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Auburn University Special Collections and Archives
Social Justice and Women's Rights Oral History Project

Interview with Julianne (Julie) Garner

Conducted by Heather Haley

February 5, 2017

Transcribed by Heather Haley

Heather Haley

I am here with Julie Garner and this is the second interview for the Social Justice and Women's Rights Oral History Project. It is Sunday, February 5, 2017 and we are in the Bond Library in the History Department at Auburn University. So, thank you for agreeing to do this interview. If we could just get your full name for the record.

Julie Garner

My full name is Julianne Garner, but just Julie.

Heather Haley

When were you born?

Julie Garner

I was born November 17, 1990, so I'm 26.

Heather Haley

Where were you born?

Julie Garner

I was born in Pequannock, New Jersey.

Heather Haley

Did you grow up there?

Julie Garner

No. I grew up in a small town by there, Verona, New Jersey. It's about 10 minutes outside of New York City as the crow flies, about 40 minutes by bus. Yeah, it's suburban New Jersey.

Heather Haley

What was it like growing up in New Jersey?

Julie Garner

Well, when you're growing up, it's just you're growing up. But now that I've moved to the South, I realize growing up in New Jersey is totally different than the people that I'm around here in Auburn. I grew up in the suburbs right outside of the city. All the kids I went to school with, all their parents commuted to and from the city. My parents did not, but that was such a huge part of our existence is how much we relied on New York City.

Heather Haley

What is one of your earliest memories of New Jersey?

Julie Garner

That's a good question. Well, my parents are both from New Jersey—I mean hardcore Jersey people. They don't understand why I left and my sister [Shannon] also left. They just can't fathom us leaving New Jersey. Every summer they would take us to the Jersey Shore, which I know has this like super negative connotation now, thanks to the MTV show, but that to me is a big part of my growing up, but also just memory. Every summer we would go to my mom's best friend in Point Pleasant, New Jersey. I remember just like waking up early with my dad and going to watch the boats go out. It was an amazing time. I loved New Jersey.

Heather Haley

Where did you go to school in New Jersey?

Julie Garner

Verona High School. Yeah, kind of funny with Verona High School. Again, like I said, right outside of New York City, but our school mascot was the Hillbilly. Yes. I never really understood it, but it's kind of fun to tell people, "I was a Verona Hillbilly."

Heather Haley

Do you know the kind of etymology and how that is associated with the high school?

Julie Garner

If you think about it, it kind of makes a lot of sense. I guess in the late-19th century, maybe, early-20th century, I'm not really sure of dates, when people would leave New York—"Neork"—they would move out to the countryside of New Jersey, and that would be Verona. Verona was this country bumpkin

aspect for people from the city and so that's where the name came from. If you moved out of New York City and you moved to Verona: *Oh, you country bumpkin*. Hence, hillbilly.

Heather Haley

When you were in high school, how would you describe your education that you received there?

Julie Garner

I went to public school and it was a fantastic education. I graduated with 153 people, and I would say probably 150 of them went to college and not even like Associates Degree, Community College. People went to Harvard. People went to Princeton, Yale. It was a really, really good education. That being said, there was no diversity whatsoever. Of the 153 people I graduated with, I did not graduate with a single African American. I can't even think of a single... We had a couple people whose parents came from India, but everyone was white.

Heather Haley

What were some of the things that you were involved in, in high school?

Julie Garner

I was a varsity cross country runner. Actually, I only did three years of high school because I was pretty heavily bullied in middle school and the beginning of high school and I was just kind of looking for a way to get out of there early. What I ended up finding was my junior year, I studied abroad as an exchange student in Japan. And that was, you know, 10 years later, 11 years later, I'm still saying that was the best year of my life. So yeah, like, I ran a little bit. I did a lot of like future teacher stuff, club wise, but for me traveling was a big part.

Heather Haley

How did you get involved with study abroad? What made you choose Japan?

Julie Garner

I actually did not choose Japan. When I applied to go—I went with the Rotary Youth Exchange—and when I applied, I was only 14. The program only really takes 16-to-18 year-olds and so there weren't many countries that accepted—I left at 15—so there were really no countries that were accepting 15 year-olds, mostly because they didn't think the maturity level [was] [high]. I wanted to go, [and] this is gonna sound ridiculous—it sounds ridiculous now, but I wanted to go somewhere where I could ski. I wanted to go to Austria, Germany, Switzerland. Three months, no, I guess it was like four months, before I left, Rotary called me up and said, "Hey, we found you a placement in Japan." I was just devastated. Devastated, but looking back I mean, I don't know. It just worked out. It was perfect. It was the best year of my life.

Heather Haley

What did you study while you were there?

Julie Garner

I just went to high school. I went to an all-girls school in Kōchi, Japan. Kōchi is on Shikoku—it's one of the four main islands of Japan—and it's considered the like, really rural redneck area of Japan. My host father was really good in English, he called it the "Arkansas of Japan." (*chuckles*) So it's really isolated, really countryesque city, but for Japan, 300,000 people is considered country. I went to high school six days a week and it was eight in the morning 'till eight at night because that education system is just really intense, and I flourished. I loved it. I left after a year having better friends in Japan than I ever had in the U.S. It just changed so much. I mean, I was very shy. I didn't have any confidence in myself before that and Japan just changed everything.

Heather Haley

Did you meet lifelong friends while you were there?

Julie Garner

Oh my god. Yes. Again, this is like 11 years ago and I still go back all the time. I was actually the maid of honor in my host sister's wedding. I stayed with four host families and, you know you're not really supposed to compare families or whatever, but my first host family, I love them. I love them so much. I talk to them all the time. It's great.

Heather Haley

Would you move there if you had the opportunity?

Julie Garner

A couple years ago, I would have jumped on that opportunity in a second, but I feel like I'm older now. I don't know if I would anymore. I've lived abroad a couple times after Japan, and I might be too old to do that again.

Heather Haley

What were you involved in while you were in Japan?

