



Katharine Jefferts Schori Oral History Interview, August 15, 2014

Title

“From OSU Oceanographer to International Religious Leader”

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Oregon State University Foundation Portland Center, Portland, Oregon.

Summary

In the interview, Jefferts Schori discusses her upbringing and the roots of her interests in both science and religion. She also notes her undergraduate years at Stanford University, where she studied Marine Biology.

Jefferts Schori next reflects on her time as a graduate student in Oceanography at Oregon State University. In so doing, she remarks on her varying research interests, her social experience, her sense of campus culture in the mid- to late-1970s, and the challenges facing women in science at the time. She also describes her early development within the local Episcopal congregation and recounts meeting her husband, who was likewise a member of the congregation.

The bulk of the session focuses on Jefferts Schori's evolution as a student of religion and as a leader within the church. She describes her experiences in divinity school and her early activities as a member of the clergy in Corvallis. She then sheds insight into her election as Bishop of the Nevada diocese and her activities in that position.

From there Jefferts Schori discusses the story of her election to the highest leadership post within the Episcopal Church, Presiding Bishop and Primate, and the particular issues that she faced as the first woman to occupy this role. In this, she recounts the process by which she was elected, her investiture and vestments, her responsibilities as leader of an international religious community, and her assessment looking back on nine years in the position. The interview closes with a coda detailing Jefferts Schori's history as an airplane pilot and her love of flying.

Interviewee

Katharine Jefferts Schori

Interviewer

Janice Dilg

Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/jeffertsschori/>

Transcript

Janice Dilg: Today is August 15th, 2014. I am with the most Reverend Doctor Katharine Jefferts Schori, at the OSU Foundation offices in Portland, Oregon. We are going to talk today about your time at OSU, and much beyond, as the Presiding Bishop and Primate, which is the office that you currently hold within the Episcopal Church. Welcome.

Katharine Jefferts Schori: Thank you.

JD: I think if you would just begin by talking briefly about sort of where your life began, a bit about your family and growing up, and we'll proceed from there.

KJS: All right. My parents both grew up in the Seattle area, in Edmond in particular. I was born in Pensacola, Florida, while my father was in flight school with the US Navy. We stayed there, I think, only a few months, and then lived briefly in Corpus Christi and San Diego, where my younger sister was born. At that point I think my mother took the two of us to Seattle, while my father spent a significant time at sea, the better part of a year. He finished his active duty tour. He was a pilot, a courier pilot, in the Navy, on active duty for about three years. And when he finished his active duty, he went to graduate school at the University of Washington, in Physics. Two younger brothers, born while we lived in Seattle.

And when he finished his PhD, he took a job at Bell Labs, and we moved to New Jersey. And I was, at this point, in the middle of fifth grade. Went to high school in New Jersey. When I finished high school, I matriculated at Stanford; did a bachelor's degree in Biology there with a marine emphasis. Spent six months at Hopkins Marine Station, and loved every minute of it.

JD: [Laughs]

KJS: Knew I wanted to go to graduate school, and I looked around on the west coast, in particular. Oregon State offered me an assistantship, and I believed at that point, when I was applying, that Joel Hedgpeth was still there, but he left the summer that I was coming! [Laughs] So it was a matter of looking around for a professor to work with, and Jim McCauley said that he would take me as a student. And I ended up working on near-shore infauna, creatures that lived in the sediments. Had a wonderful time! I was still—let me think. I was just twenty when I came to Oregon State as a graduate student, so I wasn't old enough to live in the graduate dorms, and so I lived in an undergraduate dorm.

JD: [Laughs]

KJS: Which was bizarre, but it worked. Did a master's degree; finished that in '77, on the vertical distribution of infauna, in dredge channel in Coos Bay, and comparing it to an undredged part of Coos Bay, in the south slough. And learned some interesting things about what creatures lived there, and how they were distributed and disturbed, and then disturbed sediments. When I arrived here it was required that I finish a master's before beginning on a PhD, so that's the reason for that progression. Bill Percy took me as a doctoral student, to work on some samples in particular that had been collected over several decades. Others had worked up the fish in the samples, and the crustaceans, and I really wanted to do some systematics and some taxonomy, and ended up working on cephalopods in those samples, and collecting some others, and looked at both the vertical and horizontal distribution of the zoogeography of cephalopods in the northeastern part of the Pacific, all the way from southern California to Alaska, and the west coast to west of the meridian where Hawaii is, so big chunk of the Pacific.

JD: It's an amazingly large area.

