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Joyce Kasprzak interview for a Wright State University History Course

Martell Burleson

Joyce Kasprzak

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A Survivor: An Oral History Interview with Ms. Joyce Kasprzak, HST 685: Introduction to Oral History, Dr. Marjorie McLellan, Winter Quarter 2011

On February 2nd, 2011, I interviewed Ms. Joyce Kasprzak at her home. We conducted the interview at Panera Bread in Dayton, Ohio. Ms. Joyce Kasprzak was the daughter of two Italian Immigrants. Her father was an immigrant from Italy, and came to the United States after the death of his parent and stayed with his relatives. Her mother was Italian but born in America. During the interview, she speaks about her father's difficult experiences of being an immigrant and how he faced discrimination during the earlier part of the twentieth century. Her Mother enjoyed speaking about her experiences of being an immigrant but they never recorded all of her wonderful stories and this one of the reason...
she believes in the importance of the accounts of oral historians. Throughout her childhood, her father was the type of man who would help out the whole neighborhood and she credits him with why she loves to help people so much. In her college years Ms. Joyce Kasprzak attended the University of Dayton she attained her degree and became a school teacher soon after. She taught for a short time before she decided that teaching is not what she wanted to do for her life anymore more.\(^1\)

After she took a break from teaching she attempted to go back to school and acquire more training; she also took some C.E.O raining classes. Another one of Ms. Kasprzak earlier careers was she had a weight control business for 25 years, where she attempted to help people deal with their bad nutrition hobbits. Ms. Kasprzak.\(^2\)

Ms. Kasprzak next career was her battle with cancer. Ms. Kasprzak was in battle between life and death with a rare form of leukemia. Ms. Kasprzak struggle with cancer made it hard for her even to push back her share to stand up. takes a bit of time for what she calls "the survivor hormones" to kick in and to start thinking about "what we're going to do with" those years that won't be just a small part of life but all of it. "I think in that situation, some people flip over to, 'I'm dead,' and others shift to 'I'm alive.'\(^3\) Now a fully recovered Cancer Survivor Ms. Kasprzak uses her ordeal with cancer as a motivational tool for herself but to also reminds herself when she motivating others about how fortunate she is and that's what makes her work harder to help others.\(^3\)

After her struggle with cancer, Ms. Kasprzak in 1994 started an organization named Children's Historical Publishing.\(^4\) When she started off she had to convene the Gentleman who wrote the books to actually become a book writer, he was originally going to write historical songs about the city of Dayton, Ohio. Children's Historical
Publishing is a grant Funded non-Profit organization that Write Books about underserved topics in the city of Dayton and about general history as well, then they distribute the Books to the local schools. Children’s Historical Publishing has distributed over 375,000 books thus far and counting.\(^5\) Ms. Kasprzak has achieved many awards including being mention in the *Dayton Daily News* Top Ten Women of the Community.\(^6\)

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1. Martell Burleson’s interview of Joyce Kasprzak
2. Ibid
4. Ibid 1.
5 Meredith Moss, Dayton Dailey News 10 women honored for community contributions.
Oral History Interview
Name of the Project: A Survivor story: An Oral History Interview with Joyce Kasprzak
Name of the project director: Marjorie McLellan, Department of Urban Affairs and Geography, Wright State University
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Interviewee/narrator name Joyce Kasprzak
Interviewer name Martell Burleson
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Civil Rights
Weight

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Index

0:00:00-0:00:53 Introduction to the recording.
Information listed above.

0:00:37-0:01:06 Organization Explanation
Ms. Kasprzak discusses what her organization does. Children’s Historical Publishing is a non-profit organization. She explains that her organization writes historical books about under serve topics they have distributed over 375,000 books.

Keywords:
Books
Children
Historical
Publishing
Non-profit
Grant
0:03:55-0:6:19 Cancer Battle
Ms. Kasprzak discusses her struggle with leukemia and how it motivated her.

Keywords:
Patient
Leukemia
Father
Helping
Weight
Diagnosis
Survivor
Miracle
Kemo
Remission

0:07:19-0:08:32 College Years
Ms. Kasprzak discusses her time at the university of Dayton, and also some Grad Courses she took C.E.O she also talk about the Dunbar walk-a-fame.