Julie Garner

So how the Japanese school system works is that like, you know in the U.S., you can choose kind of a sport each semester or, you know, you can do different clubs. In Japan, you choose one club and that's it. And so, I started off, I went to Japan, and I wanted to do exactly what I knew. So, I joined the track team, and I was running, and I love that. I did, but about November, I was kind of like, *I actually should probably change this up, I should probably do something that's Japanese*. I had an advisor at school who advised me to do the koto, which is the harp instrument. It's this like six-foot-long, 13-string harp. Now you have to understand, I have never played an instrument in my life. I am tone deaf. I can't do

anything musical at all, except for like, click Pandora and listen to the radio. But I just loved it. I never got very good at it. But the girls in the club that I joined, the koto club, they ended up being my best friends. In fact, the club captain, her name was Chiake, we talk on Facebook probably every night. She's just such a good friend. Because it's your one club, you spend so much time with those people and they really become your family. I had these amazing host families and I had my club friends and it was just such an amazing year.

Heather Haley

How would you say that experience defined your life?

Julie Garner

Oh my gosh. (*stumbles*) I can't—whenever someone brings up Japan, I just glow. I light up because I love everything about that year. Like I mentioned earlier, I found so much more confidence in myself. It was the first time in my life that I actually felt like I fit in, which sounds very weird because it was constantly pointed out to me that, "Oh, you look different. You don't belong here. You look different." People are always staring at me. But for the first time in my life, I had a group of friends that I like, could really trust and who loved me for me, not necessarily for any other reason. It changed everything. I went from, like this shy girl who had no friends in high school in the U.S. to happy all the time, always surrounded by people. And I caught the travel bug. After Japan, I came back to the U.S., I graduated from high school, and then I went and studied abroad again, in France for a year.

Heather Haley

Where in France did you go?

Julie Garner

I got so lucky. (*chuckles*) Because I had traveled with Rotary to Japan, they didn't give me a choice again of the country. They were just like, "where do you want to go?" and I said, "Argentina" and they said, "okay, you're going to France." But there was another girl who was going to France and they said to me, "would you rather live in the city or would you rather live in the country?" And I lived in the, quote- unquote, "country" of Japan and I loved it, so I said, "I want to live in the country." Well, the version of the country in France is a vineyard, so I lived on a vineyard in a small town called Fixin, right outside of Dijon. I stayed with one host family that year, and oh my gosh, they were incredible—another family that I'm still very, very close to. My host mom was actually German, but she was married to a French guy and they had three kids. They had 1,000 pets and I just kind of fit in there like in their giant zoo. Crazy.

Heather Haley

Just for clarification, was this your first year of college or is this in between high school and college?

Julie Garner

Yeah, it was a gap year. When I graduated high school, I was only 17. It was technically a gap year and then after I got back from France, I went to college.

Heather Haley

How were these trips funded?

Julie Garner

Everyone asks me this. So Rotary is actually really, really a fantastic program. I don't think a lot of people know much about it, but you pretty much pay for your airfare and then they cover everything else. So, when I live with these host families, I actually got an allowance every month from Rotary. Nothing spectacular, like 60 bucks a month. But in Japan, Rotary paid my host families, I guess. It wasn't, again, it wasn't much. It was like 100 bucks just to cover food or whatever. But in France, the families are volunteers. So, it didn't really cost me anything. I've worked a job my whole life, so I paid for the airfare to get to France. My parents actually helped me get to Japan, but other than that, they didn't really cost me anything.

Heather Haley

Were you allowed to work in both countries or no?

Julie Garner

I wasn't allowed to work like, you know, legally, no. I probably could have worked teaching English, but I didn't have any time in Japan. In France, I did actually teach English to a couple local kids. I didn't make serious money; it was like 10 Euros a week or something.

Heather Haley

How did you feel when you came back to the U.S. both times?

Julie Garner

It was terrible. So, France is a little different because I went right to college, so it was a whole new experience and I didn't have to wallow in missing something and I also really liked college. But when I got back from Japan, I had my senior year of high school left. I was 16 and I realize this now looking back that all I wanted to do was talk about Japan, like I just wanted to tell my high school, my Verona friends, "hey, you know this one time in Japan..." "oh my god in Japan..." and they did not want to hear it like at all. They were the kind of people that were like, "how is Japan?" They wanted the answer "good" and then that was it. They didn't want to hear about it again. I mean, I don't blame them. You know, now things are different now that they're a little older. At the time, they had never really traveled, so they didn't want to hear about how spectacular my year was in Japan and unfortunately, I feel like I pushed away a lot of people because they didn't want to hear about Japan and that was all I wanted to talk about. Yeah, so it was kind of really shitty end to the year.

Heather Haley

Where did you go to college?

Julie Garner

Oh, goodness. I went to Clemson University in Clemson, South Carolina and I don't know how that happened. That was a complete accident. Another *How does this New Jersey-born world traveler end up in South Cackalacky?* I absolutely loved everything about Clemson. It was four years of... *(trails off)* Everyone always says, "college is the best four years of your life" and I don't know if that's entirely true, but I loved college. It was amazing. I have no regrets whatsoever.

Heather Haley

What did you study while you were at Clemson?

Julie Garner

My freshman year I started with a double major in Japanese and French, and I got kind of bored. It was a little too easy and so I switched to Secondary Ed/History. It was kind of a double major, where I studied Secondary Education with the student teaching aspect, and then also History. That was a much better decision for me. As much as I loved Japanese and French, teaching is what I'm meant to be doing for sure. I went into teaching for really selfish reasons, but once I did student teaching, I realized this is the job I meant to be doing.

Heather Haley

What caused you to switch from the foreign languages double major to teaching?

Julie Garner

The foreign languages major was kind of lumped into this weird Clemson degree called Language and International Trade and honestly, I just did not want to go into business. I mean, that first day, I think it was my spring semester of my freshman year, I went into, I think it was, Accounting 101 or something and I was just like, *Nope. No. (chuckles)* I can't do this. I didn't like it; there was just no interest whatsoever. That's not the kind of people skills I have. I don't have the interpersonal skills to make a business transaction. I'm much better at standing in front of a classroom talking about the American Revolution.

Heather Haley

Was there anything that occurred at Clemson that kind of reinforced your moral and social beliefs?

