues and for their elected representatives and so forth.

³² www.kansascity.com/news/local/article304782/Alice-Kitchen-%E2%80%98one-of-the-great-Kansas-Citians%E2%80%99-is-retired-but-not-resting.html (accessed October 18, 2017)

³³ www.usatoday.com/story/travel/destinations/2017/01/21/harry-s-truman-library-impersonator/96847748 (accessed October 19, 2017)

I think Empower Missouri tries to work from a nonpartisan standpoint to make elected officials responsible for their actions, saying, "Let's talk about these issues. We see you voted such and such. What caused (emphasis) you to vote that way? How (emphasis) are you being responsible to your constituency? How can you answer the question on, let's say, nutrition, or whatever?"

Can there be social welfare without social change?

Mary Kay McPhee: Can there be social welfare without social change? It's a hard question. I think that we do not listen well enough to each other. We fall into: "Yes, but..." "Yes, but..." I think we need to get over the "Yes, but..." and try to understand our commonalities. Our desires may be similar, and how we achieve them may be different. And we may differ on how we perceive achievement.

How does change begin?

Kathryn: In a conflict situation or a social situation that needs attention, where and how do you begin?

Mary Kay McPhee: I guess, as an individual, I'd give you a call. I'd say, ok, here's what's going on, and here's what's at stake. There needs to be collaboration. People with diverse points of view need to come together, not to cast stones but to talk reality from their standpoint, with everyone thinking, "I'll speak and I'll listen closely, and together we'll figure out what we do about this."

UMKC is Kansas City's University

Kathryn: In watching a YouTube video about you, we heard University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) Chancellor Leo Morton mention how much you contribute to UMKC. We were wondering what it is about UMKC that draws you in.

Mary Kay McPhee: Well, I'm an educator, okay. (laughter) So I believe in the university. And UMKC has over a dozen professional schools, everything from education and business to dentistry and pharmacy. Their graduates, a good percentage of whom stay in the area, influence every aspect of life in this city. That's why I am a huge fan of UMKC, because it is Kansas City's university.

A School of Social Work at the University

Mary Kay McPhee: Barb Friedman got the UMKC school of social work started. There was a groundswell movement to start it, but Barb could not get a meeting with the Chancellor, so I arranged a meeting with the Chancellor. Barb now runs Coalition for Community Collaboration, which apparently meets monthly.³⁴ A family or community may have X, Y and Z but be missing M, so issues like that can be identified at the meetings, as I understand it.

³⁴ See **Community Together**, http://docplayer.net/9904801-Community-resource-guide-resources-services-for-the-kansas-city-community.html (accessed October 15, 2017).

Community service awards

Kathryn: Changing topics, we noticed that you received a community service award from William Jewell College in Liberty, in 1999. Did you have a connection with William Jewell College?

Mary Kay McPhee: I have a letter right here about who they are going to recognize this year (pulls a letter out of an envelope; there were several on the table next to her chair). Let's see: Tom Bloch and Dianne Cleaver. And the speaker will be Jan Kreamer.

This is one of many examples of Mary Kay McPhee deflecting attention from herself to take us into the present. Her curriculum vitae lists over 50 honors and awards she received from the 1980s for vision, leadership, kindness, spirit, community service, civic contributions, stopping violence, bringing policy change, fighting Parkinson's disease, going above and beyond, giving of self to benefit humanity, opening doors, mentoring others, being a friend of education, making a difference, reconciling across cultural, class and ethnic lines, and even changing the heart of the city.

This was not the only time she pulled, from the small collection of correspondence and readings by her chair, documentation to illustrate her points.

Traveling internationally, for pleasure

Kathryn: You have worked locally, state-wide and nationally and travelled as a youngster to Mexico and Canada. Have you ever had the occasion to travel outside North America?

Mary Kay McPhee: I've had many, many adventures. (laughter) I've been to South America. I've been to Europe. I've been to Australia. But I was not traveling professionally. I was traveling for enjoyment. And I traveled in Africa. We traveled on the Nile.

Kathryn and Joanna: Wow.

Joanna: You were visiting the entire continent, weren't you? (laughter)

Kathryn: The birthplace of humanity.

Mary Kay McPhee: It was interesting.

Kathryn: These trips abroad, how did they influence you?

Mary Kay McPhee: I think it's always a learning experience, for anyone. And I was one of those anyone's. (laughter) You really see how people live. You see differences and commonalities, and issues we all deal with across the board.

Kathryn: I noticed you were a member of the International Relations Council.

Mary Kay McPhee: This was a political appointment. For that, I traveled to Seville, Spain, which is a sister city of Kansas City. I was asked to deliver the good wishes of Kansas City to the city of Seville.

Kathryn: That's fabulous. We noticed that in your Ethical Will, when we did our homework...

Mary Kay McPhee: Oh my, oh gracious sakes alive... (laughter)

Traveling nationally to promote public health

Kathryn: I find it amazing that as a teenager you traveled around the country by car with your parents in the late 1930s / early 1940s and that once again, in the 1980s, you traveled the country.

Mary Kay McPhee: By air that time! I visited every state, except Alaska, for the Auxiliary of American Medical Association. It was volunteer work. The Auxiliary was comprised of spouses, of both male and female physicians. We had 80,000 members. I don't know the membership now, but I think people may not join such organizations as much these days. The Auxiliary was interested in health and wellness issues from



a medical standpoint. So, for example, when I was the national president, my motto was "Shape up for life." That meant all the things you might imagine, including good eating and exercise.

Kathryn: Were you a precursor to Michelle Obama?

Mary Kay McPhee: I would not say that at all, but I could show you the "Shape up for life" emblem on my necklace.

Joanna: We'd love to see it. Does every president design their own emblem when they decide what the focus will be?

Mary Kay McPhee: I think you worked with the staff, and your board of directors, and other volunteers to come up with a focus that reflected ideas of the physicians of the American Medical Association. When I traveled, I promoted this theme. I gave a lot of speeches. I helped bring people together on wellness issues,

and medical issues, and why it was important for the physicians' spouses to be a part of the team. I guess you could say I did education and recruitment. When you were elected, you knew this is what you were going to do, which I'll say for a lot of volunteers put pressure on their family, because they were gone, gone, gone. So who's there cooking supper, you know that kind of thing?

Joanna: How did you manage all of that?

Mary Kay McPhee: My mother lived next door to me. She was wonderful to help. She looked in on my husband who was ailing at that time.

Joanna: That was indeed wonderful of your mother. And wonderful of you to be promoting wellness in the 1980s, when there were so many program cuts.

Women's voices guiding social development

Kathryn: What challenges, or opportunities, did you encounter doing all this work as a woman?

Mary Kay McPhee: In those early years, titular leadership was male, but that doesn't mean (laughter) that women's voices really weren't guiding, because I think they were, a lot of the time.

What does it mean to be a member of a board of directors?

Kathryn: You have served on a lot of boards of directors over the years. What does it mean to be a member of a board?

Mary Kay McPhee: One challenge I found was that sometimes people – men and women – would accept a public responsibility on a not-for-profit board of directors, without really understanding what was expected of them. That is why I was such a stickler for board development, or education, for all members of the board of directors, on what it means to be a member of the board. What is the mission of the organization? What are your responsibilities? Are you ready to accept them? I think that was a new message to some people (laughter), you know, they just thought it was a big honor being asked to be on the board. But the honor goes with responsibilities.

Kathryn: What else is involved in board education?

Mary Kay McPhee: Understanding your legal responsibilities to that organization, when you say, "Yes, I want to do this." Understanding that you're making a commitment of self, not just money, but gifts of your time, your wisdom, and so forth. That you're putting yourself forward as a champion.

Kathryn: Board education is the responsibility of whom?

Mary Kay McPhee: Of the board of directors, to simply say that the people they ask to join them understand the responsibility, the financial responsibility, the moral responsibility, of the job that they're undertaking.

