

This document is the property of the Auburn University Libraries and is intended for non-commercial use. Users of this file are asked to acknowledge the Auburn University Libraries. For information about obtaining the digital audio file of this and other oral histories in this collection, please contact Auburn University Libraries Special Collections & Archives Department at archives@auburn.edu or (334) 844-1732.

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

Interview with Victoria Skelton

Conducted by Heather Haley

February 11, 2017

Transcribed by Heather Haley

Heather Haley

Today is Saturday, February 11, 2017. And I'm sitting down with Victoria Skelton for the Social Justice and Women's Rights Oral History project here in the Bond Library in Thach Hall at Auburn University. So, thank you very much for taking the time to be with us today. If you could let us know your full legal name.

Victoria Skelton

My full legal name is Victoria Christine Skelton, spelled with a C-h and there's no second e in my last name.

Heather Haley

What is your date of birth?

Victoria Skelton

05/27/1993, or May 27, 1983 like more normal humans would say it. *(laughs)*

Heather Haley

Where were you born?

Victoria Skelton

Dallas, Texas.

Heather Haley

Did you grow up in Dallas?

Victoria Skelton

I grew up in a suburb outside of Dallas. Like north of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, there's an area of suburbs that are relatively wealthy, but I grew up in a fairly upper middle-class household surrounded by a bunch of golf course neighborhoods. I was not one of those. I had three neighbors with horses growing up, so I got the full Texas experience I like to think

Heather Haley

Where did you attend school in Dallas?

Victoria Skelton

At a public school called Edward S. Marcus High School and it was [the] home of the Marauders, which was super fun when you're a child and ask your teachers what a marauder is. When you look it up in the dictionary, it's a rapist—basically a land pirate—so that was fun. The home of the Marauders. It was a big public school—about 3200 students in total—and it's grown since then. Every time I go back it's really freaky because like they keep adding on buildings. It's a weird thing to go back to now because it's changing a lot and really growing.

Heather Haley

What was your public school education like?

Victoria Skelton

It was a really good one. I had an amazing experience in public schools. I got an interesting perspective on the district that I grew up in. I lived in the same house growing up—the same house, same neighborhood. It was a pretty old neighborhood, so all of my neighbors were either horses or old people. It was an interesting experience in that sense, but all of the schools I went to were fantastic. They had amazing teachers. When I was in college, actually, there were multiple people I worked with who really wanted to go teach in the district I grew up in. So, for reference, I went to undergrad at Texas A&M, and that's 205 miles away from where I grew up—according to my car's odometer, which may or may not have been accurate. It was a really good public school district. The schools that I grew up in were top notch. They never came anywhere close to failing the standardized testing markers. They were always exemplary, always fantastic and amazing. Growing up I thought that was standard for public schools. I was like, *oh yeah, of course that's normal*. I was also the weird kid that was like, *As are average and Bs are, like, acceptable*. But that was partially because my dad was a middle school teacher. He actually taught in the same district. It was really good perspective growing up because anytime I'd come home and be like, "my teachers so awful." He would be like, "why is your teacher awful?" And I would have to explain it and be like, "she's awful because she makes me do homework." And as I would verbalize it, my dad's like, "Uh huh, yeah. is it that awful?" Occasionally that was good. I got an interesting perspective on my district that I grew up in. When I was 21 and I graduated from college early and I was going to grad school, or at least hoping—fingers crossed—I got into grad school, because otherwise I had no life plan and had no idea what I was doing. After I graduated undergrad, I had a semester to kill and so for a while, I worked at a museum and then I ended up working as a substitute teacher in my

home school district, the one I grew up going to and ended up working in my dad's middle school a lot because you know, when people would say, "Oh, I need a substitute," my dad would say, "Hey, I know a good one." He would plug me in there and it was really nice. His middle school was a lot of really, really upper class, or upper middle class, kids. Even though they would never say that, I'm sure they were. I got a new perspective, though, because a lot of times I would substitute not in the schools that I grew up going to, when I did it was very strange and I empathize with the kids a lot because yes, those peach walls were disgusting then [and] they are still disgusting now. I don't know who designed the layout. But a lot of times, I would go to schools in different places across the district and in poorer parts of the district. They were still amazing teachers, but the issues they had to deal with were far different from ours where I grew up. The teachers who had to deal with my student population were like, "ah stop complaining. You got an 89. Oh my God, I was being nice." They had to deal with kids who were vying for top 10 people in their class, not the kids who were just trying to pass because maybe mom and dad didn't necessarily have time to sit there and do their homework with them or for them in a lot of cases. One of the really amazing experiences I had as a substitute teacher is, I got to work with the ESL students at this one middle school a lot. And those kids were awesome. They were kids that, of course, I never had classes with when I was growing up, partially because I grew up in a very, very non diverse area, to put it gently. It was a whole lot of white kids and occasionally we had a few Pakistani, Indian, or Korean families. For the most part, it was a lot of white kids and much less ESL students. So, when I'm subbing for these kids—I'll never forget [it]—this one day, there's a new kid in the class and I've been subbing for this teacher multiple times. She was like, "wait, you enjoyed this job?" And I was like, "Yeah, they're all really good kids. They try really hard and, God bless 'em, they're getting screwed over by the school district and by the institution not having any real support for them." So, there's one day we're sitting there, and I was expecting a bunch of Spanish speaking kids because I was like, *YEAH! TEXAS!* No. There was one Spanish-speaking student. There were two students from Libya, and they are the sweetest kids ever. It was a brother and sister and they used to always, like the sister would get onto her little brother and be like, "stop being a little (*pauses*) insert word." (*chuckles*) Then there were all these kids who were refugees from Burma and they all spoke a dialect of Vietnamese, which means that when you plug in Vietnamese into Google Translate, to try and help, does nothing because they don't speak Vietnamese. They speak Chin. They are from Burma; they're not from Myanmar—just because we don't agree with their politics. They're from Burma, according to them. And so, this kid is brand new. Literally had just moved there, had just gotten settled, had just moved into town that day, or like that weekend, and he's sitting there. He speaks no English. Finally, my "lesson plan," using air quotes, my lesson plan turned into, *okay guys, we're trying to learn new vocabulary words, so we're going to take this word and those of you who speak English relatively well, talk about it with someone else in your own language.* So, the one Spanish speaking girl, she and I sat there and talked to each other and I remembered enough Spanish to kind of say, like, "what do you think this means? How would you say it in Spanish?" And she said it, and I was like, "yep, that's good, you're good." But the other kids, I was like, "okay, talk to each other. How would you say this in your own language?" That was absolutely not what you're supposed to do. They [the district] encourage you to just speak English to the kids to just make them speak English to each other. But that reminded me a little bit too much of stealing children

from their homes in Australia and in the United States with American Indian children and I was like, *Nope. Can't do that. Sorry. No.* That does not ever end well for bilingual communities. These kids, though, I'm having them talk to each other and they're like, "ma'am, he [the Burmese child] doesn't speak any English. We can't even translate that." I was like, "well, do your best." I eventually stopped substitute teaching. I took the summer to travel and I never did see those kids again. Never will. But those kids were amazing, and they grew up in the same district. They were going to go to the same school district schools that I went to, but completely different schools and completely different circumstances. I like to think I have relatively unique experience with the public schools I grew up in because there's a vast difference. And actually, my first day substitute teaching, I got assigned to the ISS—in-school suspension—kids. (*laughs*) But I was like, *Oh, yay! A job!* I got so excited, only to find out that I was literally going to be sitting in a room with no windows And these sad divider desks all day, making sure that the kids didn't text or talk or eat or do anything but homework. Most of the kids didn't actually get their homework because the teachers just thought they were absent or didn't take the time to deliver it because they had 30 other students to worry about. And these kids are all wearing uniforms. Growing up, we were not a uniform school, any of the any of the schools I went to, none of us had uniforms. I asked the assistant principal, who was so nice to me and so, so sweet, I said, "Why are they wearing uniforms?" and she goes, "Gangs." This is a school that is literally across the railroad tracks from where I grew up and from all the schools that I went to. These are these are 12-year-olds. I was new on the job and so I was like, "Hey, Nando, why are you in here? What did you do?" And he's like, "fighting." *You're 12! What are you fighting over?* It was just such a weird, weird experience. So, I had a pretty eye-opening experience with my own public school district and how I was pretty damn lucky where I went.

Heather Haley

What was the name of the school that you substituted at?

Victoria Skelton

It ranged. I think I was at Hedrick Middle School [Lewisville, TX], Huffines Middle School [Lewisville, TX] Middle School., and I don't remember the third one. And then my own schools, which were Briarhill Middle School [Lewisville, TX], Downing Middle School [Flower Mound, TX], which is my dad's, and Marcus High School, which was super fun getting lost in your own high school and getting asked by a zit-faced, 14 year old, "Do you need help?" *Yes, I do. Yes, I do.* This is embarrassing because that door used to lead outside and now there's a building connected to where it goes. That was fun. I think those are all the schools I ended up going to.