Julie Garner

Well, so I probably should back up a little bit. I was raised by two Republicans, two hardcore Republicans. And as I mentioned, with Verona, I grew up kind of right outside New York City. [In] my early childhood, my parents weren't very political. They didn't care at all, but as soon as September 11th

happened, everything really changed for them. They were very, very, very vocal about their patriotism. My whole life—I wish my sister [Shannon] was here 'cuz she could reinforce this—my whole life after September 11th, I was taught basically that being conservative meant being a patriot, and being anything else specifically, being liberal, meant you didn't like your country. Even when I went to Japan, and even when I went to France and my French family in particular was very, very liberal, I was always Republican at heart. Not necessarily because I actually understood it, but because my whole life I'd been raised to believe [that] Fox News was the best, it was the pinnacle of great news. (*chuckles*) And George W. Bush, he was the best. I went to his inauguration in 2004. That was such a big part of who I was. Then all of a sudden at Clemson, being surrounded by like-minded people who were also very conservative, I felt justified. I felt like *Okay. Yeah. Everyone feels this way. I don't know why these dirty liberals out there in the world want to make everybody an awful feminist or want to make everybody pay taxes when they don't want to.* You know, just like very naive understandings of the political system. Even throughout most of my four years at Clemson, I really kept those beliefs. I was in a sorority—I hate admitting this, but I was in a sorority and those people in my sorority really reinforced the ideas like, *Ring before spring. Find a husband!* That wasn't ever in the plan for me, but it was something that was always talked about and being surrounded by that kind of mentality, I really bought into it.

Heather Haley

Which sorority were you in?

Julie Garner

I was in Kappa Alpha Theta.

Heather Haley

With that wonderful background, how did it feel to be surrounded by the opposing view as your view is being shaped into liberalism?

Julie Garner

I never really was surrounded by that. It's funny now and I'm sure I'll talk more about her in a little bit, but my sister [Shannon], for example, she works at Planned Parenthood now. She's the most liberal person I've ever met before. Right now. But when she was in high school, having been influenced by our parents, she was a climate change denier. Like she got thrown out of her biology class because she got into a fight with her teacher. It's terrible, but at the time, growing up, we really bought into what our parents told us, we really bought into the notion that if you were liberal, you hated your country. And I've always loved my country. I mean, I was deeply affected by September 11th. So many people [from] Verona were killed, or somehow knew somebody. One of my dad's best friends from high school was killed. When you have that fear, it just drives everything and unfortunately, that fear in my 11-year-old mind—I was 11 when September 11 happened—that fear was directly attributed to patriotism. If you're afraid of everybody outside this country, the only way to confront that is to love your country and to fight back. I see the error in my ways now, but at the time, I could not at that young age, and all the way

up until college, I could not wrap my head around, like, *Why would you not want to support the military? Why would you tax people when they didn't want to be taxed?* Again, really naive concepts of the political system.

Heather Haley

So, you were in South Carolina. What was the political climate like there while you were in school?

Julie Garner

Probably the memory that really defines this for me is the night that [Osama] bin Laden was killed. So, Obama is President at this point. I just remember it was during finals week, and I was studying in the library. When the news broke, they announced it at the library. They announced it, I don't think they announced it on the PA but somebody like screamed it and ran through the library. Again, this is finals week. Everyone just threw their books on the ground and started cheering. I remember walking back to my dorm that night and people [were] driving around campus with their trucks. I just remember this one guy ridin' by and he had a car horn that played "Dixie." That to me, that story, that's South Carolina to a tee. It seems to be different now. I have a lot of friends that went to Clemson and I'm still good friends with and they have also changed their political beliefs in this current climate. But at the time, it was just like, *America*, (pauses) [*Fuck*] *Yeah*. And Obama was evil.

Heather Haley

Were you a part of any political clubs while you were at Clemson?

Julie Garner

No. I was not. No. I'm ashamed to admit this, but I did not know what a feminist was when I was in college. I didn't actually know until probably about last year [2016] startin' grad school. No. I was not. It was mostly frowned upon. We weren't disallowed to be in a political organization, but in my sorority, it was just like, *Just don't do it. Let's not talk about politics because that's ugly talk and we want to be pretty.* (laughs)

Heather Haley

What made you join Kappa Alpha Theta?

Julie Garner

I got back from France and then a month later, I moved down to Clemson. Coming from New Jersey, I didn't really have any friends in college. A lot of my friends from high school, went to college with people from Verona High School and they knew people, and I didn't have that experience. I didn't have anybody who came from my high school. I didn't know anybody. And my freshman roommate, really nice girl, but like, super Southern, super Southern, and in the sense that when I first walked into my dorm, her mom introduced herself and the first thing she asked me instead of like, "how are you?" is, "are you a Catholic?" So, really, really Southern people, but my roommate, she wanted to join a sorority

and she just talked to me about how important it was to be involved and be in a sorority just to be seen on campus, to meet people, to do philanthropy, all that kind of stuff. And I bought into it, I admit. I didn't go through formal recruitment, but I COB'd, which was just like Continuous Ongoing Bidding. So, I met with some of the sororities and then one of them gave me a bid and just accepted it.

Heather Haley

How did you do at Clemson, academically?

Julie Garner

I did awesome. I graduated with a 3.9 and I was Summa Cum Laude. I was very, very active in the Honors College. In the Honors College I had got the Dixon Global Policy Scholars fund, which meant that I studied abroad in Europe one summer. I got to learn about the E.U. And they gave me money every summer to travel. One summer, they gave me money to teach English in the Maldives, so that was fun. And then another summer, they gave me some money to go travel to Egypt. So yeah, that was cool.

Heather Haley

You were constantly renewing your passport.

Julie Garner

Oh yeah. Oh my gosh, my passport. I had to put new pages in it several times already. That was all because of having high grades. Clemson's Honors College is really good about giving money for travel, like funding, which is cool. After, because of my GPA, this same program, this Dixon Global Policy Scholars, they really pushed me to apply for a lot of the outside fellowships and I ended up securing a Fulbright. So, I was a Fulbright Scholar or a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant, I guess is the proper name, and I was in South Korea.

Heather Haley

How was your experience in Korea? And where were you located?

