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Social Justice and Women's Rights Oral History Project

Interview with Mary Kitts

Conducted by Heather M. Haley

February 4, 2017

Transcribed by Heather M. Haley

Heather Haley

My name is Heather Haley and I'm here with Mary Kitts, interviewing for the first time for the Social Justice and Women's Rights Oral History Project. It is Saturday, February 4, 2017 and we are in the Bond Library in the History Department at Auburn University. Thank you for agreeing to do this. For the record, what is your full name?

Mary Kitts

Mary Elaine Kitts.

Heather Haley

And when were you born?

Mary Kitts

April 2, 1991.

Heather Haley

Where were you born?

Mary Kitts

I was born in Flagstaff, Arizona, but I grew up in Panama City, Florida.

Heather Haley

When did you move from Arizona to Panama City?

Mary Kitts

Well, we moved from Arizona to Michigan when I was like two years old, three years old. We lived in Michigan for a little bit. And then when I was about five or six, we moved down to Panama City.

Heather Haley

What is your earliest memory of living in Panama City?

Mary Kitts

Actually, I remember moving from Michigan to Panama City. We moved in a snowstorm. Yeah, so really one extreme to the other—my dad, my brother, and I in a U-Haul with our dog moving down. And I remember we lived in my mee-maw's house for a little while, so my earliest memory really is like the day we moved.

Heather Haley

Who was your mee-maw?

Mary Kitts

That's my mom's mom.

Heather Haley

Did you like Panama City?

Mary Kitts

I didn't growing up, but now I do—now that I've gotten older and had some time away. It's home. It's gotten bigger. It's growing, which is nice because part of my complaints growing up was there was nothing to do.

Heather Haley

What did you do to have fun?

Mary Kitts

I played sports.

Heather Haley

What did you play?

Mary Kitts

Softball. Soccer. In middle school, I also played volleyball and basketball. Pretty much sports all year round. All the time.

Heather Haley

Was there one that you particularly cared for?

Mary Kitts

Softball. I started playing softball when I was about six years old and I played all the way through high school until I couldn't anymore because I was too injured.

Heather Haley

What were the names of the schools that you attended?

Mary Kitts

I went to First United Methodist for preschool and kindergarten and then I went to First Presbyterian for first grade. Covenant Christian for second grade. Third through fifth, I went to Highland Park Elementary. Sixth through eighth, I went to Bay Haven Charter Academy and then for high school, I went to Rutherford High School.

Heather Haley

Did you have a public school education?

Mary Kitts

Yeah. For the first couple years, it was private Christian Schools and then from third grade onwards was public schools. The charter school is a public school.

Heather Haley

Looking back on your educational experience, would you say that there was a difference between public and private school?

Mary Kitts

There's obviously a major difference between Christian private schools and public schools.

Heather Haley

Can you elaborate?

Mary Kitts

The biggest thing is the separation of church and state in education. There was Bible study in second grade. I remember vividly being given a Bible and that was a big part of the education. There was always a little devotional that we had to do and stuff like that. That did not happen in public school, for good reason, in my opinion.

Heather Haley

Why would you say that?

Mary Kitts

Unless you're specifically paying to go to a private school like that, a public education is for the public and we are supposed to be a religiously free-choice nation and that should be reflected in our schooling.

Heather Haley

In terms of the education, religion aside, do you recall any differences between the two?

Mary Kitts

I think I'm too young, really, to remember very well. [In] second grade the biggest thing I really remember someone dropping a pencil sharpener out of the window and getting in trouble. I do know the class sizes are significantly smaller, but that's because paying to go to school is a lot different than everyone being there. They have a little bit more ability to have smaller class sizes in those kinds of schools. I'm personally glad that I had a public school education. [I'm] not knocking private schools, but it was a nice way to be exposed to things that I wouldn't have been.

Heather Haley

Where did you go to college?

Mary Kitts

I went to Florida State University, both in Tallahassee and in their satellite campus in Panama City.

Heather Haley

How did you like that experience?

Mary Kitts

I loved it. I loved Tallahassee. The satellite campus was good, too. [I'm] [a] die hard 'nole [Seminole]. Have been my whole life. It was nice to be away from home and in a different atmosphere, but also be able to drive two hours home on the weekends if I needed to. It was very much in my comfort zone.

Heather Haley

And what were some of the extracurriculars that you did at Florida State?

Mary Kitts

I joined a sorority, my first year: Sigma Delta Tau. It was a good experience for me personally. The sorority I joined wasn't the kind of Greek Life that you would associate with Greek Life. It was very liberal-minded and laid back and [I] managed to make some of my best friends there. It ended up being too expensive, so I had to drop out after the first year, but they didn't exclude me from events after that. They're kind of good that way.

Heather Haley

What kind of sorority is that? Is that a philanthropic sorority? Or is it a religious sorority?

Mary Kitts

It's a philanthropic. It's Greek Life, so it's the same [organizationally] as A-D-Pi [Alpha Delta Pi] or Chi-O [Chi Omega]. It's just Greek Life. We did do philanthropy. That's the biggest part of it. We have to do that kind of stuff to keep your charter.

Heather Haley

What were some of the things that your sorority did?

Mary Kitts

We did "Have Your Cake and Eat It Too." Our Greek letters look like the word EAT, so we kind of played on that a lot. We had a cake decorating competition and you had to pay to get into it. We provide all the stuff. All the money that was made went to our philanthropy, [which] was domestic abuse survivors, children and women. I'm fairly certain we were also involved somehow with the Jewish organizations on campus since Sigma Delta Tau was originally a Jewish sorority. We did that [and] a dance marathon [in] which the whole Greek Life organization is involved in that. They do it here [Auburn]. It's nationwide. That's a big one. We participated in fraternities' philanthropy events. That's one of the best parts about Greek Life, in my opinion, is you have to make money to donate to organizations.

Heather Haley

In that same vein, is that when you started your activism in those moments or was it earlier?

Mary Kitts

I always wanted to do things like that, but in high school, in a very red part of the state of Florida, it was difficult. In college, I actually was a part of the Occupy Movement. Not a huge part, but I went to meetings and I went to the town halls out in the middle of nowhere where we were all standing around in the dark snapping at each other. I went to the protests on the [Florida] capitol. I guess that would be when it started, but then I moved back home and it kind of died back down.