Heather Haley

How would you describe those experiences shaping your outlook on life?

Victoria Skelton

It certainly made me respect my dad a hell of a lot more, not that I didn't before. But no, it gave me a newfound appreciation for what my dad does every single day. It made me confident that I don't want to work in a middle school ever because they are a terrible age. It is a terrible time for everyone involved. What really hit me was the ESL kids who, you know, they try so hard. They [administrators] [would] come on the announcements and they're like, "everyone on the A and B honor roll, you all need to come to the office and receive your awards." I was in the advanced ESL class at that point, or it was the advanced ESL's period and I had a list left by the teacher—she's very organized, I loved her—I had a list left by the teacher and she had a couple students on it. So, these kids who English isn't even their first language, they actually had to learn English at some point in their lives, not at home. not naturally [or] intuitively the way the rest of us did. This girl, she gets called down to the office for being on the A honor roll and she comes back and I was like, "that's awesome. I am so proud of you. That's so cool." And she sits down and she takes out her book and she's reading "Divergent," which I [have] [a] personal love for it because I think it teaches really awesome values about what women and men can do and what a relatively healthy relationship should look like, you know, men and women communicating and seeing each other as equals. That's fine. (*chuckles*) But she's sitting there reading this, so I, of course, get excited and nerd out a little. I look at her and I'm like, "Hey, you know that all those factions, their names means something, right?" And she's like, "wait, what?" She's like, "Yeah, of course. They mean what the faction is." and I'm like, "No, no, no, the words themselves means something." And she's like, "really?" And I say, "yeah, go grab that dictionary." So, she brings a dictionary over and we go over what erudite means and what amity means and what it means to be an amicable person. Her eyes get so big and she's so excited. That's a long way of saying I loved getting to work with those kids. It made me respect people who are bilingual people, who English with their second language, and who still managed to succeed. I got the chance to live in Italy for a summer and I wasn't there with a study abroad program and I was all alone, figuring shit out on my own. (*pauses*) It's hard. It is so hard to be in a country that does not accommodate your own language or does not accommodate any language really, other than English. So those kids though, I would just think of them and be like, *Oh my God. They could do it. They could do it and they're frickin' 12. You are an adult, Victoria. You can handle this.* Sometimes when I either have an ESL student in one of my classes here at Auburn or whenever I see stories about immigrants and stuff on TV, I just think of those kids. I think of the two kids from Libya who their dad happened to be able to get them out of the country before it went to hell. And I just think about how different those kids' lives would have been if they hadn't gotten out and if they hadn't been able to come to the U.S. They grew up in a suburb that is super bland, so boring. Oh, my God. But how awesome is that, that they got to do that instead of growing up in a civil war? That sticks with me, especially because that one kid was so freaking cute, like so adorable. But I always I always see their faces when that kind of stuff comes up.

Heather Haley

What did you major in at Texas A&M?

Victoria Skelton

History. Then I did a minor field in modern Italian study, not modern Italian, just Italian Studies, but I hate Renaissance Italy, so I just ignored those parts.

Heather Haley

Were you involved in any clubs at Texas A&M?

Victoria Skelton

I was. I was part of Fish Camp, which was the freshman orientation program. That was a fun experience. I say it was fun sarcastically, [but] it really was an awesome experience. It was where I, as a 19-year-old in college, I got my first dose of bias training, of inclusivity training. Because as a Fish Camp counselor, Texas A&M has 50,000+ students—I don't know how many they have anymore; way too many. I think my last year that I was a Fish Camp counselor, there were 9,000 students in the incoming class and Fish Camp served 6000 of those. So, every camp essentially broke down 150 to 250 students, incoming freshmen, and you didn't know where they were coming from. You had no idea. Were they going to be kids who's graduating high school class was five people, or were they gonna be like me where my graduating class was 721? Or were they going to be not from Texas? Were they going to not be from the United States? We had a couple of students like that and it was such a blessing in some ways because to me, it was just like, *Oh yeah. That makes sense. We should be able to accommodate everyone.* They taught us what seems like simple things, like, *Hey, don't make creepy remarks about the freshmen. Don't make lewd comments to their counselors. Treat everyone like you want to be treated—like you want your sister, your brother, your cousin, to be treated. Understand that you're all part of this Aggie family.* That was something that really initially drew me to A&M and so I like to be able to keep passing it on every year. A&M gets a bad rap for being a really conservative university. Yeah, there are a lot of students who are very conservative. I mean, come on, we're the home of [George] H.W. Bush's Library. We're fairly conservative just by that alone, but the amazing part is that you would see kids come in from all these different places, and they still all had one thing in common. They all still wanted to be there. Some of them were only there because this is a really good engineering school. Fair enough. Some of the some of them were like, "my family all went here, so I guess I have to go here. They said they were only paying for school if I came here." There were a lot of—[a] vast majority of students—came there because they wanted to be at A&M because they loved that Aggie family kind of aspect. That is something that I'm really grateful for; that it taught me how to include people and how to recognize that you might not have the same experiences as someone and that you should always keep that in mind, especially when you're interacting with strangers that you don't know, right? I mean, simple things like, *What do you do if you have a freshman who's disabled and needs a wheelchair ramp?* Make sure you find one. I had one student who is on the track team and she was like, "I have to go run before curfew lifts. What do I do?" I had to figure out who to get her to talk to, how she was going to be able to do that, where she should run. You know, little things. Just learning to appreciate people's differences and not see them as flaws, but to see them more as different colors of a patchwork quilt. I'm eternally grateful for that.

Heather Haley

How many summers did you participate in Fish Camp?

Victoria Skelton

The first year as a freshman myself, and then three more years after that—so long as they let me. *(chuckles)*

Heather Haley

What were some other things that you did over the course of the year to be involved on campus?

Victoria Skelton

Fish Camp itself was actually a year-round thing, as much as it really only was four days of the summer. It ended up being kind of a year-round thing, just because the counselors themselves—there are about 24 counselors per camp, and they were two cochairs. The chairs would basically manage the counselors, counselors, once you got to camp, would manage all the freshmen hypothetically. It ended up being a relatively around thing. In the fall, your job was to help the freshmen transition into college life. I had a couple that were really self destructive a couple times. You would text them and say, "Hey, you doing okay?" Because it's easy to get lost in that giant swarm of people. It's really easy. Sometimes you would text a freshman and be like, "Hey, how's it going? Do you need to go get lunch with me? Do you want to just hang out maybe without alcohol? I don't think that's a good thing in your life." *I think you're turning into an alcoholic at age 18.* Then there are the ones who you know, found their place. You know, went through sorority or fraternity rush, got through it really quickly. And you were like, *All right. Yay for you.* Then they would come to you and be like, "Oh my god, I have to do this many service hours, so I need an organization that I can join that can give me all those service hours, but not actually take that many hours of my time." You ended up helping the freshmen during the fall semester, spring applications would come out, and then spring through summer, you would make your camp. You're in all the 24 counselors and the co-chairs, trying to make them a cohesive unit, so that when the freshmen came in, they saw, *Wow. Look at all these different people who are still all friends. They're all Aggies. They all get along and they all have vastly different belief systems. They're from different backgrounds, and yet they're all still there. Really good friends. Wow, that's kind of cool.* That was my goal when my partner and I were picking counselors my last year. We're sitting there like, *Okay, let's pick a range of personalities, or at least try to pick a range of personalities [and] try to not have a camp full of white middle-class kids who never had a problem in the world who can't necessarily relate to people.* We tried to do that. I don't know if we succeeded. Over the year, though, that took up a lot of my time. Otherwise, I was also involved in Traditions Council one year, so I can tell you weird random facts about Texas A&M—sort of because I was a pretty bad member, so I didn't actually practice like I was supposed to, but that's fine. *(chuckles)* I quit. It was fine. That was no big thing in college.

Heather Haley

How did your college experience help shape or perpetuate your political values?