Julie Garner

Korea was actually a really tough year. Let me back up a little bit. First of all, I was placed in a little town called Hwacheon. It was located on the eastern part of Korea and it's kind of a little salient right on the DMZ, the demilitarized zone. It's a really weird little town because it was, during the Korean War, it was constantly under North Korean territory, [then] South Korean territory, back and forth. Right now, because it is a salient into North Korea, there's so many soldiers there. They won't even build proper roads. They won't build a train to get to this town just because it's so close to North Korea and they never really know what's gonna to happen there. So to get to Hwacheon, it's like this 45-minute bus over mountains and in tunnels, it's just like carsickness-crazy, it's awful. I was placed there because I had a teaching certification and Hwacheon, of all the 80 ETAs—there were 80 Americans that received this grant—of the 80 of us, I was one of the only ones with a teaching certification in Secondary Ed. Most of

the other people came with business degrees or engineering degrees, but because I had that secondary Ed degree, they wanted to place me in a school that was deemed more difficult. Hwacheon Middle School was very, very difficult. It was pretty much half military brats, like all South Korean kids whose parents were in the military, and then the other half were orphans. Yeah, South Korea has a lot of orphans, but they keep them in like one place and they still have orphanages; it's very different than how we do it here. In South Korea, they don't pay the military well, so the military brats were also lower income students. I think a lot of people, when they think of East Asia, they think of the really highly motivated students who do well. In Hwacheon that was not the case. Hwacheon Middle School was one of the worst schools in the country. That's not my opinion. I was told that by several teachers. But I really loved my students. For me, I went over there to teach English and it ended up being that I had to love my students and get over the idea... I realized I'm not gonna to be able to teach them English or, yes, I'm going to be able to speak to them in English, but the best thing I can do is feed them and give them love and give them hope that there is something outside of this terrible little town. That was really hard to grapple with. That was a big eye-opening year for me.

Heather Haley

In what year did that happen?

Julie Garner

I graduated college in 2013 and then, I guess, a month and a half later, I went to South Korea. So, it was 2014 and then 2015, so it was 15 months.

Heather Haley

How would you say that that experience changed your worldview?

Julie Garner

When I first went into teaching, I was always told, "you're gonna hate it. You're gonna burn out." And my student teaching experience at Clemson was so positive and so excellent that, *That's not true. I'm not gonna burn out.* But in South Korea, I really realized I could burn out, for sure. In seeing a broken education system really, really, really affected... I thought I was gonna come back from South Korea and go right into teaching, but here I am in grad school, so that's really, really changed. But I feel that South Korea, in many ways, made me more compassionate. Before South Korea, I was kind of a hard ass of a teacher in the sense that I've always had students—and I myself, I'm a very motivated student—and I've always kind of believed in that whole idea that like, *If you work hard, you can get the A. If you work hard, you can do anything you want.* But in [Hwacheon] South Korea, that's not the case. These students, even if they worked hard, they were not going to get out of that cycle. They were not going to get out of this—poor military families, they were not gonna to get out of the stigma of being raised an orphan in South Korea. Seeing that broke my heart. These kids were never gonna to be able to leave Hwacheon. They were always going to be stuck in this poor little town. No hope. No future. No economic prospects. That was really eye-opening for me, too.

Heather Haley

When you came back from Korea, what did you do?

Julie Garner

I lived with my parents for three months, which was horrible. Applied for grad schools. That took a lot of time. And then about three months after I got back, I moved up to Vermont and I worked at a ski resort for six months.

Heather Haley

What is up with the obsession with skiing?

Julie Garner

(chuckles) I don't know. I guess that was my dad and my thing. My sister has severe scoliosis, so she's never really been able to ski, and my mom just hates the cold, hates being outside, pretty much hates everything. So, it was always, growing up, me and my dad's thing. He would sneak me out of school when I was in middle school and we would just drive up to Vermont. My cousins all had a cabin up there and we would ski, just have a great time. It was the one time that I was really bonding with my dad.

Heather Haley

What graduate programs did you apply to?

Julie Garner

I knew I wanted to do Public History. Like I mentioned, I'm a teacher and I really, really, really like the idea... For me, public history was the idea of taking academic history and disseminating it for the general public. [With] my South Korean students of mine, my South Carolinian students of mine who were not high achievers, I thought about taking something that's really difficult to read and making it easier for them, which is what I did. I made PowerPoint presentations. I love that. I love making something very difficult to understand easy to understand. That to me was Public History. So, I only looked at public history programs. I really didn't look at many schools. I applied at Auburn University, West Virginia University, and North Carolina State University. I got into all three. I got funding at all three. I chose Auburn because I spoke on the phone with my advisor here, Dr. [Keith] Hébert, and I hadn't met him, but I really liked talking to him. He has a lot of ambition for growing the program here and it just it sounded like it would be a good fit.

Heather Haley

When did you start school at Auburn?

Julie Garner

I guess, August 2016?

Heather Haley

What were your impressions of Auburn? The city, and then Alabama, the state?

Julie Garner

Like I had mentioned earlier, I loved Clemson and I know that Clemson was the architect. Everything about Clemson is based on Auburn, pretty much, the only difference is that Clemson has a lake. And so, I kind of, in my mind, assumed that my life in Auburn would be like my life in Clemson, but guess what? That's not true. That's not the case at all. A big part of that is the fact that I'm a graduate student and not an undergrad anymore. The magic of undergrad is gone. But I had a really, really difficult first year in Auburn. Since coming back from Korea, my whole worldview has really changed. That was living with my parents, going to Vermont, then I went on this cross-country bike trip, and then I came to Auburn. And those string of events really, really changed my whole worldview. I say that because I never really felt unsafe until moving to Auburn. Now Auburn is a very safe place. It is. But I run and there's been a lot of cases where I've been on the road and I've been harassed. One time, somebody rolled down their window and hit me on the side of the road. And I don't necessarily think that that is Auburn or even Alabama, like I'm not naive enough to believe that that's everybody here, but I never had that growing up. I never had that in Japan or France or South Korea. I never felt like there was something—just because I was running in short shorts or a tank top—someone could easily just hit me. There was just this level of safety that was breached, and I don't know. It still bothers me.

Heather Haley

What made your first year difficult?