Conversations with Mary Kay McPhee about

Looking to the Future

Believe in our grandchildren

Mary Kay McPhee: (commenting on the t-shirt Joanna was wearing, with the flag of Australia) I would be delighted for you to meet my granddaughter. She is studying stigma in Australia and uses the arts to tell stories.

Joanna: That would be nice. I went to Australia for the marriage of my son. While there, I enjoyed hearing creation stories of the Aboriginal peoples, which run parallel with stories of other indigenous peoples. One refers to watering holes.

Kathryn: Which granddaughter is in Australia?

Mary Kay McPhee: Molly is in Australia. With her partner, Rebecca. And she's working on her PhD at the University of Melbourne. I have other grandchildren, who participated in the Million Women March in DC in January of this year. These young people used technology to mobilize quickly to say, if you care about this or that issue, we need your voice. On that day here in Kansas City, we saw little children riding on their parents' shoulders on their way to Washington Square. There were as many men as women. Which I loved, it was great. The children were there. Ife told her children about it.

Gather at the Watering Hole

Mary Kay McPhee: Would you believe that I belong to a group and have for many years called the Watering Hole?

Joanna: Oh, Lord! All: (laughter)

Mary Kay McPhee: Women connect and talk with one another when they go to fetch water. The group is based on that premise.

Joanna: How long have you all been in existence?

Mary Kay McPhee: Hmmm... 30 years maybe.

Joanna: Oh, wow.

Mary Kay McPhee: Yes, for a long time. It is based on the African concept of going to get water – early in the morning, before the other activities of the day, and then towards evening. Women go to the watering hole with their vessels to gather water, and they use this time to talk with each other (southern accent apparent), to build relationships and so forth. Our Kansas City Watering Hole was built on that concept.

Joanna: Someone brought that concept and everyone agreed?

Mary Kay McPhee: Yes, we agreed to it. Not to bringing water. But to the concept of gathering and sharing. That was SuEllen Fried³⁵.

Joanna: I've heard the name.

Kathryn: You still meet?

Mary Kay McPhee: Yes, once a week, in somebody's house. I used to go regularly.

Kathryn: What was the benefit?

 $^{^{35}}$ **SuEllen Fried** is a dance therapist, bullying prevention activist, writer and educator.

Mary Kay McPhee: Well, guess! (laughter) Just sharing stories, support, you know.

Joanna: How many people would be in the group?

Mary Kay McPhee: About twenty.

Joanna: Was it a potluck?

Mary Kay McPhee: It wasn't for a meal, but there were snacks. And beverages. The hostess provided that, which was manageable.

Kathryn: Women from Missouri and Kansas?

Mary Kay McPhee: Yes. *Kathryn*: White women?

Mary Kay McPhee: Not entirely.

Joanna: There seems to be similarities with the work Mamie Hughes was doing.

Kathryn: Among other activities, Mamie Hughes was involved with the Panel of American Women³⁶.

Mary Kay McPhee: Yes!

Kathryn: Can you tell us something about it?

Mary Kay McPhee: I was never a member or a presenter, but they tried to have a very diverse group of women on the panels, so when they would bring up an issue, people would hear from a religious point of view, like a Jewish or Catholic "take" on the issue. And there would be African American women and Hispanic women and Native American women and Caucasian women, talking about the daily struggles of living together in society and about privilege. Mamie Hughes was huge on the Panel.

Joanna: When my daughter was at St. Monica, and we were dealing with discipline issues, Mamie Hughes volunteered her cabin, at Lake Placid, for the children to go on a retreat. She loves children. She said, "You know, if you ever want to bring the children..." And with Black studies, she always made sure she was available to be a sounding board.

Mary Kay McPhee: That's important.

Joanna: I've only known her to be a good person. Mary Kay McPhee: Oh my goodness, yes. She's such a supporter of things in the community. It's no accident that things are named for her!³⁷ She deserves every bit of that recognition.

Joanna: Does the Panel of American Women still exist?

Kathryn: No. But in Arkansas, it became the

Arkansas Public Policy Panel. Kind of like Empower Missouri.

Ioanna: Wow.

Kathryn: Through Mamie Hughes, I met with members of Kindred Spirits, who are former Panel members or the child of a former (deceased) member. They meet in people's homes. Kind of like the Watering Hole.

³⁶ See mention of the **Panel of American Women** on page 17 of this document.

³⁷ See "Highway 71 and the road to compromise," of June 3, 2014, by Suzanne Hogan, http://kcur.org/post/highway-71-and-road-compromise#stream/0 (accessed October 16, 2017); photo credit: Suzanne Hogan.

Mary Kay McPhee: Such gatherings nourish us and nourish society.

Explore the social contributions of Herman and Dorothy Johnson

Mary Kay McPhee: I encourage you as you're looking at Herman Johnson and Dorothy Johnson³⁸ to contact Tara³⁹, their daughter, and I've got information if you want it, but I really think that she would be able to give you some interesting information and perspectives about her parents and their work in Kansas City. She lives in a different state. She doesn't live here.

Kathryn: Where does she live?

Mary Kay McPhee: Ohio. *Kathryn*: Good to know.

Sister Rosemary Flannigan, another of my heroines

Mary Kay McPhee: This makes me think... Empower Missouri might also want to talk with Sister Rosemary Flannigan. The role of the nuns is fabulous. Rosemary Flannigan was one of the marchers at Selma⁴⁰. She is a promoter of Nuns on the Bus⁴¹. She is a woman's advocate. She is an employee of the Center for Practical Bioethics. I hope

that somewhere along the line you might have a chance to have a conversation with her. She's one of my heroines. She lives right here in Kansas City, with another nun, Sister Paddy. They're just a team and a half. They are fun nuns. (laughter) Sister Rosemary calls for putting those hands in the air. "Let's see you volunteer for what's right." This kind of thing.

Kathryn: Why else is she a heroine for you? *Mary Kay McPhee*: I come from a medical family,

and I think she has been proactively bringing attention to ethical questions related to healthcare and the practice of medicine.

Joanna: Did you say the Center for Practical Bioethics?

Mary Kay McPhee: Yes. Do you know where it is? It's in the Harzfeld's office building downtown. They do good work, in Kansas City and nationally.

Invest in education, always

Mary Kay McPhee: Looking to the future, I think it is important to invest, always, in education. What does that encompass? I think that too often, we think too narrowly.

³⁸ See Guide to the **Dorothy** Hodge **Johnson** (1916-2004) **Collection**, at the Kenneth Spencer Research Library, http://etext.ku.edu/view?docId=ksrlead/ksrl.kc.johnsondorothyh.xml (accessed October 15, 2017).

³⁹ Tara Kaye Townsend Johnson (Curtis) of Toledo, Ohio

⁴⁰ See the film "**Sisters of Selma: Bearing Witness for Change**" at Avila University. http://catholickey.org/2016/09/09/sisters-of-selma-documentary-materials-acquired-by-avila-university (accessed October 15, 2017).

⁴¹ See https://networklobby.org and www.nunsonthebusmovie.com (both accessed October 19, 2017).

When does education occur? How does it occur? In families. In the community. In organizations. In everyday life, and so forth.

Kathryn: Because of your love for education and for social welfare, we were wondering what advice you might have for educators of today? I know it's presumptuous for us to sit here and just expect you to distill wisdom to us. But if you had to give a few words of advice, or encouragement, for educators today, what might you say?

Mary Kay McPhee: Well, I would say that I think that schools of education need to place their students, not just the ones ready to graduate, but new students as well, into social situations and educational systems where they get a better flavor of society. The University of Kansas I think may have a taller ladder to climb than UMKC. I think we are all influenced by where we live and whom we know and those kinds of things. New contexts and experiences can give us a fresh mind, and I encourage that earlier rather than later. I think we need to mobilize opportunities for students to develop a more realistic and deeper outlook on what's going on.