Victoria Skelton

I grew up raised by Democrats in Texas. It's very rare, I know. (*chuckles*) But my parents were both very liberal and I think my mom has gotten much more liberal in recent years and my father, he's not more conservative, he still is going to vote Democrat, but he's showing his age, I will say, in that he's like, *Ah, these kids with their genders and their sexualities*. But he's also like, *They should be able to do what they do and if you ever wanted to love a woman, I will gladly support you and I will go to your wedding*. My father is just kind of a weirdo that way. My parents raised me basically to be a Democrat. I voted for Barack Obama the second I could, and I actually wrote a persuasive essay in high school about why Barack Obama should be the next president of the United States. I'm showing my age. That was fun. My grandparents on both sides were also Democrats. So, I also pretty much grew up destined to be liberal. My experiences in college certainly challenged those views, or at least, forced me to explain why I thought those things and it gave me a lot of perspective on why people feel the way they do. One of my best friends in college, he and his dad collect guns. I think it's stupid. I think it's completely idiotic. He's very conservative and that's fine. I would sit there and it's like, "why?" And he's like, "I don't know. It's not like we use them all the time and it's not like we even expect the world to end in flames. We just think they're cool." He saw them as this technology that's super awesome and fun and just kind of fascinating. Yes, he was a nerdy engineer. Yes, I feel like I need to throw that in there. This is the same guy, who back when he was single—he had all these girlfriends—one night he had been like, "you guys never hang out with me anymore." And we're like, "we would invite you tonight but it's girl's night. Do you want to come to girl's night?" And he's like, "Yeah." He was, of course, just being stubborn, "Yes, I want to come to hang out with you." He comes to girl's night and we're sitting there talking about, you know, like a couple of people are in relationships, a couple of us are single and we're talking about kind of like balances and relationships. We're all feminists—like feminists like with a lowercase F in the sense of like, *Yeah, of course men and women should have an equal share in the kitchen. Do you know how hot it is when a guy can cook? Oh, my God*. We're having these conversations and my friend's sitting in the corner and he's like, "I would want my wife to stay home with the kids after she has kids, or after we have kids." And, and we all were like, "oh, what if she doesn't want to?" And he's like, "Well (*stammers*) but, you know (*stammers*) like, she..." I was like, "Yeah, but do you know how hard it is to..." I was like, "how many years do you want her to take off?" He's like, "I don't know. Until they're in school." So, I'm like, "so like six years. [If] she's having multiple kids, maybe closer to 10. You want her to take a decade off of work, and then try to rejoin her industry?" And he's like, "uhhhh." He recognizes his mistake and was like, *BACKPEDAL. BACKPEDAL. BACKPEDAL*. Of course, we all just jump on him and we're like, "No, no, you idiot. No." Now that he is in a relationship, and he is happily in a relationship with a wonderful woman, we joke about, "Hey, Kelly, you remember when you said that?" He blushes, "I know. Shhh! Shhh! It's fine." In college, I had friends like that, who of course we eventually turned, but it's fine. In a lot of ways, it did perpetuate my own political beliefs, my own kind of sense of self became more heightened because I was also around a really open, welcoming group of people. One of my neighbors, there was one night we're sitting on the roof drinking—that I did not do very often because that would be dangerous. (*chuckles*) No, did that all the time. We're sitting on the

roof, drinking a beer, looking at the stars and he made a passing comment, "his other roommate is totally gay." I was like, "wait, really?" He just never talked about it because he lived in College Station, Texas, and wasn't really sure how many of his friends would be like, "oh, what?" But he's like, "Oh, yeah, no, totally, he is." These four guys who are all from super conservative backgrounds whose parents are really conservative, they're like, "yeah, that's just him." In a lot of ways, going to a university that had a lot of conservative people, a lot of conservative thought circulating, it really also made me appreciate, though, that both sides are full of good people. It made me appreciate the fact that I didn't always agree with people, but usually I could make them see where I'm coming from. College to me was a time where a lot of people also got out of their really small town, especially at A&M. There were plenty of people I'm sure who graduated and there are plenty of friends on Facebook who are still very conservative and that's okay. I don't think it makes them bad people and I know that they are coming from their own life experiences and mine have just shaped me to be the way I am the way that there's have. It's definitely helped me see the other side sometimes, like in issues of gun violence when people are like, "I have the right to own a gun" and people want to get really upset and angry and I'm like, "I don't really think I need one. I don't think it will help me logically. I cannot logic my way through how it will help me," but for them that's their right. Just like to me, it's my right to go protest the government. The whole point of this interview. It was interesting living in a very conservative town and I always did it good 'ole boys, always dated the guys who were like, (*in a country accent*) "I can cook you dinner but this is a one-time thing 'cuz I'm bein' sweet." I look back now like, *Oh God. Why? Why? They weren't that hot.* Those experiences did certainly shape me being a liberal, but I don't think I was ever as liberal as I am today. Certainly not and hands down [Donald] Trump is the reason why I am so much more radically liberal than I used to be.

Heather Haley

When you decided to go to grad school, which schools did you apply to?

Victoria Skelton

I want to preface this by saying, I had no idea what I was doing. I look back and it's like, *God, you idiot.* I applied to University of Michigan, not really understanding that they are one of the premier institutions. I was like, *Sure. They have someone who does Italian stuff.* Fun fact, Italian historians are few and far between, especially in the United States, especially during my [research] period, which is post-World War II, no one really cares. So Italian historians were few and far between and the professors who I was getting advice from were very much not connected to that branch of history at all. So, I applied to University of Michigan, I applied to Temple. There was one woman who sort of did fascism there, but you didn't have tenure. Those didn't really work out, but I also applied here at Auburn and when I applied, I did get one bit of advice. One of my professors at A&M was like, "you need to email these people." I don't know why I didn't email anyone else, but I emailed Eden McLean. I emailed Eden and was like, "Hey, I am really interested"—obviously I didn't start it with "Hey," I swear I'm like not a total scrub—but "hi." So, I email Eden and like, "Hello, my name is Victoria Skelton and I am interested in joining your program, but I have no idea what I'm doing. Here's what I'm sort of interested

in. Would you be interested in having a graduate student question mark?" Of course, she emails back and she's like, "yes, of course" because she's Eden and she's always enthusiastic. Good to go and so stoked. Little did I know that at the time she had her first graduate student, she was on her first committee with Perry Colvin, who's married to one of my really good friends in the department [Alex Colvin]. So little did I know that she was also very excited because she had just gotten her first committee, graduate student, *Oh, My God*. She's on family leave because she just had Sophie, her daughter and it's, it's like, *Oh, my God. She just had a baby and she's so excited about everything*. So, I am emailing Eden and find out in March that I got in. I actually remember I was sitting at a friend's house, a couple of friends from college, were like, "Hey, we're going to this person's parents' house. It's super nice in the woods," same neighborhood as Sandra frickin' Bullock, so like, that's normal. They were one of those friends. We had gone hiking and we'd all fallen asleep and gotten drunk and passed out and I woke up the next morning with this horrible headache, horrible hangover, and woke up and I was scrolling through my emails. And it was this really awkwardly titled email from David Carter. It was like, "Congratulations on your acceptance". And I was like, *What? What?* So, I'm reading through it, *Oh, my God. Oh, my God. That's so exciting. Yay! But no one else is awake*. So I'm just sitting here—because I've been living an adult life, so I wake up at 7:30 in the morning by myself Regardless of what I went to sleep—so I'm just sitting there alone in a corner like, *Oh, my God. I'm going to grad school. I can go to grad school. Yes!* 'Cuz there was a solid two, three months where I was like, *Oh, my God, they're not gonna accept me. There's no way I'm getting in*. When I got into Auburn, I came to visit. Eden, of course, was like, "where else did you get in?" And I'm like, *Oh, you're so sweet. You're so sweet that you think I got into other places*. And I was like, "Well, honestly, I didn't get in anywhere else." David Carter's like the Graduate Program Officer at that point, and he's like, "Eden, you can't ask her that. I mean, but you can tell us if you want, but Eden, you can't ask her that. Oh, my God." And Mark Sheftall is sitting in the corner, just like giggling to himself and doing whatever. I say, "you guys are kind of selling me on grad school or [do] [I] try to stick it out in the real world." At that point, it was I'm either committing to being super poor, for another five to probably closer to 10, 15 years, or I can try to stick it out in the real world, be a little less poor for a year or two and maybe worked my way up. Maybe work at a museum, do something like that. So they sold me on it because sitting there talking to Eden—I couldn't ask for a better advisor—one of the biggest selling points was that I was gonna get to work with this young woman who was so accomplished already and so awesome. On top of being an amazing scholar, she's just also an awesome person. I mean, I go to her and I'm like, "I don't know what I'm doing and everything's falling apart." And she's like, "okay, we're gonna figure that out. It's fine." She got me to go to a research trip my first year in grad school—not that it was all her. Yes, I know. I did things too. But she's the one who's out there, prodding me until I finally got grant applications out [and] she was reading all my grant application. She was helping me as a scholar. So, she's not just an advisor academically she's a mentor and that was probably the biggest selling point for Auburn was that I was going to get to not only work with this amazing scholar who's writing really innovative research. You know, I don't know when she sleeps. On top of that, she's an amazing mentor, and she's the kind of person that you can go say, "I had this happen. I don't know what to do about it professionally. What do I do about this weird, professional snafu I've put myself in?" And she's like, "Well, here's what we're

going to do." She's always there to not only help me in my academics, but to help me professionally, to help me personally. I couldn't ask for a better [adviser].

Heather Haley

What was the transition like moving from Texas to Alabama?