Julie Garner

I guess I wasn't quite prepared for graduate school. I think in my mind—actually I just said it—I thought it'd be a lot more like undergrad. It's not at all. Grad school is totally different. It's just so different that any way I could have expected. It's not that it's harder. It's not, it's just that, you have to devote so much more of everything to it. In undergrad, you go to class or you don't, you know? And you get a grade at the end of the day. In grad school, you have to be there. You have to be there mentally. You have to be there physically. You have to go and talk to professors outside of school. You have to be reading books that you didn't even know existed, that no one's told you about, but you're expected to know anyway. And there's just so much about it that I was not prepared for. And I admit that that is 100% my fault. But the first year was really tough. Also, I know this now, in my second year, I devoted pretty much my entire life to grad school. I never really worked on trying to establish great relationships outside of the department. That was bad for me. That was bad for my mental health. You know, being surrounded by the same people in all my classes, in all my friend groups, and everything. That was tough. There was no new ideas, no new fresh blood. That was really hard for me the first year.

Heather Haley

What did you do, if anything, to cope with that? And when did you realize that that was the problem?

Julie Garner

I just realized that recently, to be honest with you. With the public history program here, we have to do an internship. And last year, last spring, there was a big incident between some of the women in the department and (*pauses*)—I'm trying to like, simplify stories is kind of tough—but long story short, I realized I had to get out of Alabama this summer or I was going to just die. So, my sister was graduating from James Madison University and she was leaving, she was going to get a job in Manhattan. And she had an apartment for like three months in Virginia—in Harrisonburg, Virginia—and she offered it to me. It was just so nice. At the Shenandoah Valley, there's tons of internship opportunities, so I got an internship in Virginia at the Frontier Culture Museum, and I loved it, but I wasn't getting paid, so I had to get a side job. So, I started working at, *Yay! Chipotle!* I worked like 40 hours a week there just because by the time that Chipotle started giving me hours, I was almost done with my internship. I worked pretty hard there and I actually really liked that job. Now, it's not exactly anything to brag about, like, I get paid \$9 an hour to roll burritos, *whoo*. But just being able to have that little stability, like I was getting a nice cash flow every other week and I had friends. I had my Chipotle friends and I had my internship friends. Then when I came back to Alabama, I just transferred. The Chipotle in Harrisonburg, I just transferred to the one right down the road in Opelika, not expecting anything to happen, not expecting to even really get hours from it or anything. But they've given me 30 hours a week or so, which is probably more than I can handle. But I love working there. I love the people—very different than the grad students here at Auburn and it's just so nice to have that second life. I feel like my relationships with my fellow grad students have improved. As much as my relationships with my Chipotle co-workers have become things, I guess. It's weird. When I spend time here at Auburn, it's like I'm with like-minded academics. You know, we talk about like feminism and we talk about climate change and we talk about really deep meaningful topics, but when I go to Chipotle, we talk about... One of my closest friends over there is a recovered meth head and we talk about her struggles and we talk about how she wants to get her kids back. Her kids were taken away from her and it's just so different. It is really nice to have that outside life. And working there has also really, really influenced my beliefs because I'm working with people who are [Donald] Trump supporters. Here at Auburn [University], I'm working with people who are like all Bernie bros and then at Chipotle, I have people who are just staunch Trump people. It's really nice to surround yourself with different opinions, even if you don't agree at all with them.

Heather Haley

I think that's a good transition into kind of where you currently sit or find yourself on the political spectrum.

Julie Garner

Bleeding heart liberal. I dunno, it's weird. As I mentioned earlier, growing up super-duper conservative, I think I've always been a liberal and I say that, and I feel like the evidence is all here in this interview. I've traveled my whole life. I have gone to so many countries and I've been around so many different kinds of people. God, I haven't even mentioned this, but when I was growing up, I had peace signs all over my wall at home. I never really sat down and actually read about American politics and actually read about what people believe. But I think the really big turning moment came for me when I realized that being liberal does not mean that you can't love your country because, as I mentioned, I am a patriot. I love this country. I love everything about the United States. It's such a beautiful country. The people are, you know, here and there. (*chuckles*) I realized that it's okay to want to help refugees. It's okay to want to pay taxes to fix roads and help people who are in really bad situations with welfare. It's okay to feel that way and you can still be a patriot. Once I realized that is when I realized like, *Oh my God. I am not a Republican.*

Heather Haley

And going back to the election last year in 2016, who did you support?

Julie Garner

I voted for Hillary Clinton and I did so on an absentee ballot because I'm still registered in New Jersey. I guess that it got there. I have no proof whether they counted it or not, but I know at least in my heart that I voted for Hillary Clinton. During the, what was it called, the primaries? I didn't necessarily support Clinton. I definitely did not support any of the Republican candidates (*chuckles*), they're all a little crazy. But I wasn't a Bernie bro, either. I guess I didn't really pay attention to them just because I didn't worry about it at all. For eight years we had Obama who, I'm gonna be honest with you when he first got elected, I thought we put Satan in the White House. But these past eight years with Obama have been fantastic. No one can deny the fact that we've been given all these rights, we've just been given them. We haven't had to fight for them. It's been a great eight years, I just figured it just seems obvious that it would continue. I didn't have to worry about who was going to get elected because it was gonna be someone who continued the legacy of Obama. Everyone seemed happy. I didn't really worry at all last spring either, or throughout the summer, or even in the fall when we watched the presidential debates. I mean, it just seemed to me that it was obvious who was gonna win. It was just like, *How could anyone support anything that Donald Trump said?* Then November came around.

Heather Haley

On Election Day, how did you feel that day?

Julie Garner

I was very confident on election day. [I] came to [school]. I think I had an assist that day, the teaching assist [assistantship]. Came to campus. I met up with a friend in the department afterwards, Erik [Haeuser], and then I forced him to take that picture. I had a "nasty woman" shirt on and I forced him to take a picture with a sign that said, "bad hombre." I really wanted that Instagram photo and afterwards,

we went to Starbucks and over coffee, we were talking about how it was just so obvious that Clinton was gonna be our next president. We didn't even worry about it. We didn't care. It wasn't a big deal. It was like, *This is election day and our next president is gonna be Hillary Clinton.* Then that night, I went to bed early that night or I tried to, and the graduate students here had a GroupMe [App] chat. I just remember trying to fall asleep. I took a melatonin tablet because I think I had to wake up early. I did have to wake up early the next day 'cuz I had to open at Chipotle. And just the dinging of my phone all night, and constantly looking and realizing, *Oh gosh. President Trump. That's a thing. Oh, dear.* (chuckles) Everyone, it seemed like everyone who is a graduate student here, who's on that GroupMe chat was just devastated, absolutely devastated. And I didn't really contribute at all to this conversation because I wanted to go to sleep, but I also didn't really think about it. Even after the election, in the coming days, I wasn't upset. I know I should have been, but I wasn't upset in the sense that we were all pretty upset about Obama and guess what? We had eight years of pretty fantastic, everything was great. I have very limited complaints about Obama. That's not what I thought about Trump. Everyone was so devastated at Auburn in the graduate school department. And then at Chipotle, all the people that I work with, were so excited. I just didn't really wanna deal with either side. I just wanted to not think about it, not worry about it and not deal with it.