Keywords:
U.D
C.E.O training
Walk of Fame
Dunbar
Wright Dunbar
Campus

0:14:38-0:18:51 Teaching Career
Ms. Kasprzak discusses how she taught elementary school as her first career. She also compares the diffrences in her career. And she discusses the challenges of teaching now, compared then when she taught.

Keywords:
Teacher
3 years
Interaction
Montessori
Dean Lovelace
20 years old
Discipline

0:19:00-0:21:11 Civil rights in Dayton
Ms. Kasprzak discusses what role civil rights played in her life and evaluates where rather Dayton has improve its civil right issues. Also she makes mention to how her life was in the sixties.

Intergrated
African American
Students
60s
Race
Spanish
University of Dayton.

0:43:14-0:46:00 Talks about the impact of her family, and discusses her early childhood.
She explains the origins of her family, and how they came to the country, being that they were Italian. She discussed some of the decimation they face being Italian and how that affected her and she also talks about the important of being able to speak proper English.

Italian
Discrimination
AL Capone
Mafia
Dad
Faith
New York City
Broken English
Martell: the first thing I want to ask you is do you want to explain to the listener what is it your organization.

Joyce: the organization children’s historical Publishing writes learning activities books for children we are a non-profit organization. We take underserved topics and write books about them and distribute them to the local school we have donated over 375,000 books.

Martell: How did you get involved with, did you start the organization by yourself or did you like join it later.

Stacy: Yes.

Martell: so was it anything, like when you were growing up that made you choose the type of career that you did??

Stacy: Yes.

Martell: How do you think that battle helped you moving forward with your career?

Joyce: Moving Forward with my career actually I moved backwards when I came out to defining what was really important um I think that when you, look back in was given three years to live with my diagnosis and think originally when you hear that you wonder what are you going to do for the rest of your life and who’s going to remember and are they gone remember you or if you care if they remember you. And what do you care about I don’t really know and all of a sudden survivor mode kicks in and you believe you’re going to beat this regardless of what people say or what the doctors are saying I was very fortunate that medicals and miracles took over cause the year that I was diagnosed became new treatments for this disease. I was actually on Kemo for nine years five years to get remission and four after. My body changed it put a lot of weight on me being in a weight control business that was like a smack in the face and all of the
sudden I look in the mirror one day and said I need to be happy that I’m alive and I need to be happy because however I look I look I have a little more to offer than the outside and every day you spend or minute you spend is precious that’s why I was very happy to do this for you because somebody called up and if there one word or something I or anything I say that’s helps you or you help somebody else then that’s a win that’s a real fell good that’s a big payment. That’s how the career change I guess I get paid in feels goods.

**Martell:** That’s a good story. About what year or your age was when you figure out that you had cancer.

**Stacy:** You don’t ask a woman her age.

**Martell:** You can kind of just give me the timeframe then.

**Joyce:** It was almost twenty years ago. It was nine years to get out of kemo in fact I was at the doctor this week I got to get checked three to six months to make sure and I kind of had my ups and downs, but I been fortunate with them.

**Martell:** So you went from cancer then you started with this company and I assuming that education is very important to you and.

**Joyce:** I’m a graduate of the University of Dayton and I done a lot of post grad work I never fished my masters. I think Wright State had about two buildings on campus I’m old. At the University of Dayton I took C.E.O training programs for a year I think that even in doing putting my arms around the historical activity books each time we take a new subject I learn all about it I become a minni expert for a minute. It’s fascinating

**Martell:** I’m a history major so.

**Joyce:** To understand. We’re getting ready to do a book for the Wright Dunbar walk of fame the its 125 names on their I’m familiar with may be twenty four twenty five of them. Some of these people I never heard of I’m going to hear about what they didn’t very interesting we’re trying to do it in a way that the kids of today will respond to it

**Martell:** So is this walk all people from the local area?

**Joyce:** Yeah it’s over in the Wright Dunbar area. And every year they induct like five new people of course the Wright Brothers, Paul Lawrence Dunbar. Edwin Moses Ohio Players and all these other names that I don’t really know. Erma Bombeck it’s just this mix of different categories. Don Janning who invented the Christmas tree lights. He’s right in here in Dayton he is still alive I’ve met him a couple time he’s fun yeah but it’s all about people who contributed here

**Martell:** I would never knew that the person who invented the Christmas light was from Dayton or that we had so such important stuff. And what do you think is some of the challenges that you face in getting this information out to the younger people because they got so much distractions that they probably don’t know how interesting this stuff is because it really is interesting.