I would like for you to visit the Children's Campus in Kansas City, Kansas. I think people are doing some really good things there. Barb Friedman (Ife, can you give us her phone number, please?) could tell you much more. Perhaps Empower Missouri might be inspired by the initiative and get conversations going about something similar in Missouri.

I am not sure about the current priorities of Empower Missouri, but may I suggest another idea? Could Empower Missouri find a way to recognize Leo Morton and Curt Crespino of UMKC? Leo Morton plans to retire soon as Chancellor. He might be an excellent convener of public conversations on education, including colleges and universities in the Kansas City area. Curt Crespino, part of his leadership team, facilitates a lot of outreach to neighborhoods and coordinates the alumni associations for the professional schools. And why not try to involve media in the conversation, across the silos of the *Kansas City Star*, *The Call*, and *Dos Mundos*? How can we make that happen? What do we need to do to widen our perspectives and cooperate better? And don't forget Steve Kraske [of National Public Radio, in Kansas City]. (laughter)

Joanna: Some conversations about education are going on, for example through MARC – Mid-America Regional Council – and the Kauffman Foundation. I agree that it could be powerful to bring people together to discuss common visions for education in the Kansas City area. The Lumina Foundation was here to help with strategies for increasing access to education after high school and worked with the Chamber of Commerce – knowing that people are not prepared for available jobs and ones that are coming – to strategize about what to do. People have to pull together around the skills sets that are needed.

Mary Kay McPhee: That's called workforce development.

Joanna: Right. And we haven't had a community conversation about it, which it sounds to me is part of your vision.

Mary Kay McPhee: I think it's important. College officials need input from the community, and the community needs to hear from college officials. Where did universities come from after all, if not from churches embedded in the community? How can we as a community come together for example for workforce development... What projects

are on the radar screen and who is already doing something... How can we fast track that? With a mental shift... The mental shift, this is what we do. Okay. (chuckle)

Joanna: Exactly. The people who will most need to take advantage of these opportunities may not be as aware of what the opportunities are.

Mary Kay McPhee: That is part of the role of the university, to communicate.

Joanna: I remember when we would have town halls at universities. The president or the chancellor would explain the vision for the coming year. And we would talk about that. She or he would go to every single audience, the faculty, the students, the donors...

Mary Kay McPhee: People will come back to you and tell you that the state has cut the funds for universities. And they've had to lay off a lot of people. And this, that and the other. That's true. (pause) But that doesn't preclude this (emphasis) idea. Because if this (emphasis) idea – of bringing colleges and universities together with communities to talk about education – works, then people and voters will say we need investments in education.

Joanna: Exactly. Education is the launching pad for voters. In the past, civic education was taught in the schools. It was integrated into the curriculum – your responsibilities as a citizen.

Mary Kay McPhee: Oh, Absolutely.

Joanna: We're missing a lot of that now, so people are coming up, and they don't have a framework in which to operate. Civic education in schools helps people who need jobs, housing, health, etc. Education is the foundation of all.

Mary Kay McPhee: Those kinds of topics for a community conversation are valid.

Joanna: Yes, community conversation. When we start to understand the intersections between education, media and public policy, we have a more holistic view of what a healthy community is. A healthy community where people are not just surviving but thriving. Our biggest indicator is children. When we see that children are healthy, we pretty much know that there are some really great things going on in that community. But when we start to see a lot of dysfunction in the schools with the kids, then we say, ah, something's wrong, and we need to start backing up and say where is this happening? Sometimes it's in the home, but sometimes it's someplace else.

Mary Kay McPhee: Is there any way that Empower Missouri could also work with the broad faith community? I mean, not just the Christian faith, but the broad (emphasis) faith community?

Joanna: I think More Squared has a really good handle on that. And that would be a great collaboration.

Mary Kay McPhee: Okay, and who's heading that up now?

Joanna: Lora McDonald is the Executive Director. They have a team approach, rather than just one person. Pastor Michael Brooks and Rabbi Doug Alpert are co-chairs. It's really good. Pastor Bob Hill and others work on community outreach.

Mary Kay McPhee: Maybe you could have a conversation about what's already happening, that being one, before we have a community thing, to kind of understand and build upon the successes and the positive things happening. How did they get going and what issues in the community caused them to coalesce?

To help turn dreams into reality, listen

Joanna: I'm going to bring up 1968 one more time. You were with Herman Johnson who you said was your mentor, and you talked last time about him helping you understand the importance of inclusion. If everyone was invited to the table, how would that change things since 1968? Next year will be the 50-year anniversary of what caused those riots, Dr. King's assassination. So, wouldn't it be wonderful to talk about some goodness that can come out of that, because I'm witnessing the goodness just having met with you these three times, the goodness that can came out of having a mentoring relationship with Herman Johnson. How could your discussions with him about inclusion help other people? What did he share with you that helped you, as you moved forward, to be more inclusive?

Mary Kay McPhee: What did he share with me? Everything.

Joanna: Specifically, what skills did you develop with him to help you be more inclusive and help people get to the common good?

Kathryn: Yeah, what skills did you learn from Herman, very specifically, skills that made you more effective later, as a leader.

Mary Kay McPhee: Well, the main one was listening, and I guess on listening, the thing is to *really* listen. And there's a difference (laughter), there *is* a difference. I think politicians sometimes feel they know best, with their experience. I may think, as a citizen, that I don't know how to navigate the political system, but I have experiences, experiences that are similar to those of many people of my genre. And other groups of people have similar experiences. Politicians need to hear from all citizens and groups of citizens. And we need to listen to each other.

Joanna: So really listening is one of the skills you deepened with Herman Johnson. What would be a second one that he helped you develop and that helped you grow as a person?

Mary Kay McPhee: You listen, and then you have some choices to make. What do I do with the information gleaned? How can I be a part of making dreams become more of a reality for more people?

Learn and practice kindness

Joanna: I want to ask you, because you've done so much to influence other people.

Mary Kay McPhee: (laughter) Well this could be good or bad. (laughter)

Joanna: I think it's...

Mary Kay McPhee: Oh no. (laughter)

Joanna: You just have a great sense of humor, it's amazing. And an amazing ability to influence people, just the way you have influenced us. That's the goodness that I see in you. I'm constantly thinking about Mary Kay when I'm out and about in the community and talking to people. How can people like you be brought forward? How can we nurture a sense of service to community? We don't have enough kindness and compassion in our society, and we see the offspring of that, which can be violence. So how do we learn how to get along?

Mary Kay McPhee: (pulls paper from side table) (laughter)

Joanna: (reads from paper)

Kindness sees a need and offers to help. Kindness stands up for the person being bullied, and then makes sure they're safe. Kindness disrupts lawlessness and incivility. Kindness goes out of its way. Kindness recycles, kindness holds the door, kindness builds a ramp...

Mary Kay McPhee: Holds the door and builds a ramp. *Joanna*:

...kindness explains, and kindness knows its privilege and uses it to build justice.

Mary Kay McPhee: To build justice. *Joanna*:

Kindness is not easy. Kindness is sometimes uncomfortable, because it requires us to not stay comfortable, to not stay nice and docile.

Kindness doesn't sit still. And kindness acts in big and small ways. Kindness calls elected representatives, and writes letters, and goes to protest marches, and makes sure everyone who wants to have a voice has one. Kindness donates to groups in need and stands outside of Planned Parenthood and escorts women seeking medical treatment. Kindness puts on angel wings and shields a grieving family from a Westboro Baptist Church protest. Kindness prays for the protection of sacred land and water and asks forgiveness. Kindness mourns hate-motivated deaths, and kindness works for racial justice because it knows that black lives matter [...]

Kindness isn't always easy. But kindness matters.

Kindness, not arguing, is what's going to make the difference. Kindness means that we're working for equal rights and equal pay and safety and clean water and accessibility for everyone, even those who disagree with us at the tops of their voices.