Heather Haley

When did you start becoming or getting involved in politics even in a kind of a grassroots level?

Julie Garner

I guess that's a recent thing, for sure, here. In many ways I've been involved for a lot of my life, but not necessarily of my own opinion. Like I mentioned, in 2004, I went to George Bush's inauguration and my parents love to tell this story about how I guess in 2001 or 2002, at Christmas our tradition was to go around the table and say one thing we're thankful for. In 2002, I think it was I said, "I'm thankful that George Bush is President." So, I've always been involved in politics, but I've never really had my own opinion. When this all started was when my sister graduated college, this would have been last year, 2016. She got a job at Planned Parenthood. Before that, she had started a program at James Madison University, which is also a very conservative school in Virginia, she had started working at the LGBT ally group on campus. She got really, really involved in it. Again, this is coming from a former climate change denier to someone who was now housing LGBT teenagers who were kicked out of their families, from Christian parents. She became very, very involved in it and I just remember, right after I got back from Korea, my dad was complaining that he was so upset with her. He was just so upset that she was involved in this program, not because he's homophobic or anything, but because my sister is straight. *Why is she involved in this LGBT thing?* He asked me to talk to her because Shannon's always really respected my opinions. I asked her about it, and she said, "Jule, don't you consider yourself a feminist?" I said, "No!" I would never consider myself a feminazi which—I don't know if you know, that's Rush Limbaugh's term for feminists. She was just like, "just go look it up one day, just go read about it and understand what feminism is." I think she ended up sending me a Jessica Valenti book. Growing up under my parents' regime of conservative crazy, feminism was feminazi-ism. Reading Jessica Valenti

and then eventually reading Betty Friedan—or "free-dan" I'm not sure how to pronounce her name—and realizing that I have been a feminist my whole life. But I've never been able to... I didn't even know what it was. I had no idea that feminism was the equality of the sexes. It had nothing to do with hating men, which is what I had always been led to believe that feminism is, *You don't hate men. You can't be a feminist.* That's not what feminism is. Jumping into feminism, and I mean, I jumped headfirst almost overnight became very, very involved in that. [I] sent a lot of contributions to my sister's organization at James Madison. When she started working for Planned Parenthood, [I] just research[ed] all the problems that are associated with pro-life and pro-choice. [It's] just something that I'd never really thought about. I just never really thought about it. I never really needed to. That's kind of where it all started.

Heather Haley

What would you say is the social issue that is closest to your heart?

Julie Garner

Gosh. I don't know.

Heather Haley

Or multiple.

Julie Garner

I feel like it changes every day, which sounds ridiculous. We're now two, three weeks into the Trump administration and I feel like with every executive order, something becomes even more prominent, something becomes even more important to think about or talk about. Something that like, *Yes. I've always thought that letting refugees into America was important.* Never in my life have I ever thought to turn away someone who was escaping their war-torn country. All of a sudden that is becoming such a big issue, that we're talking about it and it's great. I don't know that that's my biggest issue. When I marched in Atlanta, I had a sign with all the things that I marched for and there were a lot of things on there and I don't know which one is my biggest issue that I march for that I find most important.

Heather Haley

What were those things that were on your poster?

Julie Garner

My poster said [at] [the] [top] "Why I March" and it said, "women's rights are humans rights." That's the Hillary Clinton quote. And that's something that's really important to me, obviously. "Science is real," which I don't know. *Really?* It's just so obvious. I don't understand why that's even an issue. "Black Lives Matter," also really, really near and dear to my heart. And "love is love" because I don't understand why anyone thinks they can dictate other people's versions of marriage. I marched for all those things.

Heather Haley

Let's talk a little bit about that day. You live here in Auburn.

Julie Garner

Yes.

Heather Haley

Okay. And what was the weather like that morning?

Julie Garner

(laughs) When I woke up, it was raining. It was pouring. It was just awful outside, but within 15 or 20 minutes of waking up, my phone was dinging, and it was, [saying] you're under a tornado watch. *Oh great.* My younger sister, she was marching in Washington, D.C., and she was running the Planned Parenthood involvement there. I'm not sure what she was doing, but she was texting me like, "have you left yet?" "Have you left?" "Are you going?" "What's going on?" "What's going on in Atlanta?" "What's going on?" "Are you going to Birmingham?" I was having to field her text messages and the tornado. It was just awful, but there was never any moment where it was like, *maybe we should stay home.* No. No. No. I kept checking the weather and it looked like it was going to pass, at least by one or two o'clock when the march was supposed to happen. It looked like Atlanta was going to be clear. So, there was never any question of whether we were gonna go or not.

Heather Haley

So even if it was stormy, you didn't care.

Julie Garner

No. In fact, I have a lot of friends who marched in Greenville, South Carolina and it was terribly stormy. And they all marched and they said they had a great time playing in the mud. *(chuckles)* There was just never a situation where we weren't going to go.

Heather Haley

How did you feel when you woke up that morning? The messages aside.

Julie Garner

Um, what do you what do you mean by... *(trails off)*?

Heather Haley

How did you feel that morning? Were you excited? How were you feeling emotionally?