Victoria Skelton

I super empathized with you [Heather Haley] when you got here. People are like, "is it really that different?" Yes. Yes, it is. Mostly because I always thought that Texas was relatively Southern. There's one day I'm sitting there talking to Mark Sheftall—he was the secondary signer on my admittance or on my being admitted to the program because he was further along in the tenure track than Eden—[and] [I] needed somebody to sign off and he was like, "Yeah, sure. War and Society. She sounds fun." So, he and I are talking, and I was amazed that they don't make students take American History at Auburn. I'm like, *That feels necessary, but okay. Okay. At least they make them take some history.* I was sitting there talking to him about [how] in Texas, [in] public schools growing up, we spent a lot of time on Texas history, like two years of the 12 you were in school were on just Texas, just Texas, which was fine. There's nothing wrong with that. But it was interesting the way that they teach Texas history because, you know, there's a lot of emphasis on, *and then the six different flags of Texas.* The point of the theme park is that there were Six Flags Over Texas from six different nations, but that's fine, now it's all about Bugs Bunny. I'm not bitter, it's fine. We talked about the six different nations and the flags that have flown over Texas, but one of the ones they like to ignore is the Confederate flag. They don't really like to talk about that because it's embarrassing or should be. They mostly talk about Texas being a republic and then I get here and, first off, it's jarring to see a different state flag flying on flagpoles because that's, *What the hell?* That's a transition. But the worst part is that it's literally a Confederate battle flag. It looks the exact same as the rebel flag, just like change up a few colors. For me, it was this whole like, *Holy crap. The Civil War. It ended so long ago, how are you people still holding on to this? And you lost, right? This [is] weird.* Because I'm from Texas, where there's this Texas pride of being a Texan and here it's like this Southern pride and I'm like, *that's very nebulous and not particularly specific.* I talked to another girl who had gone to the University of Alabama for undergrad, and she was like, "Yeah, no"—and she was from Texas—"it's super weird. They all think they're from big giant cities that have like a population of 3000 people." Of course, being from Texas, you have Dallas, Austin, Houston, sort of San Antonio, even I would consider El Paso, relatively large metropolitan areas. Then you come to Alabama and there's Atlanta and there's sort of Birmingham and maybe Montgomery. It was just a weird demographic transition and it was a weird kind of stepping back in time that, on the one hand, these undergrads look exactly like all the undergrads at A&M, granted, there were a lot more Greek stuff because Greek Life is super big here. The other day, I still have moments of, *Oh, I'm not in Texas. This is a weird place,* which I hope I continue to have because there should be some things that you never quite get used to. I'm talking to my boyfriend [Alex], he's driving me to campus to go to class, and we're passing the Kappa Alpha order house, and I look up and I'm like, *Holy shit. They actually have a cannon and its pointed at Opelika, you racist little shits. Oh, my God.* I'm just like, "what?" I'd always heard the

myth of the KA cannon, that it always points to the black part of town. Racist fuckers. I just kind of always wrote it off as, *Oh, sure they did it in the 70s when you still flew Confederate flags and it was just a Southern pride thing.* It's like, *Nah. It's a racist thing. You just didn't want to admit that because it wasn't cool to be racist anymore. Then stand by that.* The number of Confederate flags, jarring, the weird subverted racism that just kind of simmers. I just never quite gotten used to it and it's something that I don't know if I'm just more cognizant of it now or if it was maybe comparable at A&M. A&M is a super white school, I am well aware. But dang. Dang. It's weird, different perspective, too. [In] [the] multiple of the classes that I've either TA'd for or if I've taken an undergraduate course, the number of students who are wearing engagement rings, it's like, *you're like 20. What are you doing? Oh, my gosh that's weird.* It's this whole weird culture that—I don't want to call it weird—it's just very different. Because, you know, it's totally normal to everyone around here. Like the idea that last Halloween, all the kids went trick or treating three days off from Halloween because Friday night, it was high school football night. Saturday, it was Auburn football night. So, they had Halloween on Thursday for all the neighborhood kids around in this area. I understand the logic of that sort of, *But really? Really?* And I'm from the state of Friday Night Lights. Then again, I also find Friday Night Lights just super strange and odd because I didn't grow up with that. It was a bit of a culture shock and not in a way that I think someone from the North would experience that or someone from the West coast necessarily would experience that. I'm not offended when students call me (*in a southern accent*) "ma'am." I understand that that's a sign of respect. That's not it. "Yes, ma'am." Granted, if a student calls me (*in a southern accent*) "miss," yeah, that's you being rude. Here that's also not really a rude thing to do whereas in Texas, it's because you're being a little shit. It's been a culture shock in the sense that there's been little events that have been, *Oh, that's not how it is at home.* Of course, now, Texas doesn't even necessarily feel like home as much as it used to, and home is just wherever I am.

Heather Haley

When did you start school at Auburn?

Victoria Skelton

In August 2015, so it's almost been two years, a year and a half.

Heather Haley

When you started school, being essentially, for lack of a better phrase blue in a red state, in a very red state—arguably College Station [Texas], because it's relatively close to Austin, you can be kind of purple [in] [your] [politics]. How did you cope with that?

Victoria Skelton

A&M wasn't super conservative. I mean, it is. It is. When you have a student population of 50,000 and they're coming from all over the state and all over the state you have these massive pockets of blue, as much as Texas always goes red, there are large pockets of blue in the big cities. You know, I found my pockets of blue in a county that always goes red, always goes red. Brazos County will never be blue, I'm

sure. Not since and Anne Richards. It's been different in some ways because there isn't that connection, in the sense of you're not making friends based on shared interests and extracurriculars. In some ways, it's actually been more blue here [in] [Auburn]. I've had more of an echo chamber of liberalism here than I had in college because I interact with my department a lot, and I don't have a lot of friends outside the department much less outside of academia in Auburn. It turned into an echo chamber the last couple years and when the news was reporting, people are in echo chambers of like, *Yeah. Uh huh. I wish I could fix it, but I'm still not sure how.* I still think I'm in an echo chamber and part of it is self-preservation. You know, it's nice to be around people who share your beliefs and the church I go to even is pretty liberal. In that, it hasn't actually felt any different. It makes me less sympathetic to the people who want to say that Christianity, or conservatives, are under attack after the election. It's like, OKAY. I sympathize with that in some ways because I do get feeling like a minority in terms of political views, not in any other way. But I do understand that feeling of, *I don't know if I should actually say that.* [I] went on a date and wasn't sure if I should say that I was going to the Women's March that weekend and that's why we had to have a date on Thursday. I recognize that when I was on Tinder [app] about a year ago, I had that I was a Ph.D. student on my profile, and I got noticeably fewer matches. Same pictures, same everything. Took that [Ph.D. student] off and suddenly I'm a lot more attractive. That's my own perception, it's not like I did a quantifiable study, but all the same. It's not really comforting.

Heather Haley

So how did you feel, fast forwarding to the election of 2016, how did you feel with the choices that were available to you?

Victoria Skelton

I'll be honest, I have Bernie Sanders mug that I cherish and will hold close to my heart and pass on to my grandchildren unless I accidentally break it at some point, at which point, *Damn it. I've lost a mug.* But, I was a Bernie Sanders supporter because I liked that he was swinging very far to the left, and I figured he would eventually, if elected, not actually get most of those things done, but he was swinging to the left and would have to come back to the middle. I didn't feel like Hillary Clinton was swinging far enough to the left for me. I thought she was taking a lot of really safe chances, safe choices. I was not happy when it came out that Debbie Wasserman Schultz, after losing her job with the DNC, ended up going straight to Hillary's camp. That just seemed to confirm the whole like Bernie Sanders being a paranoid old man. *Oh wait, maybe he wasn't paranoid.* So, in terms of happiness with choices, obviously I would have liked to see Bernie Sanders. But then when it came down to the wire, and honestly, if I had had to choose between Hillary Clinton or Marco Rubio or John Kasich or even Jeb Bush, I would have been sad at the at the election results if Hillary had, lost but I would not have said the words, *well maybe there will be a military coup.* So, I didn't love the choices, but, God damn, I got on the Hillary train real fast because the woman picked up Bernie Sanders' mantle in some ways, or she at least picked up pieces of it. I respect that I respect the hell out of that in a politician, that you are willing to actually compromise and go across the party line, you were actually willing to collaborate with people who may not see eye to eye with you. I respect that. Even if she just does it for politics,

she's a damn good politician and I respect that. Because I do think that there is an art to it, and I do think that I do want professionals doing things. There's a reason I don't go to the quack shack on campus for my doctor visits. No offense to those wonderful men and women who have their M.D.s, but still, I want to go to a specialist. I want to go to a professional and I think that's why I like academia because you are a professional, you are supposed to know what you're talking about. And you may not know a lot about everything, may only know a little about a lot of things, but you know a lot about one thing, at least, and to me, Hillary Clinton knew a lot about being a politician. Still does. I'm sure that that knowledge did not just disappear. I think a lot of people were really disappointed and I know my father even was like, "she's shady." And I'm like, "yeah, I think she is." I think she's a really good politician. Part of the reason I didn't like *House of Cards* was because Frank Underwood is a good politician. Not a nice person. But [the] man gets shit done. [I] kind of respect that, but also, I really didn't want to watch it because it sorts of made me freak out that that was what really happens in politics. (*chuckles*) How happy was I with choices presented to me? I was not over the moon, but I was very clear from the minute that the two choices were laid out that there was no question who I was voting for and it was not the person who is now the president [Donald Trump].