Kindness answers yes. Kindness doesn't calculate the return on investment or the risk to reputation or the fear of comments. Kindness is present to the moment.

Our seizing the moment matters. Our call to be uncomfortable matters. Our giving out of love and compassion matters. We can't stop to be nice and conciliatory, or the dream will never be. We must stop being nice and answer the call of our faith. Because our kindness matters.

Kathryn: Wow. Joanna:

The Reverend Kimberly DeBus⁴², see Kindness over Niceness, page 11.

We'll take a picture of this, if it's ok. *Mary Kay McPhee*: Sure.

⁴² The **Rev. Kimberley Debus** served as minister at First Universalist Church of Southold, New York. She is building a community ministry of the arts in the Capital Region of New York. See, from 3 April 2017: www.uuworld.org/articles/kindness-over-niceness (accessed October 15, 2017).

Joanna: It's funny, and I know nothing happens without a reason. There's no such thing as coincidence. Just this morning, I posted on Facebook that this month I'm focusing on compassion and leadership, and one of the first images I put up is about how leaders are kind.

Mary Kay McPhee: (laughter) Ok.

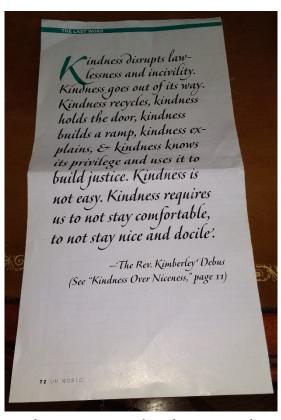
Joanna: Given all these characteristics of kindness, how can we learn to be kind to each other once again? Because I think that things have a way of coming around. You're giving us an opportunity, with your 90 years of experience on this planet, to help us understand.

Mary Kay McPhee: Oh (chuckles, laughter), for heaven's sake.

Kathryn: How can we learn to be kind again to each other? That's a big question.

Mary Kay McPhee: It is. It is. Well I think, basically, it is not an easy job to say I

understand, because rarely is that true. We can make attempts at that, but as much as we try, I think one can never really be in someone else's shoes. It's impossible. And, as much as we try, I think it is hard to overcome historic biases. We try, and we try. It's a valiant effort, and I think we're doing a better job than we used to do, but we really can't understand 100%. (soft laughter) It's an intellectual exercise I think.



Constantly reexamine the landscape and work across boundaries

Kathryn: What is civic leadership?

Mary Kay McPhee: Part of it is having a voice with policymakers, to ask them to have more inclusive, regular meetings with their constituents. I think a lot of us think we know, and we don't know, and I include myself in that. The landscape changes, with time and with people. We need to consistently reexamine that landscape to be sure that we're meeting needs and aspirations, and I'm talking about the politicians now, of their constituents. And that means they need to touch base often, regularly, because things move so quickly.

Joanna: Maybe through town halls, open office hours, things like that?

Mary Kay McPhee: Right. Politicians don't need to wait. They can simply say on a regular basis, "I'm ready to listen." Things change rapidly. "Let's talk about it." How it affects their constituency.

Joanna: Which goes back to those different statements about kindness, because a leader who is kind wants to hear from their constituents.

Mary Kay McPhee: I am concerned that the two major parties are drawing the lines too strictly. I think that our elected officials do not see how to work together. Couldn't

Empower Missouri give more classes on how to work together better?! Too often, we see it as us against them politically, so Republicans against Democrats and Democrats against Republicans.

I think U. S. Senator John McCain is doing some good work right now, on trying to simply say, "Let's quit that. Let's look at the ways we can come together rather than just be on strict party lines." We have more than one way to deal with issues. So, let's talk (emphasis) and find reasonable solutions. How attentive are our elected officials to people? How often do they hold town halls, where they might get a tomato, for example? (laughter) We need to be nimble in our world, where things change so rapidly. We need to be on top of the issues, and officials need to really (emphasis) listen to the needs and dreams and aspirations of constituents.

Joanna: Thinking about the common good, which you talk about a lot, I keep thinking about the millennials because I have two of them, as does Kathryn, two or three.

Mary Kay McPhee: (laughter) Ok.

Joanna: How do we help the next generation focus on the common good, so we don't have so much division? How do we focus concern on the common good and grow in compassion and kindness?

Mary Kay McPhee: I think we need to deliver the message in a little different way. The message is still the same, but the delivery process needs to simply point out yet one more time why the common good is in peoples' best personal interest as well. How they will benefit from certain things.

Joanna: When you think about common interests in Kansas City, or for the state or the country, or the world, it sounds like you're talking about those threads of humanity, that we all share something.

Mary Kay McPhee: We're all part of weaving the fabric of community.

Joanna: Why are some people being left out still? Of the fabric? Why are they not weavers? *Mary Kay McPhee*: Have we asked them to be? I think that's part of it. Have we simply said, we need your voice? We need your wisdom. We need your experience.

Let tensions be a source of growth

Kathryn: Can you think of any time in the Empower Missouri history as you know it when there was tension within the organization?

Mary Kay McPhee: I'm sure it was there, and I'm sure that people wanted their particular issues to be the focus. I guess I would have to give credit to the organization, which listened and set priorities, without ever discounting any voices. I think we have to recognize the integrity of the organization in simply saying, "These are the issues where there is an opportunity for us to make a difference right now."

Alice Laughlin Kitchen: If I could interject, I recall a moment of tension. Remember when we had a meeting here in your apartment, Mary Kay, with Jeanette Oxford? She had just come on board as Executive Director of Empower Missouri. We were worried about the local chapters. We really let her know that staffing at our Kansas City Chapter was not adequate.

Kathryn: It was a matter of members expressing their concern about the future of the organization?

Alice Laughlin Kitchen: In this very room.

Mary Kay McPhee: In this very room. (laughter)

Kathryn: Do you remain today a member of Empower Missouri?

Mary Kay McPhee: Well I don't know whether I am; I don't know that I pay dues. Nobody sends me a bill.

Alice Laughlin Kitchen: I think you've earned your membership.

Joanna: Emeritus.

Mary Kay McPhee: I think I'm an honorary member or something.

Learn more about rural issues

Mary Kay McPhee: I simply commend Empower Missouri for forging ahead and being able to help construct a shared vision. I mean, this is not easy work (laughter) – to build collaboratively on the strengths of members and their environment, pursue opportunities related to the vision of various communities, and thereby contribute to the public good. I think the delivery system is key and then holding that system responsible, and I think that's not an easy task. Empower Missouri offers assistance when appropriate and when needed. Missouri Empower get requests for partnership on issues and listen to needs, concerns and opinions. I think we do that well.

We need to strengthen neighborhoods and services in neighborhoods and come forward, I guess, simply to say, "One size does not fit all, and one neighborhood is very different from another." And have the flexibility to adapt and understand. A strength of Empower Missouri has been its legislative presence and force. It is listened to in Jefferson City. I'm not sure, because I see this basically from my own experience which is as an urban person, and I'm only in Kansas City, but I believe that most of the money to support Empower Missouri programming and partnerships statewide comes in general from urban areas, and that the seats in the legislature are largely held by rural people. How do we as Empower Missouri deal with that interesting predicament?

Kathryn: It *is* an interesting dilemma.

Mary Kay McPhee: Ah huh. How do we deal with it? (laughter) And do we have rural communities behind us, or are we mainly urban?

Alice Laughlin Kitchen: Springfield I think has activity for sure. It's periodic, but I think basically they would collaborate with Kansas City. It can be hard to do though.

Kathryn: Is this a trend that you've noted almost from the beginning of your involvement with Empower Missouri?

Mary Kay McPhee: It may be a personal thing. I knew better, only (emphasis) knew, actually, urban issues. I still don't know rural issues. I mean, I know what I read. And I know that there is technology and a lot of other things... it's moving so quickly. I don't know... what can we do is my question, to understand each other better?