**Joyce:** Its kind of like to try to make it fun to take Paul Lawrence Dunbar writings for instance and go from plantation dialect to English. And he died when he was 33 I think he was very very young his message and what a writer he was and the things that he accomplished and being good friends with Orville and Wilbur Wright. There was more to the story than him just writing it was a civil rights message that came with that he was the first black Poetloriet and the house is sitting right here in Dayton Ohio and what that does to a kid who likes to wright or you who loves history says wow let me take a look at this and finds out who needs to know and why and telling history you know you can tell the
forward story after you get the history because that’s the foundation that we stand on. This particular book called the amazing arts we took this book and every single arts organization in Dayton the theaters and ballets and so-on we took These little guys, they were brand new in town and handicap and the neighbors were taking him on a tour of Dayton I discovered that Mahalia Jackson wanted to be a Dancer but she was bow-legged so couldn’t move or swing. And all of these little facts. I like under the victoria theater underneath the seats you see like these metal covers back in the days of old I guess outside there was a tunnel and the tunnel use to blow air in the seats. And just a bunch of fun things to learn about and I get very smart about a subject when I’m doing this book. This young man who wrote the intro to this book Anthony Davis is a fun story because he did more shows on Broadway than any black dancer in the United States so happens he’s a daytonian and I taught him in second grade. Now he’s all crippled up but to hear how he talked about how he believed in the arts in his message of what he wanted to really do was kind of amazing to see talented kids and let them have a shot most people in the entertainment world are very happy when there entertaining and they don’t care how much they getting paid they just really want to do their craft. And that’s really important to them he donated a lot of time to his book talking to kids.

Martell: Ok, now you say you taught him so you spent some time as a teacher?
Stacy: Yes three years.
Martell: This is a quite different than when you were twenty. Would you say is it was easier or different, would you say it was easier to communicate with kids then than it is now.
Joyce: I don’t really know I would say that the discipline and the yes mamas were easier to come by but I think there was a lot of dishonesty taught by people doing exactly what they were told to do I think we as adults have learned that we got treat little kids like a person and they count and they have an opinion and you have to hear it to me it’s easier now but I’m a whole lot older and wiser.
Martell: With these books or at least these two I see things about Paul Lawrence Dunbar being an African American writer when you first start teaching was civil rights more.
Joyce: I’m a sixties civil rights girl so yes we marched we did everything we integrated the university of Dayton it wasn’t integrated we had African American students but they had to sleep in separate halls there were all types of things I was totally shocked I was from the Pittsburg area and just lived in a little town a little cocoon and the few African American people we had all lived together so there wasn’t separate side of towns and when I got here and I saw all of this I was in total shock. Remember I’m a sixties kid and its kind of fun now not fun now I feel really good about this now I never knew how this would impact my life but it seems like part of what I learned and what I felt I’m able to give back with these books I don’t think the race situation here has greatly improved laws improved we still have major boundaries and pre-qualifying things and are heads and some of it makes me sad cause I felt like we did a lot of work but its depending on you guys to go forward. And all the little Spanish kids but I think that If you want to do the full circle of life what I really walk into when I stepped onto the university of Dayton in 1963, and I’m able tool to use now.
Martell: What about you think about the curriculum do you think that more intergraded stuff is taught compared to maybe back then?
Joyce: Yeah but I absolutely hate black history month, I can’t understand how there can be black history and real history I think black history should be all year if it happened it happened if it didn’t it didn’t and I’m hoping somewhere in the new textbooks things will really melt together. I think one of the challenges we have in today’s curriculum is how to deal with the children we’re teaching many of them are second generation crack babies therefore you got the child and the parents that you have to deal with and part of the is a physical thing, they can be clean but there’s a physical leftover. Mess to clean up. And that makes it challenges in terms of curriculum I think going through my generation everything was very hopeful all you had to do is get out of college you could get a job you could be successful, and my father was from Italy and so nothing was more important to him than his daughter graduating from college send be the first out of college and that’s all I had to do and today there’s no golden ring for you to grab on to. So the curriculum and things going all the way back to question is somehow we need to start looking at education from kindergarten all the way through college. And get it in some child’s mind and people and parents that education is Kindergarten through college. And find ways to get you there and not have a test that’s going to exclude you from. Or a language barrier that has nothing to do with what your brains are about all those little fun things that you do I think that there is a lot more teacher that are open to new approach how do you feel.