Julie Garner

Yeah. I was pretty excited. I was gonna go to the D.C. march, but two weeks before that, I was in Disney [World] for a week running a couple marathons and I just spent way too much money and I could not afford to go to D.C., and I was upset about it, but I still felt like making an impact. I still could make an impact and make an impact in an area that was closer to where [I] [am]. I'm gonna end up staying in the South for the rest of my life, so at least make an impact in the South, which is a region that really needs stronger activism, I think, because it's the South. I had asked around the [History] Department and it didn't sound like many people were going. Of the women in the department, two of them were going to D.C. and then one of the older girls that I have been close to, she wanted to go to Birmingham, but she was kind of on the fence about it. So, she kind of agreed to go and then backed out and then I just didn't know who I was gonna be able to go with. Now, I wanted to go, but I didn't really know anybody who was gonna be there. I don't really have any people in Atlanta. Luckily, I found my lovely interviewer here [Heather Haley], who also wanted to go to the march, and she wanted to go with her husband [Christopher Haley]. And over a few spontaneous Facebook chats, we kind of agreed, *Let's go. We're going.* That was really good. I was really happy that I was able to go with someone. Now I probably would have gone anyway, but I was happier going with someone. Also, I felt a little more validated that I wasn't the only one, so that was good too. I was excited and then the day before the march, I really wanted to make signs and I had totally forgot. The whole week, I could have been working on signs all week. It wasn't until, like 12 hours before we left that I was like, *Oh crap. I gotta go make some signs.* So, I drove out to Hobby Lobby, which all irony aside (*chuckles*), bought some poster boards and some paint, and came back to my apartment and was just, you know, playing music and painting. I was having a great time the night before. It started raining and it was like, *Oh God. I hope it stops raining for tomorrow.* I had been chatting with Heather, deciding when to go the next morning and I totally forgot that we live, in Alabama we live in Central Time, and I totally forgot that I had to like go through the time warp. So, I thought once we had gotten to the Georgia border and jumped ahead, I thought we're going to be late. That was shocking and kind of upsetting, but whatever. We were going. It was fine.

Heather Haley

When you arrived with Heather and Christopher, what were you most excited about?

Julie Garner

That's a good question. I don't know. At the time I was just most excited to find a bathroom. I had to pee so bad that morning. (*laughs*) No. No. I mean, there's a lot of things. We got off the interstate and I had just run out of [gas], like the gas gauge and come on. It was like, *You need to find gas.* So, I was like, "oh crap." I have to worry about that now. Then we found perfect parking. It was absolute perfection. It was right by the Civil Rights Institute where the march started. As soon as I got out of the car, it was like the rain had just stopped. It was amazing. I don't know what it was. But soon as we got out of that car, we threw the \$20 at the guy for parking. I went to the back of my car and put on rain boots because there was still like puddles everywhere. It was like, yes. We are here. We are here to participate. And it was so cool because there were so many people marching, not marching but walking to the start of the march

and everyone was cheering and clapping, and cars were driving by honking. At first, when we were driving and cars are honking at us were like, *What's going on? Why are they honking at us?* But it turns out, it was just that everyone was really excited. Everyone was excited to participate and be there. And so that was really cool.

Heather Haley

Were there any speakers that you were, in particular, looking forward to seeing or hearing?

Julie Garner

Yeah, absolutely. But before I say who it was, I should probably say we didn't actually make it to that. I mean, there were just so many people there. Here at Auburn, as a graduate student, I actually study the Selma marches, the Selma demonstrations and the memory associated with them. So, for me, like being able to march with John Lewis was everything. He is such an American hero, like incredible. And John Lewis was really big that week because that was also the week that him and President Trump got into that odd Twitter war. I guess, John Lewis said that Trump was illegitimate and then Trump wanted to insult the Fifth District of [Atlanta], which was ridiculous because the Fifth District is one of the most vibrant centers in the South, but whatever. I was just really excited to be able to march with John Lewis and even though I didn't get a chance to see him, still being able to say that he was there, and we got to march behind him was pretty cool.

Heather Haley

Tell me about the energy of the march.

Julie Garner

It was nuts. After we parked, we walked on over to the Civil Rights Institute. So, you had the Civil Rights Institute and you had the aquarium and the Coke [Coca-Cola] museum. I'm not sure what it's called. I've never really been to Atlanta. I've driven through it on the interstate, but I've never actually been inside the city, so I didn't really know where we were going. But there were just so many people and they were all marching in one or heading in one direction. Everyone was excited. Everyone. There were little kids, grandmas. It was awesome. To me, considering a day before, Trump—it was his inauguration—we now have a president who no one here likes, no one here is happy about, but yet everyone was so excited to be at that march. It's just pretty cool to see and I'm sure that things have changed now, you know, three weeks into this regime of President Trump, but that next day after his inauguration, there was so much hope. Atlanta had 63,000 marchers I think they said. I don't think I saw anyone there who wasn't, you know, so proud to be there and so proud to make sure that this administration knows we're not gonna go quietly.

Heather Haley

Did you see any anti-protesters?

Julie Garner

Yeah, we did. They were pro-lifers and, of course, they showed really uncomfortable pictures. I don't know that they were anti-Atlanta Social Justice March. I think that they also were kind of just participating, you know. That's their opinion. There was no counter-protesters to the like protests. Does that make sense? Like, there was a protest here at Auburn a few days ago and there were actual protesters that were protesting the protest. I didn't see any of that in Atlanta. I'm certain there must have been something, but I didn't see anything. It was really cool because just everyone seemed to want to be there. Even the police that were on the side of the road, doing public safety things, they were givin' protesters high fives and cheering and it was so cool to see. The African American women police officers who also wanted to march, too, [were] telling everyone, "Good job! I totally agree." It was such a great experience.

Heather Haley

And were these pro-lifers welcome?

Julie Garner

I don't think that they were not welcome because they kind of chose a little corner to put themselves in with their signs. And they spoke freely, and people walked by them and, more or less, ignored them. It didn't look like anyone was really engaging them. So, yeah. They were there. (*chuckles*)

Heather Haley

When the marching happened, how did that go? And how did it feel?

Julie Garner

We were supposed to march, I forget what time we were supposed to actually march, but we ended up marching like an hour and a half or two hours later than the actual time we were supposed to march. And I think that was because the people who were organizing the event did not expect that many people to show up. That seemed to be a similar occurrence in almost all the cities around America. It was like two hours of not sitting around, but we were all standing and waiting to start. And once we started, there was a lot of energy in the rally-type standing around, but once we started moving, I feel like everyone kind of got a second wind and everyone started cheering and clapping. We didn't really walk very far, it was only like a mile and a half, but it definitely felt like we were doing something really important or being a part of history, even if maybe Atlanta is not quite as important as the D.C. march. It still felt like being there and contributing, everyone there had that *WE'RE HERE* kind of vibe goin' on.