Erase racism

Joanna: I keep saying, there's a perfect quiet storm going on in Kansas City, right now. And the world is watching. And so, because we're the hub of so much that happened historically, people are looking to us...

Mary Kay McPhee: Us who?

Joanna: Kansas City.

Mary Kay McPhee: Kansas City.

Joanna: To say, how do we figure out these issues, historically. Now we find ourselves in 2017...

Mary Kay McPhee: Do you mean...

Joanna: As a country, so talking about racism, for example, what do we do, how do we achieve peace?

Mary Kay McPhee: One thing we can do is see ourselves as one big blood bank. I've worked with blood banks. We don't keep track of who is black or white or Hispanic or Asian or Native American or things like that. We just try to make sure that blood gets to those who need it, so we are all healthy.

Unearth more examples of freedom fighters in Missouri

Mary Kay McPhee: Missouri shares borders with eight other states [only the state of Tennessee shares so many borders with other states]. Accents are different, from Cape Girardeau to Kansas City to Saint Louis. The way people speak is different, peoples' histories are different, yet Missoura (southern accent coming through) has had some good successes. How has that happened, to bring diverse groups together to talk about what unites us? Empower Missouri is huge in this. Such conversations are invaluable and need to continue.

Kathryn: Are you saying these connections across borders are a strength?

Mary Kay McPhee: I think they can be.

Joanna: I think so, too. Missouri's history is interesting, because of the Missouri Compromise of 1820.

Mary Kay McPhee: Ok, yes.

Joanna: Missouri has a legacy to overcome because of the way it was introduced to the country and achieved its statehood. A deal was brokered so that if Missouri came in one way, then Maine could come in.⁴³

Then in 1863, when Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, an executive order, there were people in Texas and Missouri and some other states who didn't find out about the end of slavery until 1865, and that's why we have Juneteenth. Juneteenth commemorates and celebrates how people finally found out that slavery had been abolished.⁴⁴

Before the Emancipation Proclamation, we had two different decisions about Freedom: Plessy vs. Ferguson [legalizing racial segregation through the concept of "separate but equal"] and Dred Scott⁴⁵. Those two decisions are still permeating

⁴³ "In an effort to preserve the balance of power in Congress between slave and free states, the **Missouri Compromise** was passed in 1820 admitting Missouri as a slave state and Maine as a free state." See www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Missouri.html (accessed October 21, 2017).

⁴⁴ "**Juneteenth** is the oldest known celebration commemorating the ending of slavery in the United States." See www.juneteenth.com/history.htm (accessed October 15, 2017).

⁴⁵ **Dred and Harriet Scott** were living in St. Louis, Missouri. Harriet encouraged her husband to sue for his freedom, but when the case was ultimately referred to the Supreme Court, it decided in 1957 that

institutions and systems in Missouri. And so, with Missouri sharing borders with eight different states, as you say, we have so many different people here, who bring cultures with them, and there *are* success stories, Quindaro being one of the main ones that's on the radar right now, about how people came together and worked together, white, black...

Kathryn: Quindaro's in Kansas?

Joanna: Yes, what I mean by that is that we have examples... the marker about Esther Brown [white civil rights activist] in South Park, Kansas. There have got to be examples, that we can find, right here in Missouri.

Mary Kay McPhee: Yeah.

Joanna: Showing that there were parallels between what was happening in Kansas and what was happening here in this state.

Develop leadership in others

Mary Kay McPhee: You heard what the president said about Charlottesville? That there are two sides to what happened? Did you hear what he said about the military? *Joanna*: What about it?

Mary Kay McPhee: He is wanting to exclude certain people from the military. Can you believe that? Here you have people willing to give their life for the country, but we're not going to take you [because you're transgender].

Joanna: I never thought I would see a leader of ours be so mocked and parodied.

Mary Kay McPhee: It is (emphasis) an embarrassment, for the United States, to hear these off-the-cuff remarks that put down whole segments of our population, whole segments. Bad news.

Joanna: This a great reminder for us to unite around what we know is right, because guess who's watching? Our children.

Mary Kay McPhee: That is true.

Joanna: Immediately after the election, we saw a lot of cases of bullying.⁴⁶ The cases of bullying started to rise, and there were some behaviors that escalated even to the point of children as young as eight and nine years old committing suicide, so we have a lot on our hands.⁴⁷

persons of African descent were not citizens and thus had no standing to sue. See www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2932.html (accessed October 15, 2017).

⁴⁶ "The educators were asked to answer a series of questions about the climate at their schools following the presidential election. In the first national snapshot of what teachers are observing, nine out of 10 educators who responded to the survey said the election has negatively impacted students' behavior and mood. Forty percent said they have heard derogatory language used against students of color, Muslims, immigrants and other students based on gender or sexual orientation." See www.cnn.com/2016/11/29/health/school-survey-post-election-negative-incidents/index.html (accessed October 15, 2017).

⁴⁷ "The parents of an 8-year-old Ohio boy sued his school district for his wrongful death, accusing the system... of allowing the school to decay into a place so terrorized by bullies that the third grader died by suicide Jan. 26. The suicide came two days after the boy was assaulted and left unconscious on a restroom floor." See www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2017/08/08/8-year-old-boy-suicide-lawsuit/548297001 (accessed October 15, 2017).

I was asking you about kindness again, because I had a 94-year-old grandmother pass away. It will be a year this month. It's ok. Thank you. What are the things I learned from her, my father's mother? That there's always Redemption, but we have to help. It doesn't just happen automatically, and so for me, I will tell people sometimes things happen for a reason, and in this case, I think it's a blessing in disguise.

Mary Kay McPhee: You're talking about Trump? He's a blessing in disguise? (hesitant laughter)

Joanna: We are used to having a leader that's respected, so to have people mocking our country is very unfortunate. What does this teach the next generation about leadership? We want people to know that it's possible to be a good person. It's possible to make a difference. It's possible to focus on the common good, to put self-interest aside, and to be a good mentor to people even if it's not direct. It could be indirect.

I know we're coming up on the end of the hour, so I just want one word about leadership. What is one word that you would use other than kind to describe good leaders?

Mary Kay McPhee: Leaders are not about themselves, but about developing leadership in others.

Joanna: Amen. Who in your family taught you the most about servant leadership? *Mary Kay McPhee*: Almost all members of my family. I think that's true in families. You understand that you do not stand alone, and that you need to give back.

To live a life of service, find your passion

Joanna: If you were to be in front of a group of young people, millennials, right now, what would you say to them about living a life of service?

Mary Kay McPhee: Well [clears throat], I guess it starts with trying to find your passion. Once that guiding passion is there, then it is about making choices to help benefit the passion and its capacity for good. I think most people respond to that inner feeling of good for more than self. That goodness is there. We just need to bring it out and understand the fulfillment that comes if we are able to focus on more than ourselves.

Empower Missouri

Kathryn: One last question for me. MASW is now called Empower Missouri. From your perspective how do you empower Missouri?

Mary Kay McPhee: You're already doing it. (laughter) By being inclusive and certainly listening to people and their personal stories, and understanding how we can come together collaboratively to affect policy.

Empower Missouri is known for being a listening ear and for making the collective voice heard, simply by assembling people with different takes on an issue. In having a civil conversation (laughter), people begin to see the possibilities of collaborative effort. You still facilitate these discussions... is it First Friday⁴⁸? It's still going on.

⁴⁸ "Every First Friday of the month, the **Empower Missouri Kansas City Chapter** hosts a forum called the **First Friday Forum**. Each month tackles issues facing our most vulnerable citizens. Topics include, Urban

There is respect and civility. Nobody's opinion is discounted. The different opinions are put into the mix.

It hasn't been us and them, but we.

The issues that affect us are common to all of us, but they affect us a little bit differently, depending on your heritage and where you live. When we work together on them, we are enriched.