Martell: I think with a lot of regular history I think the smaller people don’t get to tell their accounts this be an example a history book was talking about the civil rights movement in Dayton they you maybe two or three pages. And some dates and they go on and my teacher just told me about this most people think the personal accounts of history are what’s important and that’s what I think most important in history is the personal accounts so, not so much the broad of what’s was going on at the time peoples personal accounts I like hear older people stories about the cites because you here about the negative stuff in the city and older people still talk about the city and such a positive way.

Joyce: MR. Bell when he started the organization that was his whole big thing he had a second family one six year-old and seven year-old and realize when they came from school nobody was talking about the city. His mother had her masters in history and he was an only child, so he was a museum crawler as a little kid that’s what she did with him and he love this city, and he loved to talk about the entertainment the west side and all over town and various things that we started her looking at flight, and how most children don’t even understand the impact of Orville and Wilbur Wright and that the whole computer world came from that and its right over there right down the street, and his expression was his first love was music. Cause he was a musician and that’s why he turn things to song if kids could recite the history through singing it was cool and pictures if the kids didn’t know anything about the building or faces and listening to people when they would tell us there stories and somebody would come up and say my grandfather was actually friends with Orville Wright. Civil rights is probably funny when I read the stuff that they depicted what happened in the sixty to me what happened here I rode through it twice I didn’t know what was happening and I really did I rode through it the first time and I had no idea they were doing all that stuff in west town. And I was coming cross Gettysburg and all this junk was happening but it wasn’t how it look in the news and then of course everybody started luting up and down third street made it a little more terrifying but when I read some these accounts I totally unknowingly
Martell: So let me get this right u drove through the riots and didn’t know it
Joyce: I didn’t know it I stopped on third and Gettysburg I dint know what was
happening to the right of me. By the time I got home my mom was calling from
Pennsylvania, screaming what’s going on in Dayton because we made national news its
funny because I’m like I don’t know what everybody talking about yeah I came from
north Dayton in drove straight down Gettysburg came to west third
Martell: Do you remember what the riots were about?
Joyce: No I think there were pretty deliberate I can’t remember it started in west town
and it just grew. There were race riots going on all across the country at the time and i
think that was a way for people to speak out that’s the way I always felt yeah somebody’s
going to pay attention not that I’m really out here to make a lot of noise to somebody
pays attention and they do for a moment then they move on.
Martell: I want to say it’s almost sad that I live in this city twenty years and I never
heard the accounts of this story At all?
Joyce: There was a lot of looting up in down Third Street as it when on toward the
evening busted windows people stealing and then it became a real hoshposh and that’s
what I think sometimes really happens to the real issues I work with an organization
called leaders of equality in Dayton and we just had over 21 churches involved and we
just had to get over a thousand people calling into RTA, the people who own the Mall,
and the people in Beaver Creek why we can’t have Bus Stops, cause they don’t want you
guys there you know that if you go to that mall in get off that bus their going to be scared.
Ok we have these people saying no you shouldn’t have to spot at Speed-Way on 741 to
get to the Dayton Mall but that were the Bus Stop is or Down By Max and Erma’s it’s all
because of the riots at the Salem Mall and all the stuff over there that they don’t want.
And Beaver Creek. You guys get to Wright State you can’t take the Bus over to Beaver
Creek
Martell: Now you have to get off at Wright State and walk the rest of the way to the
Fairfield Mall.
Joyce: And that’s why we’re going to a city council meeting Monday morning at six
o’clock in Beaver Creek with letters from all over we’ve been working with the RTA they
agreed to put bus stops but Beaver Creek doesn’t want them. Even the Stem School kids
don’t have a ride there it’s crazy you guys have to walk over five miles to walk over the