Heather Haley

So, the morning of the election, the morning of. Tell me about your day.

Victoria Skelton

I'm gonna start with technically midnight on because... (*trails off*) When I lived in Italy, I saw a guy and we were dating and then I moved back to the U.S., so we stopped. But we kept in touch and the whole election season, when I was still living in Italy, we would be sitting there over dinner talking and I'm like, "What the hell is my country doing? What are we doing?" Brexit had just happened, and he was like, "yeah, that's super not comforting." He studies political science in college. He texted me at three in the morning, our time—that'd be 10 in the morning his time—so he woke up to the election news and he's like, "What the fuck is happening? God, America, what are you doing?" So, he texted me exactly that. "What is your country doing?" And I was like, "I don't know. I don't know. Everyone took crazy pills." Of course, we're texting back and forth, and I was like, "I'm gonna go to sleep and when I wake up, I want this to all be a weird, weird dream." It wasn't. The next day, I had to go to class. I had to sit there. I always sit in the back so that I can make sure students aren't being little jerks in the back of the room doing whatever. I was the person who's out there and did crossword puzzles in the back-room classes I didn't like, so I can't really judge. But I'm sitting there, and I put my bag down and I'm getting ready, puttin' all my stuff on the desk, gettin' my notepad out. I uncap my pen and look up and there's a person sitting there and he's wearing a Donald Trump hat. It wasn't the "Make America Great Again" hats that were super cheap. It was like a full-on fancy baseball cap that was probably not made by the thousands in a Vietnamese factory. And I just sat there and went, *This is the world I live in now. It's fine.* (*imitating the meme*) And [I] took notes, went to class. My advisor was teaching that class and so she and I, and a couple of the other TAs were sitting there and we're like, "This is so weird and unbelievable." I remember how shocked I was. In hindsight—you know, hindsight is 2020—[I] really

shouldn't have been that shocked. There were a ton of kids in our classes who were wearing "Hillary for Prison" t-shirts or the "Make America Great Again" hats. My first semester TAing, people were taking exams and I looked down and a kid is bent over his test wearing a "Make America Great Again" hat. That's a year before the election. In hindsight, I shouldn't have been surprised and for that class we had offered everyone an extra bonus point on their final exam if they showed proof of voting. Two-thirds of my class voted, and I am so proud of them for that. I'm so proud because all of those—not all of those students—most of those students were really wonderful people who were so smart and so bright and really deserve to be here and are amazing students and are going to be amazing people. They're not real people yet, but when they are real people, they will be amazing real people. *(chuckles)* But they all voted, and I can't help but think a lot of them probably did not vote for the same person I did. I felt so conflicted because on the one hand, I'm so proud of those kids because they got out and voted. They actually voted. They proved that our generation isn't a lazy bunch of couch surfing lame people. I cannot think of a more offensive word, but essentially, they're not a bunch of couch surfing hobos who live in their parent's basements for the rest of their lives. These kids actually get out and vote. They actually cared enough to vote. In some ways, in hindsight, of course, that was the big message of the election was that people cared enough to vote, More people cared about the things that Donald Trump was talking about than what Hillary Clinton was. That's heartbreaking because my dad's in-laws, who are my stepmother's parents, they watch Fox News just constantly and they voted for Trump, and they're wonderful people. Lucille is an amazing baker. She's so amazing, like her cake is so freaking good. How do you separate that from, *Yeah, but you were also kind of okay with all the misogynistic rapey things that this guy said? And you're okay with the fact that he's petty. And you're okay with the fact that all of these white supremacist groups, he's not denouncing them. He's being like, I'll take some attention where I get it. That didn't bother you? The day after, though, none of that was going through my head. It was just, Oh, my god. Oh, my God. People really didn't care about that stuff. All those things that I found so appalling, so important—so much so [that], pushing me the other direction, it either drew people in or they just didn't care enough about it. You could say the same thing about [me]. I didn't really care enough about Hillary Clinton using a private email server and the FBI continuously told me and the rest of America that, Shame on you, but it didn't actually do anything. Then that never really became the story. The day after was rough.*

Heather Haley

In what state did you vote?

Victoria Skelton

I voted in Alabama. I re-registered here and went and cast my ballot at the Parks and Rec Department, makin' Leslie Knope proud.

Heather Haley

In almost the hours after Hillary Clinton conceded the race, there were protests across the United States and there were rumblings of a Women's March on Washington. What were your reactions to all of this post-election hubbub?

Victoria Skelton

At the time, I was very much so in favor of it because it was like, *Yeah. You go young people. You show the fact that you don't approve of the president.* It wasn't like we elected a Jeb Bush, who, yeah, sure he might try to tighten up immigration. He might try to put more restrictions on abortion. He might try to do a lot of things and maybe he'll succeed, but they'll all be incremental things and, quite frankly, Jeb Bush also doesn't believe in a wall [at] [the] [border] [with] [Mexico]. The man tried so hard to capitalize on his ability to speak Spanish. *(sighs) (pauses)* So, when all these people started protesting, I felt like they were justified, and I felt like they were giving voice to the fact that people are scared. People were actually scared. One of my ex-boyfriends, his best friend was technically illegal. All of his siblings [were] legal kids, because they were all born in the U.S., but when he was still in utero, his mother went back to Mexico because one of their family members was sick and she gave birth a little early and he was born in Mexico and not the United States. So even though all of his siblings are legal, even though his parents have visas, he is illegal. [He] [had] always, and may still be, one of the highest ranked members of his class in high school. He ended up going to college, was doing really well in college. So, I saw those protests and it was like, *Yeah. They're giving voice to the people who are scared, who are not happy.* And there were the idiotic anarchists, *Okay, that's not helpful. That's not helpful. You just want everything to burn.* But overwhelmingly, it was a lot of people marching and protesting and trying to do something, trying to show in droves how upset people were. So, I think it was either the night of the election—or not the night of the election, the night after the election—within a couple days right after that, I saw on Facebook this whole Women's March thing was popping up. It was this weird, slap together Photoshop thing on Facebook and it was just Maryland at the time—it was like the Maryland-Virginia area. It was like we're going to march on D.C. and 100 people had responded or something really negligent—negligible, I think that's the word I was looking for. Just [a] small number and I was texting my friend Mary Kitts. She is distraught. When I panic, [I] get very quiet and still. Something lit a fire in her more than it did me, but I saw that, and I was like, *You know what? How much are tickets?* So, I go online to Southwest and they had tickets available to into Reagan National Airport for 55 bucks each way. And I was like, "Hey Mary, how much money do you have? Do you want to go do this?" We're like, *Yeah. We should do that.* But it was the end of the month, and we're graduate students, and we were like, *Okay, but 100 bucks is a lot of money.* That's like my grocery bill for the month and I'm not sure that this thing's actually gonna happen because 100 people does not a historic march make. It was November 11, something super early like that, and we're all going, *They've got to get everything together in less than three months. How can they do that? That's almost impossible, right?* So, we said, *Okay, we'll see if there's another Southwest sale [and] we'll buy tickets then. If it's closer and it really feels like the march is gonna happen, we'll go.* Fast forward to a week or two later and I get a text from my mother who, who says, "Me and two of my friends and their daughters, we're going to D.C. for the Women's March. Do you want me to buy your ticket?" I was like,

"Yes, I do. Okay!" My mother and two of her friends and their daughters who, one of whom I grew up with, she's basically like the older sister I never asked for, we all were gonna to go up. They rented an Airbnb and they're making all these plans and I was just like, *Okey dokey, I'm gonna show up and then we're gonna go march. Yay!* A couple weeks before the march, I told Mary, "you have a place to stay for free." We were going to originally stay with my cousin and his partner and their 10 billion cats, but then I was like, "you have a place to stay if you want to come, you just got to pay your airfare." and she's like, "okay, I can do that. So, we went up to D.C. We drove her to the airport together and we went.

Heather Haley

The day before was President Trump's inauguration. How did you feel that day?