We've come to understand a bit better how to have the conversations that can erase some of the divisions. What we are talking about is universal. It doesn't necessarily have to be driven by state lines or counties or whatever... but it is. (sad laughter) The fact is, it is.

But I think Empower Missouri's message for a long time has been: "Let's talk about what we can do together. How can we do it better, more effectively."

Take care of and empower one another

Joanna: You've done a lot of work for community, and you've also taken good care of yourself because you recently celebrated 90 years, for which we congratulate you.

Mary Kay McPhee: Thank you! Thank you.

Joanna: How do you do it? How do you take care of yourself?

Mary Kay McPhee: How do I take care of myself? Genes are probably a part of it. I must have longevity genes (laughter); my mother lived a long, fruitful life. Plus, moderation, moderation, moderation. I think part of it is also feeling that you have a purpose. That you still have something to contribute. I've also been very fortunate, because I've got fabulous help here. They take really good care of me. Okay. (laughter) So that's my answer.

Thank you, Joanna and Kathryn, for all the time you have spent with me. And thanks to Neil Tucker as well. I really enjoy it. Empower Missouri has struggled with important issues since day one. Many of the rest of us are just learning the lessons, but you've been there for decades. Love it, love it! (claps hands)

Policing, Hunger, Education, Housing, Fair Wage. The announcement of each month's topic is provided up to 3 weeks before the forum through email and press releases." Source: http://empowermissouri.org/chapters/kansas-city (accessed October 15, 2017).

Conducting the Oral Herstory and Producing the Video

We were quite honored to meet Mary Kay McPhee through Empower Missouri and be involved in documenting aspects of her life of servant leadership⁴⁹. All our encounters with her were friendly, enriching and truly humbling.

Joanna Grace Farmer and Kathryn Toure were welcomed by caregiver Ife Peterson into the home of Mrs. McPhee on the 11th floor of an apartment building on Roanoke Parkway in Kansas City, Missouri. We met three mornings in 2017 (July 18 and 25,



August 1) for conversational interviews and three mornings (August 11, September 1 and 8), with Neil Tucker as well, for videography. We audio-recorded and then transcribed the conversations, each lasting about one hour. The transcriptions were used to compile the narrative about the life of service of Mary Kay McPhee. We made notes on the videography sessions, totaling about two hours in length, to see if we needed to integrate any new content or slants into the narrative.

At our first encounter, Mrs. McPhee wore a greenblue suit, and her eyes shone with welcoming grace and humility. Her smile and words were no different. Her name resonated with one of us who was called Mary Kay growing up and Kathryn throughout university in Kansas and life in New York City, Iowa City, several African countries, and Kansas City. Joanna introduced herself as being from Chicago. She spoke of her father

who was a Towerman at the Chicago Transit Authority and a patriarch for the family, promoting organization and dedication.

The work with Mary Kay McPhee is inspired by ethnographic and life and oral history / herstory approaches. We used a semi-structured interview format each time, to explore Mary Kay McPhee's life of service and leadership and her connections with Empower Missouri. We had some questions in mind to get our conversations going, while also being open to where they would lead. In transmitting our discussions here, we decided to leave most of the narrative in conversation format, to reflect the format of our dialogues and the intergenerational sharing that took place. In drafting the narrative, our subjectivities came into play, as in any work employing a qualitative methodology, for

⁴⁹ "Servant leadership is both a leadership philosophy and set of leadership practices. Traditional leadership generally involves the accumulation and exercise of power by one at the 'top of the pyramid.' By comparison, the servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible. Servant leadership turns the power pyramid upside down; instead of the people working to serve the leader, the leader exists to serve the people. When leaders shift their mindset and serve first, they unlock purpose and ingenuity in those around them, resulting in higher performance and engaged, fulfilled employees. A servant leader's purpose should be to inspire and equip the people they influence." Source: Wikipedia, inspired by www.servantleadershipinstitute.com/what-is-servant-leadership-1 and www.greenleaf.org/what-is-servant-leadership (both accessed October 15, 2017).

example in the questions we asked, the way we structured the narrative, organized it by theme, and provided subtitles for different sections. The "Conversations with Mary Kay McPhee" as presented here remain open and accessible and available to others to bring their own interpretations to bear.

We felt mutual trust and respect growing over the first two meetings in July, so much so that Mary Kay McPhee, at first resistant about being filmed, accepted our requests. She had already been filmed by the University of Missouri-Kansas City and was surprised that we had viewed the video on YouTube⁵⁰. We spoke of the value of multiple approaches in communicating legacy – written word and audiovisual –, and she eventually accepted the videography sessions, as long as we organized them on Fridays, after her Thursday hair appointments (information we gleaned from Ife).

In her ethical will, Mary Kay McPhee wrote about the importance of listening attentively, and listen attentively at each of our five meetings she did, and responding succinctly. We were thinking: If only we could be as alert as Mary Kay McPhee at her age, as attentive, as relevant, and as succinct in what we say. She is a woman of principles, and enthusiastically lives by them. She speaks of being curious and engaging others. She was curious about us, asking about our backgrounds and passions and engaging with us each time we met – and sometimes giving us homework.

The partnership between Joanna and Kathryn was important and enriches the work in the way that two heads and two hearts are better than one of each. Both in our 50s, and with similar and different backgrounds, our questions of and discussions with Mary Kay McPhee reflect multiple perspectives. Before and after each session, we dialogued in person, by



phone and by email, trying to make sense of what we were hearing and learning. "I'm hearing my Grandma's wisdom about respecting and honoring elders and the significant role they have in our lives, helping us learn about our journey... and the power of listening," wrote Joanna, in one of the emails. Kathryn wrote to Joanna, "After being with Mary Kay McPhee, I continue to wonder why we measure development in terms of production and consumption rather than checking in on the wellbeing of all our children to know how we are doing as a society."

Kathryn led the interviewing the first two times and Joanna the third time. We considered this important, to allow different ideas to come through via our different styles. There was healthy tension as well. Kathryn, trained in qualitative interview techniques, insisted on open-ended questions. Joanna, committed to community capacity building, insisted on the need to balance that with honest and open two-way dialogue, saying "Mary Kay does not just want to be interviewed. She wants to discuss social

⁵⁰ See 6-minute video produced for the 2017 UMKC **Starr Women's Hall of Fame** Luncheon, www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YaP9rFQR-4 (accessed October 15, 2017).

issues." This understanding and adjustment of our approach was important in avoiding one-way communication and mere extraction of information. Mary Kay wanted to learn as well from our perspectives and experience, and truly engage with us.

She laughed if she thought we were trying to put her on a pedestal. And put her on a pedestal is the last thing we would like to do. We merely hope to attest, through this work, to how Mary Kay McPhee, a woman of privilege, struggled with the social issues of her times, trying, for example, as tenaciously as a mother bear, to find out why there were outhouses at the school of her sorority sister and why so many African Americans worked in menial jobs at the university. We hope this work attests as well to how she tried to learn from and make herself useful to those around her and useful to Kansas City, Missouri, the nation, and the world.

Included in the narrative are footnotes, when specific people or historical events are mentioned, to assist the read for persons from different geographies and ages. Only basic information is included, sometimes from Wikipedia, understanding that readers can investigate in more depth on their own.

Educators may find entry points in this document to engage learners, whether in relation to issues like school segregation and desegregation, racial discrimination, social and political issues, or the lives, struggles, and legacies of other Kansas City people. The document could inspire others to interview elders and share their learnings or to conduct related archival research.

The videos with Mary Kay McPhee, are another opportunity to be inspired.

We leave it to others to pursue the suggestions of Mary Kay McPhee – of researching and writing about the contributions of Dorothy Johnson and of Herman Johnson, for example, and contacting their daughter. They may ask: How is Empower Missouri recreating itself to meet the challenges of the 21st century? This is not a question we attempted to answer in this work, but we hope that this work may contribute to that process.