Heather Haley

In what year was that?

Mary Kitts

I cannot tell you.

Heather Haley

Do you remember how old you were?

Mary Kitts

Yeah, I was 20. 19. I graduated high school in 2009, so it might have been 2011. It was whenever all the Occupy stuff was really going on.

Heather Haley

How did you involve yourself in that movement? What did you do specifically?

Mary Kitts

I went to meetings. There were gatherings. It was kind of the idea of breakout groups where you would go to meetings with people who wanted to be involved and they would talk about different ways to get the message of Occupy out. The whole idea there was that 1% of the nation should not hold as much wealth as they do and Wall Street's corrupt—all things I still think are true—but we'd go to meetings. Tallahassee is a very liberal, hippie-like town, or at least it was when I went there, or at least the colleges [were]. It was always people our age, who maybe had no idea what we were doing, but we were trying our best. (*chuckles*) It kind of fizzled out eventually because there was no real concentrated leadership, but we tried. We made signs. We went and stood in front of the [Florida] capitol. There was about 30 [or] 40 of us. Not terrible, not huge, but bigger than anything that would have happened back home in Panama City.

Heather Haley

When you protested at the [Florida] capitol, what were you seeking for your group?

Mary Kitts

Just to be heard. To show that there were people in Tallahassee that cared about what was happening in New York because that was when the big protests were happening in New York and they were basically shutting down the park. And to be on the [Florida] capitol and tell Governor [Charlie] Crist—at the time, I think it was—that we did not support some of the legislation he had pushed through in support of the wealthy and things along those lines.

Heather Haley

How would you define the poverty and wealth in Tallahassee and where you were living at the time? How could you see that there was a disparity?

Mary Kitts

Well, it's the capital of Florida and Tallahassee is a lot different than Auburn, where everyone's in one space because this is a town that's built around the college. Tallahassee is a city that existed, and Florida State is just there, so is FAMU [Florida A&M University], so is Tallahassee Community College. I was in the college part of town living in a college house. The place where I saw wealth disparity was really among my own peers. Because I was in Greek life and I'm a teacher's kid, I couldn't afford it [the

sorority] after one year. Then you see these kids, maybe not so much in my sorority, who are driving like Benz's and really nice cars that, frankly, 19-year-old's have no business driving. So, you see it there. I would say mostly in the capital, I would see it there. You'd see people driving these really crazy nice cars and just wearing very well-tailored suits walking into lobbyist firms. I visited a lobbyist firm once to try to get a job or an internship and that's kind of where it hits you. You see the people walking up the steps to the capitol and these women in these suits that you can tell they got from like JC Penney's—I'm not trying to say anything bad—but you can tell [that] they're there to do a job. They should probably keep getting paid much more than they are. Then you have the lobbyists who are parking their foreign cars and walking up into their really nice offices downtown.

Heather Haley

Were there any lobbyists in particular that you sought to... (*trails off*)?

Mary Kitts

I can't remember the name. My parents are Republican, and my dad worked with charter school stuff in the capitol. Jeb Bush has worked with a lobbyist firm after he was the governor and I had sought maybe working there because I had connections, but then I decided not to.

Heather Haley

What made you change your mind?

Mary Kitts

If I remember correctly, it was, number one, the hours. Waking up at 7:00 a.m. was a pretty solid no-go for me at age 20. Part of me wants to say that it was because I didn't want to work for a Republican lobbyist firm, but I don't know if that's true. I like to think that's true now, but it was probably more than 7:00 a.m. thing.

Heather Haley

How did you end up at Auburn?

Mary Kitts

I took a break from Florida State. I did two and a half years and then took a break because I didn't know where I was going [or] what I was doing. Came home, worked for a year and was a real person with a job and an apartment and it was terrible. So, I went back to school and finished my degree in communications at the satellite campus at FSU and sort of realized that the only thing I really enjoyed were my history classes. I was doing really well, like surprisingly well in school the second time around, and I started thinking more about teaching. Both of my parents are teachers and I knew because of my parents being teachers that I didn't want to stick in the younger age range. I went, *maybe teaching in college is what I want to do*. So, I applied to a bunch of schools. [With] Auburn, I actually applied on the last day the application was due because it seemed like such a far-fetched long shot.

Heather Haley

What were some of the other schools that you applied to?

Mary Kitts

I applied to Alabama, South Carolina, [and] Georgia. I applied to UNF [University of North Florida], UWF [University of West Florida], smaller schools that are around where I'm from. I did not apply to Florida State because the application was incredibly involved, and I remember thinking [that] I don't want to do all of this work. (*chuckles*) I think that's it. I think those are the big ones that I applied to. I bought about applying to Michigan, but I needed a master's before I could do that.

Heather Haley

What are you here to get your degree in?

Mary Kitts

I'm getting my master's in history.

Heather Haley

Any focus or specialty?

Mary Kitts

I'm looking at early America, the republic right after the Revolution and before the antebellum period and the Civil War. I'm looking at Florida—it's a mesh of Spanish and British and New America—and I'm looking at settlement around that time, around 1820 when they finally opened it up for homesteading

Heather Haley

When you got to Auburn, how did you feel about the political climate?

Mary Kitts

This is only four hours away from home. It's the same. Where I'm from is called Little Alabama with pride. I'm from the panhandle of Florida. It takes an hour to drive and cross the line into Alabama. Everyone from Alabama comes down. I've met so many people here. The guy who told my car one day was like, "I vacation in Panama City." Of course, he does. So, this is nothing new to me. It's the same. The only thing that's different is [that] I can't smell the beach in the air here.

Heather Haley

When did you start school at Auburn for your Master's?

Mary Kitts

Fall of 2016.

Heather Haley

At the time, who were you hoping would win the presidency?

Mary Kitts

Hillary Clinton.

Heather Haley

On what grounds? How did she appeal to you?

Mary Kitts

I've loved Hillary Clinton since I was little.

Heather Haley

What was so intriguing about her?