Victoria Skelton

It was weird. It was very odd sitting in the Atlanta airport and I looked up—they always have CNN on, at least in Southwest terminal, the terminal that Southwest flies out of—and I'm sitting there with Mary before my flight boards and look up and the Obamas are waving goodbye. And we're like, NO! We're just sitting there mumbling under a breath like, *(mimicking a panic attack) Oh God. Oh God. The country's going to shit. Oh, my God, the country's going to hell, going to hell in a handbasket. Oh, my God.* We're sitting there and we're kind of on edge, like, *Wow. This is really happening.* I actually didn't listen to the inauguration speech until a couple days later and it was just as awful as all the news media reported. But it was so surreal and then I was on a plane. I got in [to] [D.C.] and drop my stuff off at the Airbnb. My mom and her friends and their daughters had been sitting in a bar drinking all day. You know, solid, solid choices. So, when I got there, not only are they angry, and slightly depressed, they're also a little drunk. We're in this bar and there are tons of the pink [pussy] hats that everyone had knitted for the Women's March. There are a bunch of those around. There are a ton of men wearing them in the bar. One of the bartenders was wearing a t-shirt with Michelle Obama's face on it. It was like, *It's so good to be in a blue place.* I think my cousin told me maybe half of a percent, or some just crazy low number, of the population in D.C. voted for Trump. It was a really fun place to be after living in Alabama and Texas your whole life. Being around a bunch of like-minded people was really nice. We're sitting there and we look up and, *Oh, they're getting ready for the inaugural ball. Oh good.* The [Three Doors Down] concert was playing and everyone's yelling things at the TVs that are all broadcasting different networks coverage and they're like, *This is bullshit. They couldn't even get any good acts to come out. Everyone hates Trump that much.* It was funny. In a way, it was so surreal. That was inauguration day.

Heather Haley

What was the plane ride like? Was it full of women?

Victoria Skelton

Oh, God, it was wonderful. It was so great. My flight actually went from Atlanta to New Orleans to D.C., 'cuz Southwest, but it was the cheapest flight. So, I said, *Okey dokey. I'm just gonna spend a lot of*

time on the plane read[ing] for classes and stuff. I have a window seat and I'm kind of towards the front and everybody gets off the plane who's going to New Orleans. I look up because they're [the flight attendants] like, "we're about to start boarding again, so if you want to change seats, now's your chance." So, I'm sitting there, just like reading my book and I look up and I just watch women coming onto the plane. Women who are all different ages, who are all different walks of life. You have one girl who's dressed as a total hipster and another woman who's in her crisp blouse and you can tell she ironed it this morning. There were maybe four men on the plane. It was so awesome and all the flight attendants, they were totally happy—a couple of them were like, "We've had requests for pictures, so everybody smile and say, "nasty woman!"" And of course, the plane erupts in "Woooooo!" 'Cuz you know we're all a bunch of women who are "Woooooo!"—woooooing all over the place. The flight is finally circling in for our landing and a flight attendant's up there and normally on Southwest flights, they would be like, "Okay, if you're connecting to Norfolk or wherever you're going, please see the departure board" or "you will be departing from gate blah, blah blah." This time, they were circling in for landing. And she's like, "normally I would tell you where all of your connecting flights are going to but, I think this is everyone's final destination." The whole plane erupts in cheers and we're like, "Yes, it is! Yes, it is!" It was really awesome. Granted, I was asleep for most of it, but it was really awesome seeing that many women from such diverse backgrounds and such diverse ages and everyone was there for the same reason. Obviously, there were probably a couple of people who just happened to be going to D.C., I'm sure, but it was a plane full of women who were so excited.

Heather Haley

What time did you get into Washington D.C.?

Victoria Skelton

I got in around, I think around 5:30-ish [p.m.]. We missed all the inauguration people on our plane. But when we get off the plane. The other amazing part—this plane full of women wearing pink hats and buttons that say, "Dump Trump" and all of this other stuff and all the Hillary memorabilia were unloading off the plane [deplaning]. So, the terminal that Southwest flies out of at Reagan National Airport is basically just one big circle. So, we're getting out and there's all the people waiting to get onto their own flights. But this flight gets deboarded and it's all of these women getting off and just passing, in droves, all of these people in "Make America Great Again" hats and wearing all their inauguration t-shirts that they bought. It was almost like watching the changing of the guard except much more meaningful for me personally. It was really awesome to watch that many women walking together.

Heather Haley

Did you witness any kind of derisive behavior from the Trump supporters?

Victoria Skelton

No. To answer your question directly, no. I never experienced any of that. There is some Facebook heckling of like, *Oh, the Women's March left trash.* But it was overwhelmingly, face to face, it was

perfectly nice. There was one point my friend Maddie—she was one of the women who had come with her mom in our group—Maddie was like, "I really want to go to this one place called Momofuku's Milk Bar." It's basically just a bakery, but they had damn good cookies. We were walking and trying to escape the crowds at the Women's March afterwards. We're standing in line and while we're standing there, Maddie starts talking to this woman and her friend and she's like, "Oh, cool. I live in LA [Los Angeles], too." And I'm talking to her friend like, "Where are you from in Houston? Oh, Cypress? Yeah, that's where my first college roommate was from." So we go in and these two women are kind of sitting in a little alcove outside of the restaurant itself and we go in, and we're standing in line behind a couple of people wearing their Trump inauguration regalia and he's like, "oh, my god, that was so and so." It's some woman who's on *Parks and Rec* every once in a while. I don't watch *Parks and Rec* enough to know who she was, nor to recognize her much less, but the people in front of us are like, "Oh my god, I thought it was her!" And we have this lovely conversation about how wonderful *Parks and Rec* is and how, yeah, Leslie Knope's the best. And of course, I'm sitting there going, *You do realize who Leslie Knope would have voted for, right? Right? No? Okay.* That was just one of those moments of... (*trails off*) There are still a lot of commonalities and as much as the five of us were all there for very different reasons that weekend, it was it was very interesting to see that many people there. There really weren't any calling out of people. I didn't witness any kind of derisive language, any negative attitudes. Granted after we'd been standing for several hours, there was a little more, *Okey dokey, when are we gonna leave [to] [march]? No, we don't want another speaker.* It was overwhelmingly, pretty peaceful, pretty uplifting.

Heather Haley

Did you make a poster?

Victoria Skelton

I did.

Heather Haley

What did your poster say?

Victoria Skelton

It said, it's a quote from Bishop Desmond Tutu and—oh my goodness, I don't want to misquote it—but it's along the lines of, "if you are neutral in times of oppression, then you have taken the side of the oppressor." ["If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."] Because for me, the important part about the Women's March was that I'll be fine. I have parents who will help support me if I have to get kicked off their insurance. I have family that will support me if abortion is criminalized and I have to give birth to a tiny human. I will be okay, but a lot of people won't, and a lot of women won't—a lot of women who don't have those advantages, who don't have that privilege or good fortune, whichever you like. I personally think they're kind of interchangeable. But those people probably also couldn't afford to go to Washington or might have been working a retail job

or a fast food job where they don't get paid a good living minimum wage, so they can't afford to take off a Saturday to go march. But I could because I'm in grad school. I only have class Tuesday through Thursday, so I can leave on a Friday and not come back 'till Monday. I have a mother who pays for my plane ticket because she believes that that's important. So, I didn't march really necessarily for me. I mean, of course, I believed in all of the tenets of the march and the idea that this is an inclusive [group] and [that] this is a presidency that concerns everyone, and that women's issues include an array of issues. It's not just reproductive rights or reproductive issues. It's LGBTQIA issues. Its environmental issues. It's everything. Women are not just flat, and I think I marched because I needed to make sure that my voice was heard, but that my voice represented others, or at least I hope it did. hope someone said like, *No. God no. That's not what I wanted.* And you know, 53% of white women would strongly disagree with me. I think in some ways that demonstrates the fact that women care about a lot of different issues. The Women's March also demonstrated that those issues all do affect women in a way that is different from men.

Heather Haley

What are some of the issues that are closest to you?

Victoria Skelton

Closest to me? A couple of years ago, the whole birth control being covered by the Affordable Care Act was really important to me. I've been on birth control since I was 14. Not because I was sexually active, I went several years just being on birth control [for] hormone control. I had really awful periods, like every other week, [using] the highest absorbency tampons every day for seven days. It was rough. I mean [a] combination [of] being in high school and being like very self-conscious, combined with the chance of bleeding through your pants every day puts a little stress on your body. Plus, my doctor was like, "you might be anemic soon 'cuz that's a lot of blood loss. Oh my god." So, I started birth control when I was like, 14. My parents, fortunately, were like, "yes, that is a medical necessity. You should be on that. Also, it's very handy if you do start having sex, like we feel better about that." When I did start having sex, it was a sigh, it was a perk of, *Whoooooo. I can not only track when my period is going to come, I also am not going to get pregnant. Yay!* For me, that was a really important step and I thought it was such a no-brainer. *Well yeah, you want fewer abortions, you increase access to birth control, obviously.* Then the Hobby Lobby decision happened, and it was so concerning because I didn't understand that logic. Granted, I was 17, 18 at the time. I was younger. I didn't really want to empathize with another perspective. I still think its bananas stupid, but to me that access to birth control solves so many problems. It's not only medically necessary for some women like myself, but it also prevents unintended pregnancy and usually unwanted, just by association by being unintended. I think moves to repeal the ACA and to not keep that, it only hurts people and I don't understand that. I don't believe in corporations, I don't believe in businesses really doing what is in the best interest for their employees, for the people that they serve, or for their workers. The idea that we're going to repeal Dodd-Frank [Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act], we're going to get rid of all of these regulations on businesses because it will make them freer and it will make the economy bloom and blossom. The last

time we were doing that, [the] Great Depression happened, because things didn't work well, or the housing market collapsed because people are selfish, selfish, awful people. Maybe that's a dark worldview. Maybe it's because I'm young and in my 20s and I don't have a lot of disposable income, and I would be much happier to sell a bunch of my shit and be able to travel (*chuckles*) or just because I lived without a lot of stuff for a while and it changes your perspective on what's important and changes your perspective on the value of doing something because it is right for people and for the greater good in a way that I don't see the current [Trump] administration standing up for people who actually need help. And I don't think corporations are people. Community would argue with me—Subway was a real person. (*chuckles*) I wish I could say that I just have a couple of key issues, but it's mostly the issue: I don't think that Republicans, for a very long time, and I don't think that the current administration, in the near future, has the best interests of the average American or of the American body politic, at heart. That's concerning. To me, that's just as much a women's issue as accessibility to birth control because when you have a boyfriend who doesn't understand the concept of pulling out and you just told him that you forgot your birth control that day, and he doesn't understand how those two go together. I don't think I've ever seen a naked man move so quickly as when I said, "You did what?" That kind of lack of sexual education, that kind of lack of understanding, that's not helping anyone. It's not it's not doing anyone any favors. I wish I could just pick one or two issues. I just can't.