Whose life is better as a result of an organization's work? This too is not a question that we tried to answer for Empower Missouri. Nineteenth and 20th century organizations were undergirded by an ethos of believing that people had problems and needed to be fixed. This led to labels and stigmas and a system, the welfare state, that spent billions in the war on poverty and the supposition of the great society. Here we are at the eve of 2018, which will mark the 200th birthday of Frederick Douglass⁵¹, the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Holy Week riots in Kansas City, which Mary Kay McPhee mentioned as a turning point in her life. We should ask: What has stayed the same, and what has changed? We must reflect and not put ourselves at risk, allowing history to repeat itself. We must ask questions. We cannot afford to use broken systems that create dysfunctional people. We must find ways to bring out the goodness of humanity in all of us.

We thank Mary Kay McPhee and her caregiver Ife Peterson for their openness and cordiality. We would also like to thank Sherri Camp, Librarian at the Topeka Room of the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library, for assisting us when we were consulting

⁵¹ After escaping from slavery in Maryland, **Frederick Douglass** worked as a social reformer, abolitionist, and statesman. See www.blackpast.org/aah/douglass-frederick-1817-1895 (accessed October 21, 2017).

Topeka High School yearbooks. Finally, we would like to thank Jeanette Mott Oxford, Empower Missouri Board members, and Alice Laughlin Kitchen for trusting us with this important life herstory work, which we hope contributes to deepened understandings of Kansas City, the times of Mary Kay McPhee, the life of the organization now known as Empower Missouri, and ways in which people can live a life of service and be a servant leader.

Let us conclude here by emphasizing how Mary Kay was always attentive, convivial, and ready to work, as documented by these conversations.

Joanna: We've done a lot of talking, and we really appreciate everything we've been learning, because a lot of it's new to us. Kathryn and I, in our discussions, have been like *wow*, we didn't know that.

Mary Kay McPhee: About Empower Missouri?

Joanna: And about your life.

Mary Kay McPhee: Oh [giggle]. Wow.

Kathryn: We are two curious women with question marks still coming out of our heads, but we promised ourselves to never go over one hour in our sessions with you, to respect your time, and our energy level. We're at 58 minutes...

Mary Kay McPhee: (laughter) Do I love you or what? I want you on my team.

Joanna: We are on your team.

Mary Kay McPhee: Love it, love it. Is there something I need to be working on? Something I need to prepare for next time?

Kathryn: Your life has prepared you for these sessions. And we thank you for conversing with us today.

When we went to see Mary Kay after she reviewed the first draft of this document, she thanked Empower Missouri immensely for the time to reflect, and said that everyone should have such an opportunity. Let's continuing talking with our elders!

Joanna Grace Famer, Scholar, Activist and Community Capacity Builder

Kathryn Toure, Writer and Researcher

Neil Tucker, Videographer

Please note that any factual or historical errors are not the responsibility of Empower Missouri but of the authors of this document.

Team McPhee



Joanna Grace Farmer (Scholar-Activist, legacyoflove.global [at] gmail.com, phone: +1 816 287 1975) has worked for over 30 years on political engagement strategies; community development initiatives and programs focused on housing and education; integrated social service delivery systems; culturally competent mental health systems, transformative pedagogy, and team building; and evaluation. She earned her bachelor's degree in Public Policy Studies and master's degree in Sociology from the University of Chicago; and master's degree in Curriculum and

Instruction from the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She has completed doctoral work in Sociology, Social Work and Community Psychology. Her accomplishments include research and publishing for private and public grants; curriculum development and implementation for social studies, reading, college and career readiness, community development practitioners, and students with disabilities; and writing about social capital and intrinsic motivation.

Joanna has successfully implemented several initiatives including Celebrating Kwanzaa, University of Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), the Consciously Cultural Calendar, the Buy Black Youth Ambassadors, Rising Sun, and Buy Black Empowerment Initiative. She is currently researching and networking to establish a solid infrastructure for her primary social enterprise, Building Community Capacity, LLC. BCC's work is focused on increasing access and resources that strengthen children, families, and communities. She uses collaborations and partnerships to empower community residents to explore possibilities and take advantage of opportunities available to them.

Joanna's activities include mentoring children, sharing capacity building strategies, and volunteering with the Alliance for Economic Inclusion, Money Smart Kansas City, South Kansas City Alliance, and the National Black Council of Elders. She is a Change and Peace for Humanity Ambassador for the Youth Education Leadership Initiative International and top KC Connector. Joanna serves as secretary for the Women of Wealth Investment Club and government affairs representative for the Avalon View Neighborhood Association and enjoys uncovering her family history as a member of the Midwest Afro-American Genealogical Interest Coalition. She enjoys reading, walking, traveling, and photography.



Kathryn Toure (researcher-writer, <u>kathryn.toure [at] gmail.com</u>, <u>www.kathryntoure.net</u>) earned her Bachelor's degree in political science and French from the University of Kansas and her PhD in education, with a focus on sociocultural studies, from the University of Montreal. She worked in higher education and research administration at the University of Iowa and for Canada's International Development Research Center. Based in Africa for 17 years, she lived in three different West and Central African countries and travelled for work to over half the countries of Africa.

She is a member of the Greater Kansas City Black History Study Group. For Garrison School (established in 1877) Cultural Center in Liberty, Missouri, she worked as a volunteer curriculum developer (via MacArthur Foundation funded LRNG KC, hosted by KC Social Innovation) and a mentor for high school students and served on the diversity, inclusion and equity committee of the Liberty School District.

She participated in the Quindaro, Kansas City, Kansas oral history project and attended in 2016 an oral history workshop at the Missouri State Archives. She is a member of the editorial board of Langaa Research and Publishing Common Initiative Group, which publishes 50 books per year. She is author, co-author, and co-editor of several books and papers now cited internationally. She assisted a priest with his memoir about 39 years in Bolivia – seeing the country evolve from military dictatorship to fledgling democracy. Toure uses ethnographic approaches and thick description (à la Geertz) in her research and writing which seeks to reveal and share untold stories, from local/grounded perspectives, about what it takes to innovatively transcend boundaries and live together harmoniously in society.



Neil Tucker (neiltuckervideo [at] gmail.com) is a veteran of 30 plus years of working in the television industry as a videographer, editor and producer. During that span of time, he worked on news, commercials, promotions, community affairs and a variety of live "remote" productions. Most recently, he works independently on video production projects, many of which fall into the category of documentary. He is passionate about technical issues; current and innovative technology including drones, steady cams and point of view cameras; and social issues. In his work, he puts people and relationships first.

Timeline of Some Periods and Events in the Life of Mary Kay McPhee

	Year	Age	National/World events
• Born	1927		
Elementary and middle school	1933	6 12	1939 War in Europe
Completed travels to 48 states, Canada and Mexico		13 14	1941 US enters War
Topeka High School (approx.)	1942 1945	15 18	
• University of Kansas	1945 1949	18 22	1945 End of WW2
 Parker Elementary School, Kansas City, KS (3rd grade teacher) 	1949 1950		1951 Class action suit against Topeka Board of Education 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision
 Parent Teacher Association President Boy Scouts den leader 	1962 1963		133 . Brown v. Bourd of Education decision
Girl Scout Brownie leader			
Missouri Sate Medical Association Alliance	1967 1975		

Note: Timeline includes selections only; see Curriculum Vitae (included with Ethical Will) for more comprehensive listing