Mary Kitts

She was a woman who was very well-spoken, very powerful. Like I said, my parents were Republicans, but they always watch the news. This is kind of pre-Fox News gaining ground and so they'd have whatever was on and she'd be on TV and I'd catch her makin' speeches. There's also a book I read by Meg Cabot where the main character was in love with Hillary Clinton. While that might have influenced me when I was little, as I got older and started paying more attention, and we started talking about her in history classes and things like that. The *women's rights are human rights* thing really resonated with me. It's also partially the fact that everyone I knew hated Democrats, and I was like, *well, I like 'em*. She was a very powerful woman. I remember being told that I should look at Margaret Thatcher and taking one look at Margaret Thatcher and going, *no, thank you*. So, Hillary Clinton has always been someone I look up to, I guess, and I like her. She's so qualified. It kills me. If ever there's someone who spent their lives tailoring their resume for a specific job, it is that woman. I can't imagine anyone who you know—she has, since she's been in high school, this is the job she wanted. And she did everything in her power to make sure she was she was thoroughly qualified, relationships built with world leaders. She made sure that she could be the best, and this is my opinion, but I honestly think she made sure she could be the best she could be for that office and for a country that she clearly loves. So that's why. I also think she had very good ideas. She knows how to play the game, which is needed. You gotta know how to play the game. She understands that the best way to get things done is not to ram them through but to find middle ground. Because if you can get people to scooch over a little and meet you on the middle ground, it's easier the next time to move it over a little bit to the left and begin to scooch over a little bit and find the middle ground. It's slow, but steady progress that wins the race and I like that about her. I like that she understands that.

Heather Haley

I'm really intrigued that you grew up in a red state. That's a pretty accurate... (*talking over each other*)

Mary Kitts

Yeah, very recently... (*talking over each other*)

Heather Haley

But you were blue. You're a Democrat. So, what about the Democratic Party growing up appealed to you?

Mary Kitts

I don't know if it was the party so much. Until I basically turned 18, it was like going to church, I just kind of told my parents I was Republican. It was much easier. But I knew that it was little things, the women thing, specifically. I think it was high school when I really got introduced to the idea of feminism. When you have grown up in a very one way and you find out that there's still a wage gap and all that kind of stuff, it kind of hits you like a ton of bricks. And that was a big thing. I think Sarah Palin, my senior year of high school, was a thing too. I was like, *No. This can't be the first woman in a high office like this. I need to be looking over there. What are they doing over there?* And that was when Hillary was doing her primaries and so I was already on that side. Gay rights was a thing for me. I played softball, sports, and I don't want to feed into the stereotype, but that's a place where a lot of gay women feel safer is in sports. So, I had a lot of gay friends bi [bisexual] friends. God, they really struggled where we were. It was a terrible thing to watch. Now that I look back on it, I thought maybe that was just a normal part of being gay was how terrible it is. But it shouldn't be and that's part of it. [There] should be more acceptance. Evolution in schools. There are a lot of people who hated that we were being taught science. So that was a thing, too. And tax cuts for the rich. That always bothered me. I think trickle-down economics is one of the dumbest things that's ever happened to this country and that was part of it. This all came together probably about my senior year of high school is when all these ideas really [fomented] because I had always known I didn't like Republicans that much. But I didn't know I was a Democrat. I was kind of just like floating. There was a long time where I was like, *I think I'm a libertarian*. I think everyone goes through that phase when you're raised in a red state and you're not red. But then my senior year of high school was when I was like, OH, because that was when Barack Obama ran. And while I really wanted Hillary, I got behind Obama pretty quickly.

Heather Haley

How old are you now?

Mary Kitts

25, almost 26.

Heather Haley

You've touched on many different issues. Which one would you say is the one that is closest to you, that you would fight for?

Mary Kitts

Women's rights, intersectionally. I'm a white woman, so I'm kind of at the top of the woman totem pole, which means that it's still not easy, but it's not as hard as it would be for maybe a queer person of color. But women's rights. That's my big one. That's the thing that gets me real heated.

Heather Haley

Are you talking holistically? So, voting rights and our rights to... *(trails off)* Could you elaborate on... *(trails off)*

Mary Kitts

Voting rights, yeah, but we can vote. *(chuckles)* Wages. The news that came out yesterday with Donald Trump telling his women to dress like women. That pisses me off. His National Security Advisor [Steve Bannon] looks like a huffalump and he's [Trump] telling women to dress like women. I'm not a woman who dresses particularly like a woman. I don't do dresses. If I have to dress up, I'm in a pants suit. I don't care for being dressed up and I think that if dudes can come in wearing jeans and a button up and be considered presentable, I should be able to wear something similar. Things like that. Rape culture. And that's not just a women's issue, but women take the lead on it because it's a societal thing. It's seeped into everything. The fact that I have to, at sundown, have pepper spray with me is stupid. There's this thing that I've seen where it's like, *imagine what you could do at night if every man had to stay in their house after dark*. And the quotes that you see are things like, *I could go grocery shopping*. That kills me. I hate that. Catcalling. Just, all the women's issues. I mean, we have the right to vote, yes. We make more money than we used to. More jobs are open to us, but there's no real equality yet. And I don't mean just for me, I would like to see equality for women across the board and that includes transgender women. Anyone who identifies as a woman should be treated the same as anyone who identifies as a man. That's my big one.

Heather Haley

What were your initial reactions when Donald Trump was elected president?

Mary Kitts

There was a lot of crying. *(sighs)* That night watching the election, I was so excited because I thought that this nation wasn't—I want to choose my words carefully, 'cuz I'm still very mad—stupid enough to elect that man. I have great respect for the idea of the oval office. And the people who've always sat in that chair, even like Richard Nixon had respect for the office. And it's always been men, I know that. But there's some kind of gravitas about that office, about that whole building, about the idea of it. And we elected someone who couldn't give two shits about it, and that kills me. I can't even watch *The West Wing* anymore without feeling sad. *(chuckles)* Because that's a show where those people are so dedicated

to what they're doing, and they understand the depth and the power of it, and they respect it. And we voted against someone—who I honestly believe she knew the depth; she feels the same way that a lot of us do about it—and then we elected someone who could not care less. I was so mad that night. I cried. I couldn't believe what was happening. You could feel it the next day in the History Department. It was dark. I don't know. It was like a bomb went off and we were all in the aftermath of it. No one was really talking. I had seminar that night and we didn't talk about the book. For three hours, we went over what had just happened. We went and sat in Starbucks, I think, if I'm remembering correctly. I might not be, but we just couldn't wrap our heads around what had happened.