675 there and were the entry level jobs or jobs while you’re in school and if you don’t
have a car to go there you know. So if you have nothing to do go to the city council
meeting in Beaver Creek on Monday actually the president of Wright State wrote a letter
supporting us so that’s where I’m laughing at myself because I come like full circle they
ask me at my church if I would be interested in stuff and then they thought I was really
cute because I guess people look at you and they presume you a certain way because they
don’t really know about you ok and they’re going to tell me things are first meeting is
that were across town, that was a big scary thing for some people to come across town on
the west side of Dayton, I joke with them I told them I guarantee you I got guys standing
on Salem avenue with guns to salute you. Its so silly its like west third street nobody’s
down there I be scared to there’s not a soul there at night nobody on the street you got
national park rangers running around so that is kind of shocking I haven’t been around
people who was still that hesitant and really afraid lock your doors so um and the east
side of Dayton you know addresses make up a lot statements in this town and you see
how everything just lines and you can see how far we come but how far we’ve not come
if you make it you should be able to live where ever you want to live and you should be
able to do anything you want to do. And I shouldn’t look at you at you and judge I know
all of these Mexicans running around without driver’s license, a tricky situation cause
their illegal immigrants once there here it’s like they wanted to be here for a reason cause
it’s so bad there so I have no idea of what I was talking about.
Martell: this did this back on subject now earlier you said your dad was Italian, and you
said your mom was New York but she was Italian also did your come over. So how do
you think having that type of background effect you
Joyce: what my dad told me was there was a lot of prejudice with immigrants when they
came over and if you were Italian you were a Daygo or a Whop you were something they
called you names you were stupid you smelled like garlic or whine not a good time, I
guess the other side of it, when Alcopone came to be my father did police work and that
really use to upset them cause they thought everybody who had a Italian name. was in the
mafia so I use that today when I get upset you know I’m a Italian so they really felt. And
um my mother being from New York City that was a melting pot where everybody
jumped of the boat. My father spoke with a broken language and his mother died on the
way over here she was in child birth so they left him over here that’s what they did.so
they had a whole lot of stuff to overcome and that’s why geographically most of the
neighborhoods you will find the Jewish population, the Italian population, and then the
black population.
Martell: even here in Dayton
Joyce: no I wouldn’t say as much but in the major cities it was. There use to be a joke
after the Jews beat up the Italians, Italians beat up the blacks, and the black beat up the
Jews and the all take care of each other afterwards. But if you look at the east side of
New York it’s kind of fascinating there is something there that is kind of connectivity
with family and so forth.
Martell: one of the major thing in oral history besides the story is actually peoples
language you said your father is Italian what you say he a broken type of English reading
the Paul Lawrence Dunbar I seen that they had plantation talk and how it converted and I
was just thinking like did you struggle with that growing up having Italian parents.
Joyce: my parents spoke Italian in the house when they didn’t want us to know what they
were saying my mother had beautiful grammar and was well read and I guess there was
never an opportunity just like if you have a lot of friends from another countries they
sometimes speak to each other in that way, I say that’s not nice I have no idea of what
you’re saying, and that’s kin of what went on there to make sure that your children did
not and I do carry a prejudice with me today that my father says I have done our books in
Spanish yet and I know I need to do that my father I will forget driving up the street sayin
to me when in this country you speak English you’re an American you speak English I
still remember that from years and years ago I remember this I think why are we
converting our English language to Spanish if people are coming here to live in America
are they to learn us . and I never realized I have a prejudice to that
Martell: very good question
Stacy: Yes.
Cancer
Book of Job
Children Historical Publishing
Whop
Little Spanish kids
MR. Bell
Paul Lawrence Dunbar