	Year	Year Number of years of service		National/World events	
Jackson County Welfare Commission	1967		1		
,			1968	Assassination of MLK, Jr.	
	1971				
 Jackson County Child Welfare 					
- Advisory Committee Member	1969				
	1982	15 years			
- Program Chair	1972				
	1973				
- Chair	1973				
	1974				
MASW/Empower Missouri					
- Chair, Kansas City area (5 counties)	1973				
	1974				
- State Board of Directors	1973				
	1976	3 years			
- Local Advocate Award, Kansas City Chapter	2011				
	4070				
Auxiliary of the American Medical Association	1978				
- Board President and Chair and	1985	•			
Immediate Past President	1987	9 years			
Herman Johnson African-American Scholarship	1988				
Fund for students at UMKC, selection committee	present	29 years			
,	p				
International Relations Council					
- Nominating Committee	2000				
 KC Mayor's Commission on Race 					
- Commissioner	2003				
	2007	4 years			

Annex 1: Review by a Millennial

of

"Reflecting on Empower Missouri and a Life of Service: Conversations with Mary Kay McPhee"

I read the narrative about the life of Mary Kay McPhee, and it was so inspiring. Sometimes we feel like there is only one way to make change happen, and Mary Kay's life really demonstrates that that is not the case. On the surface, she was a wealthy white woman who did things that wealthy white women did. However, as you dive into her life and life experience, you quickly begin to realize the ways in which she circumvented the social norms of her time. She did not challenge the norms of the day head on, nor did she risk her family's future, but she went about creating change in a way that was true to who she was as a person. She did not wait for other people to get up and make change happen – she did it. See, in the CV attached to her Ethical Will, for example, how she was involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS from the very beginning!

She worked with people, like the Johnson's who were intrinsically linked to the communities she wanted to serve. She learned from them. **She joined organizations like Empower Missouri** that were already doing the types of work that she wanted to do, and helped to develop and further shared agendas.

Mary Kay's narrative is especially timely considering the current social climate. There seems to be an overwhelming number of issues that need to be addressed, socially, politically, and economically, whether at the national or global level. It is easy to look at ourselves and believe that because of our privileges or lack of them, there is nothing we can do to address these issues. Mary Kay did not have that attitude. Nor did she work in isolation. She acknowledged the privileges she had and, with others, leveraged them. In her daily life, she recognized the injustices and oddness of certain structures, like having a Caucasian and an African American King and Queen at her high school. She spoke to people who were different from herself and recognized their humanity. I believe that these two things, recognizing that there is injustice and making an effort to get to know people different from herself, are the key factors that make her life so extraordinary.

Mary Kay could have easily chosen to ignore all the injustices and inequities of her day, which would have been relatively easy for a white woman of her social standing and background. Alternatively, she could have gone into different communities and taken a heavy hand in deciding how funds should be allocated. Instead, she listened and learned. I think that is the biggest take away from her experiences. She continuously listened and learned, and afterwards she took action. Mary Kay is so inspiring to me because she is so human. She worked within her constraints to do the best that she knew how.

There are many examples in history of those individuals who threw everything they had behind a cause; they lost jobs or family members, were ostracized, and in many cases lost their lives. While change needs those people who will do that, the vast majority of people are not willing or able to. Mary Kay's activism, while quieter, is equally as important, and it is more accessible. Her activism is about using every opportunity make the changes you want to see. Her activism takes the lead when necessary but also follows

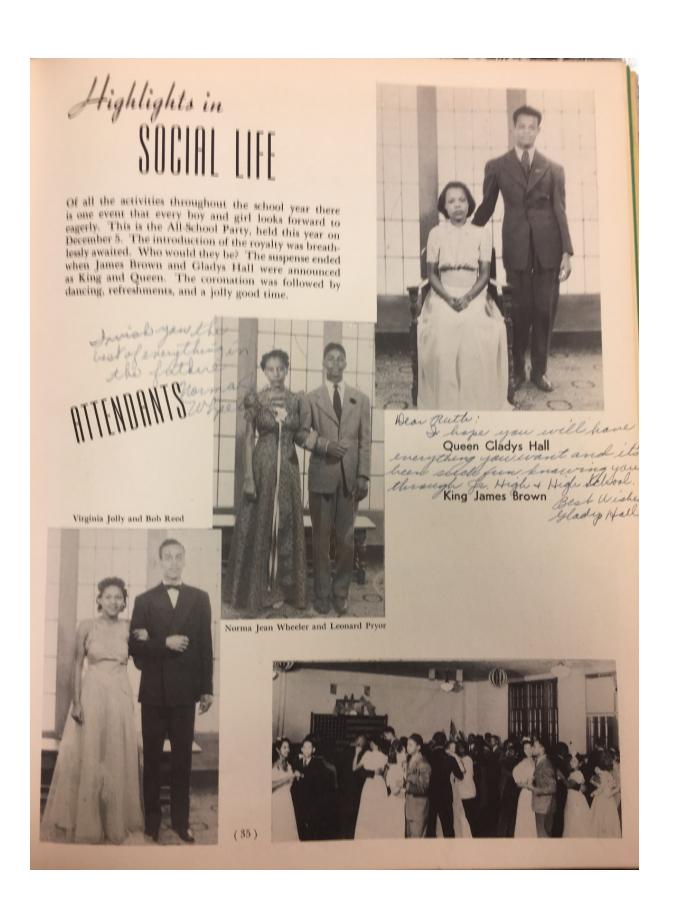
when necessary. Her activism is a long-term strategy or lifestyle instead of a passing fad. For me personally, her life empowers me to know that while I may not see that changes that I want in hours or days, if I continue to diligently use the tools that I have available, then I will see that changes in society that I so desperately believe need to happen. If I listen and learn from those who are different from myself, I can help to create the type of society that I want my children and grandchildren to live in.

I am glad that I had the opportunity to read the narrative about Mary Kay's life. It has led me to ask what, at the age of 90, is the legacy I want to leave. What are the issues that are important to me, and what will I want my grandchildren and great grandchildren to glean from my life? In these tumultuous times, how am I leveraging the resources within my reach to help others, to build community? What am I doing today to put myself in a better position to constructively shape society? What are the ethical legacies of my parents and grandparents? Mary Kay's life experiences, as shared here, inspired me to reflect upon my own life, in ways that I believe have been insightful and even necessary. I hope that others, too, will be inspired.

Natasha Aduloju-Ajijola, PhD, MPH, CHES, Post-Doctoral Fellow, at the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Medicine, seeking work in international public health

Annex 2: Photos from Topeka High School Yearbooks





Annex 3: MASW/Empower Missouri event honoring Mary Kay McPhee and William Pfeiffer, Sr.

MASW

Celebrate our Local Chapter's Future Wednesday, August 10, 2011 5:30pm - 7:30pm Home of Alice Kitchen 3725 Valentine Rd. Kansas City, MO 64111 Honoring Mary Kay McPhee and William Pfeiffer, Sr. Special Guest: "Harry S. Truman" Sharing stories from his days as Jackson County Judge Wednesday, August 10, 2011 5:30pm - 7:30pm Home of Alice Kitchen 3725 Valentine Rd., Kansas City, MO 64111 Drinks and light Hors d'oeuvres Catered by: Culinary Cornerstones Kansas City Community Kitchen, Grace and Holy Trinity Please reply: August 2nd Alice Kitchen [by phone or email] Event Host: KC Chapter members on the State Board - Class of 1990 • Marsha Campbell • Vicki Riddle · Lucy Torres · Alice Kitchen -----clip off and return with check-----Name Address City State Zip Phone Number \$25 Person \$100 Patron Check made out to: MASW, KC Chapter__ MASW is a 501-c-3 tax deductible organization serving Missouri's citizen Mail to: ____



Mary Kay McPhee of Kansas City accepted, at the age of 90, the invitation of Empower Missouri to be interviewed about her life of service. She embodies the Empower Missouri slogan of advocating for justice and empowering change. In her ethical will and the conversations documented here, she shares her life, values, and hopes.

"We at Empower Missouri hope that the stories and reflections Mary Kay McPhee so willingly and humbly shared will inspire younger advocates to engage in social change and work for social justice."

Jeanette Mott Oxford

Empower Missouri Executive Director since 2012, and Member, Missouri House of Representatives, 2005-2012