Heather Haley

So, he's elected and is inaugurated in January, on January 20, 2017. But almost immediately after the election, things went into motion to have a women's rights rally/protest in Washington, D.C. What were your initial reactions to that announcement?

Mary Kitts

I saw it on Facebook, I think two days after the election, and I went, *Yes. I am in for this*. I think about a week later, I started talking to some of the people in the History Department about wanting to go. I was pretty rapidly about it. I saw it and I was like, *Yeah. I'm in*. I didn't know the details about how I was going to get there or where I was going to stay, but I knew that I was gonna go.

Heather Haley

You were gonna make it happen.

Mary Kitts

It was gonna happen. I think one of those things that happens when you just have had the hope and the optimism knocked out of you, like you can either wallow in it, which I did some wallowing, or you can get up and do something about it. And so, I did a little bit of both. Pretty much as soon as I saw it, I said I was going.

Heather Haley

What appealed to you about traveling over 1,000 miles to the nation's Capital? What about that appealed to you, taking time off of school and going and doing this?

Mary Kitts

The importance of it. I just kept telling myself if I don't go, I'm gonna regret it. Because there's a lot of back and forth. It's a lot of money. I've been on a plane four times in my entire life. There's fear [of] [going] to a place I've only been once, and I don't know how to get around. But I knew that if I didn't go, I would be kicking myself for it in 20 years. That's what I told myself. I was like, *this is too important to not go and even if you're just one of 500,000 people, every person counts in that*. We didn't know if he'd [Trump] actually be in the White House because I thought he'd probably go back to New York after the

inauguration. But knowing that he could hear us from the streets, that showing that we were pissed. We as a nation are mad that 19% of Americans decided to do this to us. That's what it was. Something inside me said that if you don't go, it's gonna be one of those regrets that you think about every night before you go to sleep.

Heather Haley

So, when did you start making plans to go to D.C. for this march?

Mary Kitts

December. Pretty soon after the election, I think. I bought my plane ticket around then and then had made plans with a friend; we were going to find a place to stay there.

Heather Haley

Have you ever been to D.C. before?

Mary Kitts

Yes. Once, when I was 18. After I graduated high school, my family and I went and did the tours and the Smithsonians and the [National] Mall. We didn't get to go the White House, but we saw it.

Heather Haley

So, before the march, you had a basic understanding of how D.C. operated?

Mary Kitts

Yeah. Well, the historical side of D.C., at least.

Heather Haley

Sure. What did you bring with you to D.C.?

Mary Kitts

A carry-on and that was it. A carry-on and my backpack. I brought my computer because I was in the airport for a very long time. [I] brought cold weather clothes, which I'm from Florida, so that took some planning. I brought food because I knew that we were gonna be out all day and there wasn't going to be food. I brought up, no, I made a poster there. I didn't bring a poster with me. Headphones. A portable phone charger, so that way I could charge my phone while we were out marching. So just the basic necessities.

Heather Haley

What arrangements did you make before you left?

Mary Kitts

I boarded my dog. My friends who stayed here and went to the marches in Atlanta, I gave one of them the key to my apartment and asked her to pick up my dog Sunday night so I wouldn't have to keep her there another night. I let my apartment know that I was gonna be out of town because I like to let them know in case something happens. I told my parents I was going; I didn't really make any arrangements. I just kind of told them I was going.

Heather Haley

How did they react when you told them?

Mary Kitts

I first they were okay. They got snarky as it went on. I think they weren't expecting as many people to show up as did. I think, at first, they thought, *oh, it's cute she's going to this*. When I landed, my dad said I should use my time more efficiently and go look at museums. And that was when it shifted from, "be safe" to *oh, this is real. We don't like this*. They weren't thrilled particularly. They were worried. I think they'd been watching a certain kind of news, which told them that we were going to break into riots, which didn't happen. There were no arrests and there's a whole different set of reasons for that, but it was not violent.

Heather Haley

What was the path that you took to get to D.C.?

Mary Kitts

I went to Atlanta, got on a plane, flew straight to Ronald Reagan. And then I took my first Uber to the Airbnb that my friends and I were renting. *(laughs)*

Heather Haley

Who did you meet in D.C.?

Mary Kitts

A girl from this department, Victoria [Skelton], and her mother and their friends. They were nice enough to let me stay with them.

Heather Haley

Do you know all of their names?

Mary Kitts

Victoria's mother's name is Vanessa. There's a woman named Elaine and Julie and then their daughters.

Heather Haley

When did you arrive in D.C.?

Mary Kitts

Friday night, about nine [o'clock].

Heather Haley

When you were on the plane, did you notice other marchers?

Mary Kitts

Oh yeah. If you were sitting at a gate in Atlanta for a plane going to D.C. that day, it was 90% women, 90% of whom were going to march. The entire plane was full.

Heather Haley

How could you tell that they were going for march?

Mary Kitts

Shirts. People had posters, pins. They were wearing the pink pussy hat caps. Or someone'd sit down and go, like [a] secret, "are you going to the march?" "Yes." And eventually word would spread. There was a really great sense of community even at the airport before I even boarded the plane and I was at the airport all day because Victoria's flight left way before mine, I just kind of waited. It was very obvious that the airport was full of women and that they were almost all going to D.C. Which is kind of when I started to go, *oh man*. I thought it would be big, kind of thought 200,000, but that was when I went, *No. This is bigger than that.*

Heather Haley

When you arrived in D.C., what were some of your initial thoughts when you landed in D.C.?

Mary Kitts

All women in the airport, which was another nice thing. There's something about being a woman and being surrounded by other women that are there for the same reason, that you just feel safe in a way you normally wouldn't in an airport or in a big space like that. It was cold, much colder than it was in Atlanta. I was kind of wondering if I would run into any issues because the inauguration was that day, but almost no one came to the inauguration so there wasn't a lot of traffic or anything like that. I was just ready to get to where we were. But again, the planes that were landing were just women streaming off of them. And everyone was doing the, "Women's March! Woo hoo!" in the bathrooms and in the terminals. People were cheering us on. The people who worked at the airport were asking, "you here for the Women's March? Good luck." So, I was excited. The car ride to where we were staying was cool. I got to see D.C. through the windows, which was nice because I love the history of D.C. I was a little emotional that day watching Barack Obama get on Marine One. [That] had already made me feel sick to my stomach, so looking at the White House made me sad. But seeing the monuments and all that stuff was very cool, seeing the old buildings. It's a much bigger city than anything I'm used to. Suffragettes,

women dressed as suffragettes walking around was very cool. And that was another thing, women everywhere. The whole ride, walking up and down the street, just everywhere. I think I saw a couple limos that were inauguration, like going to balls. But it was all women everywhere walking up and down the streets of D.C. And I was like, *Oh God, this is gonna be big.*

Heather Haley

What time did you and your friends get up the next day?