Heather Haley

Going back to the day of the March, Saturday, January 21, 2017, how did you feel that morning?

Victoria Skelton

Tired as fuck. I was so tired. I woke up and originally, my mother and her friends were like, "we're gonna write the Metro." I was like, "the Metro is gonna be awful" because we're on the green line and the green lines end points on the north side of the city are basically for commuters. They have all these parking lots and they're connected to regional airports and they're awful and we were like the sixth stop down. I was like, "there's no way we're gonna get on a train. We're gonna have to leave at six in the morning." The March itself wasn't supposed to start until 10:00 [a.m.] or the rally was gonna start at 10:00 [a.m.] and then the march itself was supposed to start at 1:00 [p.m.]. That was not the case, spoilers. We got up and I said, "why don't we try to see how much an Uber costs for six people to get downtown." I think it was like 35 bucks. So, I said, "we're (*unclear*) for Uber! Good, yay. We're doing that." They [the Uber driver] dropped us off in front of the Federal Reserve. They were very angry about that because you're not supposed to drop off in front of federal buildings, for future reference. We got dropped off, had to beeline down Independence—or not down Independence—a block away from Constitution Avenue and we ended up walking towards the Capitol. Fortunately, I have been to D.C. a lot and so I was just put in charge of directing everyone. So, we start walking towards the Capitol and the rally itself was supposed to start at the corner of Independence and Third, so we started on the north side of the [National] Mall. Yes, we started on the north side of the Mall and ended up going south across the big grassy area, which is still covered with all the white plastic stuff that, you know, makes it very obvious when people aren't standing there. We walked over and I tried to get us through to the

other side of the American Indian Museum, it just felt like such a fitting place to start. We walked around and it was like, *Okay. That's super crowded. No way.* So, we walked down past the Air and Space Museum, which as an aside, my favorite reporting on the election weekend was Slate had an article about what Trump supporters had to say about the Women's March. And most of them were like, "I just don't get it. I don't get why they're marching. I don't really understand the point of it. What are they so upset about?" And the best one was, "Oh, my gosh, I just wanted to go to the museums, and they were all so packed and I couldn't get to the museums." (*chuckles*) So, the idea that a couple of Trump supporters might have filled in a couple extra gaps at the Women's March just brought me a little bit of snickering joy. So, we ended up wandering around and ended up on Seventh Avenue, so four blocks away from the rally point from the stage and from Emma Watson. That was fine. We ended up in this little cul-de-sac, essentially, where Constitution Avenue was on our right, across the Mall on our right and Independence was on our left. Then ambulances kept coming through helping people who had passed out or who had locked their knees or were dehydrated. I was super dehydrated, I see in hindsight, because I woke up, drank a cup of coffee, ate a granola bar, peed, left, and then did not perform any bodily functions, including drinking water or anything else until about six o'clock that night. But, you know, stamina with adrenaline and hate fires. We're standing there and there's a big screen casting the speakers and the video is about two seconds behind the audio, so you couldn't quite match up what people were saying, so when people didn't really lean into the microphone—the irony that these women weren't leaning in—but when they wouldn't lean into the microphone quite enough, you couldn't quite hear and so you just sit there and go like, (*whispers*) (*mumbles*) *Oh yeah. We're clapping. Yay.* But a lot of the time you can hear these speakers. America Ferrera was amazing, amazing person to lead off [with] an amazing speech. And then, Ashley Judd gets up there and she performs this poem and it's amazing. I just got chills thinking about it because she's not getting up there and reading a speech, which I respect all the women who did because let's be honest, you're getting up and speaking not only in front of a crowd of hundreds of thousands of women, you're getting up and giving a speech in front of the nation and in front of posterity. So, most of the women are reading their speeches, but Ashley Judd gets up there and she's standing behind all the other speakers this whole time and so we're just watching her. She takes off her jacket, she's like drinkin' water, gettin' ready, reading her notes. And then it's [announcer] like, "Ashley Judd!" And she gets up there and just pours her heart out and it was amazing. Oh God, I still get chills.

Heather Haley

This is gonna seem like it's off topic, but what was the weather like that day?

Victoria Skelton

I was not getting chills because of the weather. (*chuckles*) No, it was probably mid-40s [Fahrenheit]. But it stayed pretty dry, which was nice. Unfortunately, it was D.C., so it was nice and humid. It was really pleasant weather. I ended up just wearing like a t-shirt and a pea coat with tennis shoes because I knew I was gonna be standing for the whole day. But it was pretty nice. It had rained the day before and so the ground was a little soggy in some places and God bless 'em if anyone had worn white tennis shoes, those

were not white when they left. It was really nice weather. Everyone was cool enough and when you stand packed like sardines to the point where we couldn't quite raise our arms. They [announcers] would be like, "Put your hands up and clap!" and we'd be like, "whoooooo!" because *I can't reach my arms. My arms can't reach each other.*

Heather Haley

How many people would you estimate were there?

Victoria Skelton

I read one place that estimated about one person per square meter and that's how they generally do estimates of population. If our little crowd was any indication, and I know we also had a weird situation where every time an ambulance would drive through, more people would follow the ambulance, so it kept getting slowly more and more crowded. But in a square meter, there were probably closer to 10 women. I saw reports initially trickling in of about, I think it was, like 500,000 at the march in Chicago and looking at pictures of that versus what I experienced and what I was seeing—of course, I'm not a bird's eye view, but the pictures I saw of the [Women's] March in Washington, I would say an easy 500,000, if not 750,000. I still feel like that's a low estimate. But our area was a sea of people.

Heather Haley

Tell me about the diversity of the people there.

Victoria Skelton

In the area that I was standing, there was a range of age. I was pretty much surrounded by a whole lot of white ladies. There were a few women of color around. The speakers themselves were incredibly diverse. But the most surprising part for me was that there were a ton of men in the audience at the rally and I think in a lot of ways that shows how normalized feminism has become. There was one guy when we actually started moving and marching, there's this one guy who was leading chants and leading these yells, for lack of a better word. I stood next to a man who [is] slowly trying to inch back towards his people. And I was like, "I can scoot over a little." He scoots in. "You're with them, right?" And he goes, "Yeah," Not that you can't be there by yourself, obviously. You can support women without being married to one. I saw a gay couple there and this guy's there with his wife and they're maybe 10, 12-year-old daughter. That, to me was the coolest part. In terms of diversity, there were a lot more people of color there than you see in in marches from the 60s—nothing against the women in the 60s. *Dear God, thank you for doing your thing*, but it was a lot more integrated than then I've seen in historical documentation.

Heather Haley

Did you ever feel unsafe?

Victoria Skelton

God, no. There was one point where I was like, *If there's a stampede, we're all gonna die*. Fortunately, nothing bad happened. But there were a couple of moments where I was thinking about the stampedes during pilgrimages to Mecca, and I'm just thinking about those stampedes, stampedes in stadium disasters, and it's like, *You know what? You know what? If this is how I die, that's fine. I'm okay with it. I'm really okay with it.* Being surrounded by a bunch of women who are so supportive. We were standing by the bathrooms and there's one woman who's got a tampon in the air and she's like, "I've got to get to the bathroom. I'm so sorry. It's so inconvenient, but I need to." And of course, everyone's like, "we'll move as much as we can." But no, I never felt unsafe. It was awesome.

Heather Haley

Did you see any anti-protesters, or counter protesters?