Heather Haley

What were some of the posters that you were particularly excited about? Thrilled about? Really happy to see along the march?

Julie Garner

There was a lot of great posters. Everyone marched for a different reason. And it's not a bad thing, actually, it's a really good thing. But everyone seemed to have a different, one big issue of their own. And so, there are a lot of people who marched for women's rights or for pro-choice. A lot of people marched for science, which is cool, too. A lot of people marched for Black Lives Matter. And just being able to see all the different voices, all the different causes was really cool and all of them coming together because I have a pretty good friend who's a police officer in Greenville, South Carolina, and he's very, very conservative, very anti-Black Lives Matter. And when they do Black Lives Matter protests in Greenville, he says that no one takes them seriously because they're all of one mindset. *They're all all-Black Lives Matter. Who cares? They don't think about anything else.* And that's not true. It's not. But I thought about that when we were marching in Atlanta because there was just so many different causes. And everyone had come together to march, and it just felt like we were all supportive of each other. We were all standing together in solidarity and I thought that was great.

Heather Haley

Did you ever feel at any point that you were not safe?

Julie Garner

No. (*chuckles*) Not at all. From the moment we arrived, there was never an issue with safety. I think a lot of people assumed, who didn't want to participate in the march or assumed from the idea of a protest, that it was gonna break out into a riot. But that was never, no, that was never going to happen. There were little kids. There were babies. There were elderly people. It was such a peaceful protest. No one was there to fight. No one was there to cause problems. No one was there to break things or riot. Everyone was there to just have their voice heard.

Heather Haley

When it was over, how did you feel?

Julie Garner

I think on the car ride back, this is like a two-hour car ride, I think I just said like 20 times, "Guys, I'm just so glad we did that. Just so glad we did that," which is a very simple way of say[ing], "Hey, I'm proud of us." I'm proud that even if nothing comes of this for me, I can know that I didn't go quietly into the night. In many ways I marched for, you know, my sister's gonna have kids one day, I marched for her kids. I marched for all my friends' kids. I marched for my future students. I know that there are a lot of people who are disappointed that I marched. My own parents are not speaking to me right now because of it. But I feel that it rests easy for me knowing that I did that. I think I'd feel a lot worse if I did not go.

Heather Haley

In the weeks since, what have you done, or would you suggest, to fellow feminists [and] social justice advocates, to continue the momentum?

Julie Garner

Okay, well, I'll answer that question. But I do want to say one quick thing, too is, as I mentioned earlier, I have that second job at Chipotle and, again, they're all Trump people. But when I went to that march, I took off from work and they all knew that I was going to the march. When I got back the next day to work, I was really impressed by them because I thought a lot of them would be like, *Why did you march? What did you accomplish by that?* But instead, they asked questions. They wanted to know what it was like. They wanted to know my opinion on things. In many ways, just engaging people. It's sometimes really hard to engage with people who don't want to hear your opinion at all. But I find that at Chipotle, my co-workers, my fellow Trump supporters—no, not fellows—my coworkers who are Trump supporters, they were just curious. *It didn't break out in a riot. What did you do? What kind of issues were there?* Just talking and exchanging ideas. And in the three weeks since the march, with all these crazy executive orders, a lot of them [co-workers] have started asking more questions. Like, "Hey, we don't really agree with the refugee thing. What do you think about it?" Because I let it be known that I did not agree with the President's administration from the start, a lot of these other people are starting to kind of come around. They're not necessarily jumping on the activism bandwagon, but they are starting to ask questions and they are starting to realize that this refugee ban is horrible. This rumored executive order on religious freedom is not a good idea. So just being able to find ways to engage people who are forgotten about or not talked about. The people I work with are these poor whites who don't know any better. They voted for Trump because they want to keep their guns, but they don't necessarily realize that they're also voting against themselves. They don't realize that they're voting against all these welfare benefits. They're voting against health care, which they desperately need. So just being able to find a way to reach out to these people—not to like force your opinions on them, but just to be able to have open conversations with people who don't know any better. That's my biggest advice for these grassroots movements. Protests are great and they actually get things done. Look, the travel ban was overruled, but if there's some way we can reach out to people who don't understand what's going on, or who voted for Trump, but didn't understand why they voted for Trump. I hope that makes sense.

Heather Haley

It is rumored that in the future, in the next few months, there's gonna to be a march for science. There's going to be a march on bill pay day [April 15], that there's going to be a march so that way Trump can release his tax returns. Would you participate in those, too?

Julie Garner

I would definitely participate in the science march. I'm not a scientist, but I am, you know, hopefully a future Ph.D. student and I do believe in peer review, edits. I don't understand how anyone could deny science. I don't get that. It's just one of those things that I'll never be able to fathom. I'll never be able to understand. So yes, I would definitely march in the science parade, errr, march, excuse me. My sister just got an apartment in Washington, D.C. and she's a crazy activist, so she is ready. Anytime there's a march, let's go. I'm not sure about the tax thing, just because I truly do believe that there's nothing on

Earth will get him to release his tax returns. There is nothing on Earth. No way. I know that some of these marches, things don't always come out of them, but I think with that kind of thing, there's just no way.

Heather Haley

Are there any things that you do locally, aside from talking to co-workers, is there anything that you do locally to help you, I guess in some sort of mental therapy, to keep the momentum internally with yourself?

Julie Garner

Admittedly, no. I'm a master's student here and so I kind of had that deadline of I'm only gonna be here for two years. I should have probably gotten more involved in local things. I was very involved in volunteering at Clemson for my four years of undergrad, but not so much here. I have applied to the Ph.D. program here and if I do end up staying, and if I get in, I probably will be much more involved in the community mostly because I'm going to be here and I feel like, with that second job, I have actually really become more ingrained in the Opelika-Auburn community. And there's a lot of good that could be done here.

Heather Haley

Was there anything else that you wanted to add that we didn't cover?

Julie Garner

I don't think so.

Heather Haley

All right.

Julie Garner

Yeah.

Heather Haley

Cool. Well, then I guess we will end our interview here.