Mary Kitts

Early. I think I took a shower at 6:30 that morning. We got in our Uber at 8:30 [a.m.] I think, I could be wrong. Time kind of becomes blurry that day, but I know we wanted to be there by 8:30 [a.m.], but I think we left at 8:30 [a.m.] just because we were all trying to get ready. Our Uber took us as far as he could and dropped us off near the Capitol.

Heather Haley

Between that night and the morning of the march, you had made a poster.

Mary Kitts

Yeah, we made posters. We had markers and poster board.

Heather Haley

What did yours say?

Mary Kitts

"Who runs the world? Girls" as Beyoncé once said, and then on the back I just had a heart that said "HRC" [Hillary Rodham Clinton].

Heather Haley

I'm assuming you all did these together as a kind of crafting group. What were some of the other phrases that the other posters said?

Mary Kitts

There was one girl, I think she wrote "future" and for the T, she put the sign for women. Victoria [Skelton] had a really good one with a fist about the about resistance. I don't remember exactly what it said, but it was good. I can't remember. The one girl had one, it was a line from [the] [TV] [show] Community, but I don't really watch that show, so I don't really remember exactly what it was, except for she was really excited about it.

Heather Haley

How did you feel while you were making those posters together?

Mary Kitts

I was exhausted by that point. I had been in the airport all day. I was so tired, and I only knew Victoria [Skelton]. But we were all talking like we were old friends and we were just looking up *Parks and Recreation* feminism lines, like stuff we could use that Leslie Knope had said. We were really talking about these TV shows where they had great quotes. I was trying to find out if anyone ever wants to *Veep*. No one else did, but I think that's a great show with some really funny—I don't like to carry vulgar signs, but if I did, I probably would have used some *Veep* quotes. *(laughs)* That's what we spent our night doing, just trading quotes from TV shows that were pertinent to the moment.

Heather Haley

How much sleep did you get that night before the march?

Mary Kitts

A pretty good amount. I think we were in bed by 11:00 [p.m.]. I mean, [I] woke up at 6:15 [a.m.] to take a shower.

Heather Haley

When your Uber dropped you off, how many people would you say were around you?

Mary Kitts

They [the police] had blocked off all the roads. Everything that was blocked off for the inauguration, they just kept blocked off for us. We were a little bit away because they could drive past the barricades, but you could see people streaming down the streets. We went past the barricades and there were just women everywhere. Everywhere. Everywhere, we were in front of the archives, the National Archives, and the bleachers that set up for the inauguration were there and we were standing near them. It was just a constant stream that never stopped of people making their way towards the Capital and then towards where the stage was for the march. It was a lot of people. I remember looking and going, *there's way more than 200,000 here. This is half a million at least.* I don't know what the official counts were, but there were definitely at least half a million to a million people there. It was nuts and everyone was so nice. People were handing things out. You know, it's a group of a big crowd of women. Everyone was handing out PowerBars and people had brought extra hats for people who didn't have hats. That's how one of the girls in our group got it. A woman from Minnesota, I think, had knitted extra hats and was handing them out. So, there was an immediate sense of community. That was very cool.

Heather Haley

If you can remember, in relation to where you were dropped off and relation to where the stage was, how far were you from the center of all the festivities?

Mary Kitts

We couldn't get to the stage. It was crowded. I really don't know because my internal map of D.C. is not good. I've been there once. I know that we walked in front of the Capitol. So, where they had the grass in front of the Capitol, in between the monument and the Capitol, we walked down that way and then we took a right. We walked by the Smithsonian. That was there. Where we were standing, the stage was to our left, I think. We were kind of off on the right where they had put up a big screen. We were by the porta-potties, which was fun. We were close enough that you could hear the cheering, but I had no idea where we were. I was just following. I was going where I was told to go.

Heather Haley

Could you hear what all the announcers... (*interrupted*)

Mary Kitts

Yeah, our screen was set up. We had audio. It was great. We were right there near the screen. We could see everything.

Heather Haley

How did you feel being in this huge crowd of women?

Mary Kitts

I don't know. That is hard to answer because I was a little overwhelmed. We were all squished together and there were people complaining a little bit—not really complaining. It was more like, *I wish we had more room*. But I think we all knew what we had signed up for. Everyone was real nice, jokey. There were people all around us who we had no idea who they were, but we were there together. That is what mattered. Watching the speeches was really good, standing there in the cold with the porta-potties behind us. We always had people try to—"excuse me"—trying to get through the crowd, but we just made way. There was no yelling. There were a few women who were a little snarky about it coming through but usually they apologize and be like, "I'm so sorry, I just really have to go the bathroom." There was no phone service either, so you kind of had to be present, which is good. Looking back, I was able to take pictures and videos, but there was there was No sharing that moment with anyone except for who I was with. So, it was good. I wasn't hungry. I wasn't thirsty. I wasn't tired. It was weird. It was one of those things where that just kind of fades away for the few hours, you're standing there

Heather Haley

Were there any men there?

Mary Kitts

There were. Not a lot, but the ones that were there were very supportive. It was mostly women. I mean, there were some men, but I would say, in my little area, it was maybe 10% of the crowd at most. I know that most of the women's husbands [or] boyfriends were supportive, which I know because they showed Emma Watson on the screen and everyone was like, "I have to text my boyfriend. He loves her." And

then all the women were talking about how much their husbands and boyfriends were supportive of them being here and stuff.

Heather Haley

Were there any anti-marchers there?

