

Interview with Bettie Allen
Tape 5, November 21, 2003
Interviewer: Cullom Davis

Davis: [This is the] interview with Bettie Allen, continued on November 21st, 2003. You were talking about this one bitter experience you had when you were transferred, I think, to the accounting side or something like that.

Allen: Yes, and that was during a time in which we were changing the structure of the agency, you know (laughter) and you learn about management, there are the squares and then there are the circles. (laughter) We were going through a circle thing –

Davis: Right.

Allen: – with things overlapping, you don't have to go through all of these – Well, anyway, this boss was in charge of all clerical help as well in both the Chicago office and the Springfield office. And something happened in Chicago that I didn't even know about and he accused me of being the instigator of that incident because the person in charge of the clerical people in Chicago was another strong black woman and he couldn't handle her either. He thought that she and I was on the phone. Well, at that time, I was a board member of the Child and Family Service Center, and they had been given some playground equipment and I was asking, from that vantage point, if one of the contractors whom I did know and enjoy and he was very good to me, if he would install it for them. And that was perceived as (laughter) forcing the contractor to do something that he didn't want to do because of affirmative action, that I had threatened him with this. Well, it turned out that he would be put in non-compliance if he did not install that for her. It turned out that the person who complained was really not this contractor at all. It was somebody else who was p.o.'ed because he was using his wife as head of the firm, so he could get status as a female business, and he didn't want to comply with hiring minorities or females. He alleged that his wife was the bookkeeper, blah, blah, blah, and all that and, yes, she was a good Catholic and they had 10 kids. She didn't even work in the firm 'cause there were all these kids.

Davis: Sure, so she was really a front.

Allen: So, he reported that I had said this. He had reported this incident and my supervisor gave the name of the contractor who had been, who I really asked about that. Well, anyway, they called the State Police to investigate this.

Davis: (inaudible)

Allen: Yes. And in a nutshell, they, every contractor that I had dealt with, my good contractors. I used to make wine. I don't know whether you ever drank any of my wine?

Davis: Oh, I know about the wine. Yes, and I want to talk about that later. Right.

Allen: I used to give my good contractors a bottle of wine every Christmas. So, you know, the only thing that they really found that I had done that they think could have been bad was giving the contractors the wine. But the big thing was, using the copy machine to copy – you know, everybody did that –

Davis: (laughter) Oh, yes.

Allen: OK. But even that, I hadn't been a part of. I did use the gal that was head of the secretarial pool because we didn't have individual secretaries, we'd go to the pool. I did use her to deal with a catalog, putting together a catalog for us 'cause she was good. Well, I didn't think she'd be so dumb as to (laughter) leave the stuff in – You know, when you do all of that, that goes on file. She left it all there instead of taking it out. And that's the only thing that they really found.

Davis: Was this catalog related to your work or –

Allen: No, we sold, we sold beer and wine making equipment.

Davis: Oh, yeah. OK. All right. So there was a little bit of –

Allen: Yes.

Davis: So it got you in some hot water.

Allen: Yes, but that was the only thing. So this guy said, "I can only slap your hand," my supervisor, "I can only slap your hand for this," what the rest of the agency said was insignificant. "And I really wanted to fire you." So that was the worst thing that I ever did.

Davis: So, in a way, he set you up and –

Allen: Yes.

Davis: – he was trying to knock you over.

Allen: Yes, yes.

Davis: So he was not a pleasant person, right?

- Allen: No, no. And he caught it when the rest of us who had been there most of the 20 years of the agency left under the early retirement, he was asked to leave.
- Davis: Was he? So that was kind of, for you, that felt kind of good.
- Allen: Yeah, because it wasn't just me, it was whatever he was doing otherwise.
- Davis: Do you think he was a racist or a sexist?
- Allen: No, no, no, no. I think he was just an insecure person. Probably, he was not even a good manager but what he did do, you know, he did not stop me from going to, getting a little class here, a class there. He wouldn't give me MBE. I wanted to do the MBE thing.
- Davis: MBE? Oh, "management by example." Right, right. And he, he –
- Allen: He wouldn't allow that, no.
- Davis: – thought that was silly.
- Allen: Yes, that's right.
- Davis: I can see. I know the kind of person you're talking about, yeah.
- Allen: And that's not for me. And he never, never gave me pay raises for my accomplishments. I never missed any of my goals that I set, and I did good papers and he just never gave me –
- Davis: And how long were you stuck with him?
- Allen: I was stuck with him my last five years.
- Davis: Ouch! (laughter). OK. Did that, in part, help you decide to retire when you did?
- Allen: Yeah, he was always a guy who would ask me to stay 'cause I was going to retire at age 55, and he'd say, "Oh, stay! Stay. I really need you." Well, I wasn't causing him any trouble, you know, and that's what they needed – someone in that position. But I said, "Oh, man." And, boy, when he came, I said, "I'm going to get out of here" because I had already missed the social security. I wanted to – You see, when I said "55," then I went to 62 and I said, "Here I am now 65 and I could have been out of here three years ago making the same kind of money." You know?
- Davis: Right, right.

- Allen: But I just, I wanted to show him – I think there was something else going with him and I, I had an idea of him – I always saw Catholics as being more fair, more equitable.
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: And he just wasn't. He was the worst guy. And I wanted to show him that there was another side. Hey, I can take this. You can't da-da-da. And recently I ran into him and his wife. His wife's name was Bettie, too, and we had a conversation. So –
- Davis: But those are, those are bitter memories.
- Allen: Yes.
- Davis: It could have been a pleasant relationship and it wasn't.
- Allen: No.
- Davis: Oh, I'm sorry about that.
- Allen: Oh, it's OK.
- Davis: But in terms of the goals you had and the accomplishments you were able to perform, it was a rewarding job, I guess.
- Allen: Yes, because you know, I realized that I had been performing, you know, over-performing –
- Davis: Right.
- Allen: – to get an OK or an approval, so, and I really believe – I'm not talking about the present generation – but my generation and older, we really did do what was right and did it well. So, you know, you learn that what they said about you as a group, it really wasn't true, it really wasn't true. When you think about how many blacks were blessed with white people who saw them accomplishing and would invest money in them or their kids to go to college and stuff like that, you know, that's a good statement.
- Davis: I'll say.
- Allen: Yes. It was a good thing.
- Davis: Well, let's wrap it up today.
- Allen: That's right because –

End - Bettie Allen Interview Tape 5