Victoria Skelton

There was one really weird instance. So, in Auburn occasionally you get the—well not really occasionally—every Friday and Saturday night there's those guys who stand on the corner and are like, "Jesus will save ya!" Which, good for them. Good for them for yelling into a void. God bless 'em, they try. They try so hard. A girl walks by in a little short jumper and 10-foot-high heels and it's like, *Oh, your message was lost.* But there were there was one instance where a guy was holding a big sign talking about [how] Jesus saves. I couldn't really read it [the] [sign], but there were a bunch of Bible verses. I don't really remember what it said, but the general gist was that he was there and [I] kind of got the same vibe that he was trying to preach at the crowd and maybe change someone's mind. But we're walking past them and someone starts up the chant, "Science. Is. Real. Science. Is. Real." And the group of women that I was with, we talked about it afterwards—we're like, "I'm really conflicted about that because were they actually counter protesting the protest? The march? Or were they supporting the march?" It was kind of a weird situation. And another instance where the march, because it was a women's march and because women are such multifaceted creatures with multifaceted interests and opinions, that they [street preachers] could have all been part of the same march. That was one instance where you saw, *Oh, there are some conflicting views there.* Again, [I'm] not really sure if that guy was actually there for the Women's March, I get the distinct feeling he was not because the Bible verses were not exactly like, *and women shall rule the Earth.* So, take that with a grain of salt, but that was kind of the worst I saw

Heather Haley

When you started marching, what was the energy like?

Victoria Skelton

We were all really tired at that point. I had said that the march was supposed to start actually moving at one o'clock. I think at some point, someone just said, "Fuck this shit. We're moving." Because they had a lot of speakers. That was one thing that I don't think had been made particularly clear. I think the Women's March organizers really intended for it to be a rally and then it wasn't a rally or not everyone

got that message. The rally was supposed to end at one [o'clock], around 2:45 [p.m.], the area that I was in started filtering out and marching towards Constitution Avenue, which is the north side of the Mall. It's the north side of the mall that runs East-West—it was that side of things. We were like, *Oh heck yeah We're moving? Good. Yes. We will move. We'll take it.* Because at that point, we had been standing in the same place in relatively uncomfortable positions since about 9:30 [that] [morning] and by that point it was 2:45 [p.m.] and we were all tired and kind of hungry and full of rage—not really at each other or the leaders of the march, but certainly at the situation. *We shouldn't even have to be here and yet we are and now we're all hungry and tired.* We all started marching and I got to snap a couple of really cool pictures. My phone was on 1% [battery] the entire day, so [I] lucked out—some Flying Spaghetti Monster, higher order God, Goddess, whoever is in charge of phones was making sure that my phone stayed on. We're marching down Seventh Avenue towards Constitution [Avenue] and there's one point where a couple of women started singing "Amazing Grace" and "This Little Light of Mine." It was all very soothing. As much as it started out with *Thank God we're moving. I'm a little angry that we haven't neem moving, but oh, my God.* And it turned very quickly into a peaceful atmosphere. It was electric and it was very invigorating, but it was so peaceful at the same time, because you're surrounded by all of these people who believe the same things you do. People were still chanting, "THIS IS WHAT DEMOCRACY LOOKS LIKE!" "TELL ME WHAT DEMOCRACY LOOKS LIKE!" It was amazing. That's the kind of the vibe we got. I totally missed the Madonna was there—apparently, she was. By that point, we had marched away from the screen and it was like, *Meh. Sorry Madonna. I think everyone's already said what you were gonna say. (mumbles)*

Heather Haley

And you flew home that Monday. What was the plane ride like back to Alabama?

Victoria Skelton

My flight was delayed by about two or three hours, so that was very frustrating. But I was just sitting in the airport. By that point, most of the protesters had gone home—the protesters and marchers—most of the people who'd been there for the march were gone. In the round [Southwest] terminal, there's a round bar. Super handy. At first, I was sitting there like, *No, I'm gonna do work. I'm gonna just sip my water and sit here and do work with the Wi-Fi.* No. Then I found out my flight was delayed by two hours and I was like, *Nope. Okay. Wine. [I'm] going to start drinking wine 'cuz its been one of those weeks.* So, I'm sitting there and there's these two women and an older woman. The two women look like they're probably in their 30s and older woman looks like she's probably their mother—come to find out she is. I overhear them. One of the daughters goes, "Mom, no one did anything in Nazi Germany and look how that turned out." I was like, *Holy crap.* I mean, I don't disagree. I study the aftereffects of fascism and the women's organization that I study—that still exists today in some capacity—when Mussolini came to power in the 20s, they were all a bunch of middle-class white women. Which race [is] a whole different thing in Italy. These middle-class white women did nothing when Mussolini came to power. They're not the ones who lost. They were so close to getting women the right to vote and then they're like, *This Mussolini guy, he seems alright. He seems like he's gonna Make Italy Great Again—seems*

like he's gonna bring back the Roman Empire, bring back our glory days. We'll give up the right to vote for that. And they did and Italian women didn't get the right to vote until 1945 and it wasn't that organization that did it. It was the communist women's organization. So, I'm listening to these women talking [in] [the] [airport] and they're like, "No, mom, you can't be a quiet activist. You have to do something. You have to speak out when people say racist things. You have to speak out when people say those things because if you don't, you're just as bad as the people who let the Nazis take away their Jewish neighbors." I just went to the Holocaust Museum for the first time that weekend and so sitting there listening to these women, it was like, someone got it. Someone paid attention in history class, someone went to a museum and saw that, and it stuck. They were on my flight home and I sat there and talked to a couple of older ladies who were flying back to Atlanta, who were behind me in line to board the plane, and they were like, "that's so exciting that your generation's out here." And I was like, "Are you kidding me? It's exciting that you're out here. Did you really just go stand for six hours yesterday? Oh my god." It was an awesome weekend full of a lot of like-minded, really wonderful women.

Heather Haley

What have you done, and are you doing, to maintain the momentum of the march?

Victoria Skelton

I'm trying to focus my efforts on things that I really care about that I think will affect us in the long term and affect us in terms of women, in terms of the United States. So recently, I've been calling senators a lot and representatives because, for instance, the representative for Auburn and Opelika in the House of Representatives at the national level recently proposed a bill to remove the United States from the United Nations because it impacts our sovereignty. So, I called and talked to a poor staffer in his office in D.C. and said, "Do you know who founded the United Nations, who helped found it? Do you know what the League of Nations is? The foundational program that was basically impotent, but was the building block, foundational cornerstone of the United Nations. It was the United States and Woodrow Wilson." And I gave her a nice lecture on how the whole point of the United Nations is to guarantee sovereignty for countries. That's why it's been imposing sanctions on Russia for taking over parts of Ukraine. Because the whole point is to protect [the] sovereignty of nations and the fact that he is naming this bill to protect U.S. sovereignty is bananas stupid. It's just garbage. So, I've been calling my senators and picking and choosing my battles. [I] called about Betsy DeVos because I think education is one of those things that does impact me directly because I work for a public education institution. So, if they abolish the Department of Education, I don't know what happens to my job or what happens to the university that I work for, or where I'm going to get a job someday? It's gonna be interesting.

Heather Haley

What were some of the memorable posters from the march in Washington?

Victoria Skelton

I liked the very creative ones. The clever ones were really good. There was one said, "keep your tiny hands off my uterus." Oh, one of my favorite, like yells that came up multiple times and I call them yells because I'm from [Texas] A&M. I'm an Aggie, I get it, their cheers to everyone else but whatever. But [my] favorite was "hands too small can't build a wall." Gold, pure gold. My favorite poster sign things were the handmade, really crafty ones. There's one woman who had sewed a quilt and it looked like one of the old school suffragette banners that they would sew letters on to and say "Votes for Women" and instead, this one had something about LGBTQIA rights and making sure that everyone was welcome. It was amazing. And we were like, "Oh my god, did you quilt that yourself?" And she's like, "Yes. It only took me like a week or two." We're like, "Really? Oh my god. What? You're so crafty." Hands down, my favorite one was a papier-mâché vagina. Very direct. Just so you know who is protesting right now—there's a reason it wasn't a giant paper mac papier-mâché penis. There are some really good ones. A lot of them pulled out the "women's rights or human rights." That was on the back of my poster. A lot of good ones.

Heather Haley

Is there anything else that you wanted to mention about the march that we haven't covered already?

Victoria Skelton

The only thing I would mention, it was so disheartening after it was over that Fox News hadn't reported on it at all. When they did, it was only with reference to Donald Trump's second tweet about *the right to protest is a tenet of American society* or whatever that he obviously didn't write, at least seems like he did not write because the first tweet talked about *where were all these protestors during the election?* To which of course everyone pointed out, *You lost the popular vote by 3 million votes.* There were 3 million women at these protests. Probably all those people who the electoral college ignored. It was disheartening that all that President Trump had to do was say, *I hear you. I want to represent you because I am your president as much as the people who voted for me.* And he didn't. I would argue that's it's a very (*pauses*) purposeful decision. It was disheartening, but it also just kind of confirmed why I went. So, I think that's about it.

Heather Haley

Awesome. Well, thank you very much for your time.

Victoria Skelton

Thank you for yours. (*laughs*)