Mary Kitts

There was a Trump group that came through where we were. They were trying to be a little disruptive, but the message through the crowd was, *Don't give 'em what they want. Be kind. Be nice. They can be here if they want to be here.* The only thing was when Gloria Steinem was speaking, the crowd fell silent and everyone was like, "hey, Trump supporters, can you please just be quiet, just right now." I heard that Westboro Baptist Church was there. I don't know if that's real, though. I couldn't see, it spread to the crowd, but it could have been anyone. If they were there, they didn't make an impact at all. There was one point when we were actually marching when a guy came through. I don't know if you've ever seen them, they're really prevalent in New Orleans especially, these street preachers that carry the really big signs of Bible verses and they're always condemning all kinds of groups to hell. And he was going through shouting stuff about God and evolution being fake and the crowd chanted "science is real" at him. That's the most confrontational it got, and it was because someone had said something that really got under our skin, I guess.

Heather Haley

But all were welcome regardless of where they sat on the political spectrum.

Mary Kitts

Yeah. I know that there was social media issues with pro-life people coming, but they were also just welcome to come. They weren't an affiliate group, but they were welcome to be there. No one was turned away.

Heather Haley

It was marketed as a march. Did you actually march?

Mary Kitts

We did. We were told that the speaking would end like 1:15 [p.m.], come three o'clock [p.m.], they kept coming up and going, "we know you guys want to march. but here's this person" and our group got tired of waiting and just started marching. And when I say our group, I'm talking like thousands of people who just like no, like, two hours ago. It's been too long. We're tired. We want to march. The whole point of this is to march. And I think what had happened was the organizers had let too many people come on [and] [speak]. I remember turning around, looking the screen and for some reason Madonna was there. I remember going, "why is Madonna here?" Apparently, she performed, too. I had no idea because we had already gone. So yeah, we marched. Not when they wanted us to march, but we marched. (*chuckles*)

Heather Haley

When you started marching how did the group dynamic change, if at all?

Mary Kitts

We went from being all pressed up against each other. People were joking again because we all started getting a little, *okay, we've been here for five hours. Are we going to march?* The joking started [to] [die] [out], part of that fire had burned out a little bit. But once we got going, it got back. Once people started singing and chanting. We had to get through a barricade setup. So, we weren't going on the route because we couldn't because the only way we could have gone the route is if they had told us all, *okay, let's start marching.* So, we had to go through [a] barricade set up by the police and the police are like, *we don't know what's happening. Just go. Everything's cleared for you guys.* That wouldn't have taken place at a lot of marches. It was a predominantly white women crowd, so we got away with something like that, I think. But once we got going, there was chanting. Everyone's holding their signs. It was good.

Heather Haley

You just commented that it was predominantly white. Why do you think that is?

Mary Kitts

I don't know. It was a very mixed-race speaking crowd, very diverse. There wasn't a really issue there. I don't know why. And now could have just been my area where I was, but I think I heard the commentary that it was predominantly white. Now that could be financial. That could be a plethora of reasons. I don't know. I do know that it's a fair criticism of the march to say that while the speakers and the goal was intersectionality, it wasn't really intersectional. I do personally know people of color who went to the march, but it was predominantly white from my area. I don't know why. That could be because I'm not as aware as I need to be. Maybe because they didn't feel welcome or like financial reasons could have been a big part of it. It's something we need to work on as a community for sure. White women specifically need to work on making people of color feel welcomed, and also need to show up to events that people of color need them to show up to. So, I don't know.

Heather Haley

The D.C. march was, again, marketed as a women's rights march. What were some of the other things that marchers were marching for?

Mary Kitts

Science. There are a lot of people just mad about Donald Trump. Tax returns. Twitter. A lot of people just couldn't believe that we had put this person in the White House. I think for a lot of people this was something to do to feel less helpless because the Democratic candidate won by 3 million votes and didn't get put in. That's a helpless feeling right there. When the person who won isn't the person who is in the office. I think a lot of people were there for that reason. I personally think a lot of these, the white

women who were there, there's a wake up happening because white women overwhelmingly voted for Trump. And for the white women who didn't I think it was a wakeup call. I'm from an area where I knew it was going to happen. I think for a lot of people, it was a *I don't understand why or how*, and maybe they needed some solidarity to go and see all these other women who were like them because their mothers and grandmothers and sisters and aunts all voted for Trump and they felt very alone suddenly. So, everyone was there for different reasons, but I think that was kind of what made it great was it wasn't a single reason march, it was a, *Women: are you upset? Come march*

Heather Haley

Why do you think women specifically? Why would a march specifically target women?

Mary Kitts

Well, [in] this [presidential] race, there was a lot of anti-women rhetoric. I mean, Mitt Romney had his whole binders of women and *single mothers are the reason that people get killed* spiel during the debates. We elected a man who was caught on tape admitting to sexual assault. Who uses women as playthings. Who talks about wanting to have sex with his daughter. I think women felt attacked. Like I said, white women apparently didn't, but women felt attacked. We have a candidate, who if she had been a man, would have won. I truly believe that. I think that part of the reason so many people hate her and always have hated her is because she's not a woman who is quiet about things. People do not like that. I really do believe [that] if a man had the same credentials that Hillary Clinton has, it would never have been a question. You know? I think there's an anger of, *what do we have to do at this point?* Literally the most qualified person who's ever run for president and she couldn't win and it's because she kept getting harped on on things that are happening really right now with this administration, and no one cares about [it]. Things that were proven over and over again to have no real impact on national security. Like, the email thing shouldn't have happened, but it's happening right now. Every Secretary of State before her did it, but she's Hillary Clinton, so let's beat her over the head with it over and over again. She makes a mistake as Secretary of State with Benghazi—really not a mistake. She did what she thought was best and four people died, whereas George W. Bush used false information to start a whole war. I think there's an anger. I'm angry. *What do we have to do? Who do we have to put up as a woman that has more qualification and esteem for this country?* I don't know what to do. I was angry because watching him win just felt like a solid portion of the nation just said, *yeah, but she's a woman, so we're gonna vote for him.*

Heather Haley

How far did y'all march?

Mary Kitts

I have no idea. We marched from where we were almost to Pennsylvania Avenue. They had blocked off our direction, so we had to walk around towards the Capitol again and then turn and then hit the left to

try to get to the White House lawn. But by then, we had kind of gotten tired. A lot of people kept going to the White House, but we were like, "let's go get dinner." It had been a long day.

Heather Haley

When you decided to stop, what time was it?

Mary Kitts

I think it was 5:30 [p.m.].

Heather Haley

You had been there from when?

Mary Kitts

We got there at 8:30, nine o'clock [a.m.], so we'd been there for a while.

Heather Haley

And did you feel safe?

Mary Kitts

Yeah. I was in a crowd of hundreds of thousands of people and never once did I think I'm going to be hurt or sexually assaulted or my wallet's going to be stolen. There was this bubble of safety that you can only feel as a woman in a crowd of women. (*pauses*) Which was something that was really cool. Because even at Disney World, you don't feel that safe. Now, if Disney World was nothing about women, you probably would. But yeah, it was very cool. It's very nice. Never, not once did I feel for my safety or worried about the safety of the others around me.

Heather Haley

Did you ever feel any concern that there would be, not something that the women perhaps initiated, but any sort of violence propagated by...

Mary Kitts

No.

Heather Haley

...anti-protesters?

Mary Kitts

No. The only thing I saw was when we were leaving, we got in our Uber to go back to our Airbnb and there's a group of anti-fascists [antifa] that had been [there]. They're anarchists and I saw [that] they had been there at the inauguration the day before. They wear the black masks and they have a whole getup

that they wear, and they were walking through the streets, but our march was already over. They weren't a part of the march. I don't know what, they were just walking around in the streets. I don't even think they did anything that night. That was the only time when I went, *oh, there they are.*

Heather Haley

What do you think the march did for politics in the coming days?

Mary Kitts

God, it really made Donald Trump mad, which was a beautiful thing. (*sighs*) I don't know if this is true or not, but when they blocked us from the White House, the rumor that spread through the crowd was it was because Trump basically threw a tantrum about all of us coming and he had to go to the CIA and we were making him late for his meetings. You just know that he was sitting in there going, *why don't they love me?* It mobilized people. I've noticed, particularly women in politics have been much more vocal. Now, I don't think that's because of the Women's March, but I think that maybe they gained a little confidence from the Women's March. They've become a leading voice of the resistance. Women lawyers are the ones who are leading the charge on the immigration ban right now. About 70% of the lawyers who showed up to airports were women, immigration lawyers. They have been doing pro bono work for a solid week now. Sally Yates was a woman in the government who finally stood up and said, publicly, *hey, we're not doing this.* She got fired for it, but she did what was right. Congresswomen have been leading the march. I don't know if it's because of the Women's March. But women have really kind of taken the front of the resistance and picked up the flaming torch so to speak. Our Republican congressman recently said that the women will not get out of his grill because they are calling every day. They're showing up to offices every day. It's an incredible thing. I think a lot of women were emboldened by this march. I think a lot of women who had wake up calls are kind of going, *oh man, this is up to us.* And they're taking it to heart. I know in this department [history], we have all really turned on the burners in what ways we can. If anything, I think what it did was it gave us hope, fueled us up a little bit, and it really showed women that women are here for women. We have to do this because no one else is going to.

Heather Haley

You had talked just a second ago about the department, what are some of the ways that women in this area, at Auburn in particular, are maintaining the momentum of the Women's March?

Mary Kitts

An undergrad here set up a march the other day, a protest against immigration ban. She was not expecting the turnout. I talked to her for a minute. She was not expecting the 200-something people that showed up to march through Haley Concourse. I went and looked through Twitter and it was funny. I mean, there were the frat bros who were yelling at us, which was delightful. Fraternity brothers. But what I saw on Twitter was, *you know it's bad when they're marching through Auburn.* A lot of people who even said, *I may not agree with them, but they're doing it peacefully.* Overwhelmingly it was

people who were surprised and proud or surprised and went, *oh, this is really bad because if people in Auburn, Alabama are marching, that's pretty serious*. That was [organized] [by] an undergrad and a bunch of us from the department went and marched. We're all interested in what else, other things we can do. The postcards that you've [Heather Haley] set up to do. I think we're all just trying to do the little things we can right now. I think that's what most of the women who want to be involved in Auburn are doing.

Heather Haley

What was the name of the undergrad who organized that march?

Mary Kitts

I don't remember, but I did ask her if someone sent her a message on Facebook, if she would respond to the History Department and she said yes.

Heather Haley

What day was that march here on campus?

Mary Kitts

Thursday? So, the second [of] [February] [2017].

Heather Haley

Is there anything that, going back to the march in D.C., is there anything about that day that you felt overwhelmed?

Mary Kitts

The whole thing was overwhelming. My friend I had that I had talked to [who] worked on the Clinton campaign was asking me about it. I was like, "honestly, I don't have enough perspective right now." I need a day or two away from this to get some perspective because being in it was overwhelming. I mean, seeing someone like Gloria Steinem and Angela Davis, get up and talk to you is a little overwhelming. The mothers of Trayvon Martin and the leaders of the Black Lives Matters protest getting up and talking to you, that so overwhelming. The whole day was overwhelming in a good way. I can barely remember what people said. I know it was great. The biggest thing that stuck with me was Janelle Monáe did a song where she had the mothers come up and she goes, "say their name" and they'd go "Trayvon Martin" and she'd go, "say their name" and the crowd would yell the names. That should have been how they opened the march. But the whole day was overwhelming.

Heather Haley

Did you ever cry?

Mary Kitts

Yeah. The whole crowd cried when this small girl named Sophie came up. Sophie Cruz and her family who stood behind her and she talked about immigration. Her mom started crying behind her and the whole crowd... When the mom starts crying, everyone started chanting "Sophie." She has to be like six years old and she's a voice for [immigration]. She was born here and she's basically saying, "please don't deport my parents." So yeah, the whole crowd cried then. Couldn't help it. When the mom behind her started crying is when a woman standing behind me went, "aw shit," and started crying. (*laughs*)

Heather Haley

When you got on the plane to come back to, I'm assuming Georgia and then back to Alabama, how did you feel? What were some of the reflections that you had in the airport?

Mary Kitts

That was a little strange because there's a dichotomy in the airport, right? So, inauguration people were leaving at the same time that march people were. And I'll give you a hint as to who was being rude and loud about their opinions and who wasn't. There was a comedienne that I liked that was there. I didn't say anything to her because I didn't want to bother her because she was already agitated because this woman was on her phone and loudly talking about how the march was nothing but college girls who just wanted a weekend away on their parent's dime. She was talking about how it was so stupid and we weren't actually helping each other out and she started talking about [how] we were all lesbians and all gay and this comedienne is gay was there with her wife [Rhea Butcher] and they were sitting right next to me. I was trying to work up the courage to ask for a picture, but I stopped because that's when I started having to determine, *Okay. I gotta stand up and say something to this woman.* But instead, I was getting up to go and the wife goes, "Hey, we're just gonna move. Don't make a scene" and I said, "okay" and I sat back down. That was what was happening the airport all day. It was the Women's March people huddling together, talking about how empowered we felt while Trump people very loudly talked about how stupid we were, so we could hear them. I think they were looking for a confrontation, but they were not being given one.

Heather Haley

It's really interesting that when you left, it was so very exciting and happy, and everyone was cheering each other on. You had people in the airport, when you landed in D.C. that were very excited for you and wished you luck. And then on your way home, when you're leaving Ronald Reagan, you [are] confronted with this.

Mary Kitts

Yeah. My flight kept getting delayed, so I spent all day in the airport again. I bought a Hillary Clinton shirt that they were selling. The people in the airport were like, "did you go to the March?" We're surrounded by Trump people. I was like, "yeah, " and they're like, "thank you." So that's interesting. The people selling me the shirt were saying thank you for coming to the March. I ended up having dinner with random people, random women from Atlanta and we just talked about how important it was to

continue the momentum. And so that's really what happened. I think it went from being like that *Yay. Happy. Look at everyone to Okay, it back to reality. What are we gonna do now?* And that was the conversations I kept hearing in the airport, *what do we do now?* We're being confronted with this really ugly reality, people wearing these really gaudy Trump hats and we need to get ready. That was what was happening in the airport. It was hard because they were being antagonistic. They wanted a confrontation and I know that there are a lot of women there who would have given it to 'em. But there were also a lot of us there who were like, *No. That's what they want. Don't.* I ended up sitting on the plane next to two women who marched and a woman who'd brought her two young kids with her to march were across [the] [aisle] from us. And then two rows up were Trump people who were loudly talking about how stupid we were. And the mom was trying to tell her daughter that what they had done was right and not to listen to that man. That made me mad. But the mom had it handled, I was just mad and tired and cranky.

Heather Haley

What was the name of the comedienne?

Mary Kitts

Cameron Esposito.

Heather Haley

I made the comment earlier that when you arrived in D.C. it was very apparent that all of these women were going [to] [the] [march]. When you left, could you tell the pro-Trumpers, could you tell the difference between the two?

Mary Kitts

Everyone was pretty much decked out in shirts. Trump people were wearing their inauguration stuff. Women's marchers, if not wearing a shirt, they have their posters with them, or they had buttons on the backpack or something. I didn't have any tells on, but I ended up putting a button on because I wanted the women, I sat down next to to feel safe, to continue talking about what they were talking about.

Heather Haley

In those moments, did you fear that someone, when you put your button on, that someone from the other side would confront you?

Mary Kitts

I had a woman be very ugly to me while we were waiting in line to board. Real snarky because my pin said "feminist" on it. She tried to cut in front of me and I said, "Hey, I'm here," like, "just so you know, this is the line." And she just looked, and she goes, "well, I don't care." Luckily, the woman who I was standing behind went, "she's with us" and pulled me up. But that was the only thing. As for fear, I think I'm combative that way by nature because I grew up in such a red place, a place where I was told, "don't

put your bumper stickers on your car because it's going to get keyed." So, I don't know if I'm afraid of it as much as I'm just kind of like waiting for it.

Heather Haley

What are some of the things that you have done personally since the march to maintain the momentum and not get caught up in the in the anxiety and the fear and the anger?

Mary Kitts

I make phone calls. I'm registered to vote in Florida, so I call Marco Rubio and Bill Nelson. I went to the march here. I donate to Planned Parenthood and the ACLU. I'm trying to figure out when I can get over to Atlanta, I have friends who are very involved over in Atlanta in activism, who've been nice enough to start inviting me to all their events. So, you know, if I can't go maybe some people that I know could. I'd bring stuff to the shelters around here, which they're run by Christian missions, but they those women still need things. And when I say around here, it's actually kind of a drive because you have to go to Lafayette, Alabama. But I do that kind of stuff. Not hugely important things, but a little bit, so that way I'm not just sitting around. I decided to go to law school instead of getting my Ph.D., so after I finish my Master's, I've decided to go to law school. I think partly because I would like to be involved in changing the law now and fighting for people like these Muslim immigrants who their visas are getting denied. Part of that is I have an incredible guilt complex, like I'm not doing enough. And so, the only way I'm going to be able to get rid of that guilt complex is to do something in the now. What history teachers do is so incredibly important and there are people who will do it much better than I will. It is necessary. I wish I could have been at the airport this weekend, finding ways around the executive order. That's a pretty big life change to be an activist for the rest of my life with my job and get paid to do it.

Heather Haley

Are there any final thoughts that you want to comment on, on the march, that we didn't touch on? Something that stood out in your mind.

Mary Kitts

The signs were awesome.

Heather Haley

What were some of your favorites?

Mary Kitts

One that said, "shed walls, don't build them" and someone had drawn a uterus. That is something that really pissed off my friends and family who are Republicans is how some of these signs were. They did not like the idea that we were... (*trails off*) Like I said, I don't do vulgar signs, but that's just because I grew up in such a strait-laced town and family. I wish I had the chutzpah to do that. The signs were great. They were witty. They were funny. Some of the chants were hilarious about "we need a leader,

not a creepy tweeter." That was one of my favorites. Just the ability that we have, especially now, I think, it's very indicative of how we handle things as a generation. You gotta be able to laugh. So even what we're saying is pretty serious—this guy's got to get the tweeting under control—[but] the way we said it was funny. It lets you laugh in these really dark moments when everything seems to be falling down around you. That's something I've liked about the women's movement so far: there's a lot of jokes. It's the only way to keep your head above water at times. So, I thought that was something that the marchers themselves did very well.

Heather Haley

Well, if there's nothing else, thank you very much for participating in the project and I guess we will call it.