KJS: Yeah, and not intensely sampled farther out, farther off shore. But there were some good series along the coast, in particular.

JD: So it sounds like you had a fairly strong sense of what you were interested in studying by the time you went off to Stanford.

KJS: Mm-hm.

JD: Where did you develop your scientific interest? How did that play out as you were growing up?

KJS: The formative part of my childhood was in the Pacific Northwest, in the Seattle area, and we spent, as a family, a fair amount of time in the mountains, and also in Puget Sound. [0:05:00] The natural world has also always been fascinating to me; my parents were both trained as scientists, my mother later on, as a biologist. She had majored in Microbiology—I think in Comparative Literature first, and then went back and got a degree in Microbiology, and did a PhD in Biology at Rutgers after we moved to New Jersey. So I was formed in a scientific mindset, in the midst of the great wonder and beauty of the Pacific Northwest; always fascinated with the creatures of this part of the world.

Some of the people I read while I was growing up—I read several of the things that Jacques Cousteau had written, before he became a TV star, about his invention of the aqualung, and the kind of work that he did before and after the Second World War. Just fascinated with creatures. I've just been reading a book about—it's an essay about the giant squid. And several of the authors that this fellow cites are ones that I recall reading when I was in this process, so cephalopods have fascinated me for a very long time.

JD: And did you have the opportunity to dive, and be in the water with them, as you were growing up? Or is that something that came later?

KJS: No. Swimming in the Sound, maybe, but that was the extent of it. I took a Scuba course my first year at Stanford, and learned to Scuba dive, and did a fair bit of Scuba diving, both for research and for teaching other students about sub-tidal ecology, so.

JD: I believe you swam competitively in college, too.

KJS: I did. I did for a year, mm-hm. I swam and played water polo.

JD: Interesting. Those require a fair amount of discipline, and focus as well, I would think.

KJS: Lots of practice. [Laughs]

JD: In another interview that you did, you talked about kind of fairly early in your young adult life, or maybe even earlier than that, really contemplating, or perhaps wrestling with both your interest in science, and your faith. And it sounds like—there was one reference to you doing some of this in Memorial Church, at Stanford, which was why it kind of—I bring it up in relation to your undergrad years. Maybe talk about—that clearly was an important part of your life from very early on.

KJS: Mm-hm.

JD: Perhaps elaborate a bit on why those were both so important, and how you approached them at that period in your life, anyway.

KJS: All right. The first school I attended, in primary school, was a convent school in Seattle, run by French nuns who had a rather different understanding of teaching than some of the stories you hear about Roman Catholic nuns in that era. I'll give you an example. On feast days, on celebratory days, we'd go to school and put on our gym suits, and play all day. Feast days were not to be observed in the same way normal days were. And I have memories of these then fully-habited nuns, long black dresses and veils, sort of gathering up their skirts and running down the pitch with us to play kickball, or playing hide and seek with us on feast days.

So there was a great sense that being a person of faith was not only about using your mind, but your whole body, being able to experience the full wonder of creation with everything you had. The teaching there was very disciplined. We got numerical grades in things like Diction and Deportment, and Handwriting, as well as in Mathematics and English and French. And every week on Monday there were prizes awarded for performance the last week. So it was a very disciplined, but also a gracious place of joy. [0:10:05] When I was in high school, by this time in New Jersey—when we moved to New Jersey I began at a public school, in a coeducational environment.

But by the time I was in high school, I was beginning to wrestle vigorously with the faith that I'd been brought up with, and the science I was learning, and not really getting much help in how to sort through that, how to make sense of holding both at the same time. Stanford was a step in that process, without a whole lot of active progress, I would say. It really

wasn't until I got to graduate school and took a course in Research Perspectives that was about the philosophy and history of science, where we read the great physicists of the early twentieth century, who talked about mystery in ways that gave me permission to go back and start this work again, in a much deeper way—a very significant part of my formation.

JD: And do you remember who was the professor for that course?

KJS: Oh, Warren. Warren, Professor Warren, I believe, mm-hm.

JD: Uh-huh. And so you went through school relatively quickly. As you mentioned, you were younger than some of the students that were in the same type of programs. Perhaps just talk a little about the social side of being at Oregon State.

KJS: Okay. I was too young to go out on Friday afternoon and drink beer with the other graduate students, and I was embarrassed about that, at least for the first couple of years. It was a challenge, a great challenge. But the group in the lab, both labs I was part of, were wonderful human beings, and there was certainly a reasonably close social circle in both of those laboratories.

JD: Mm-hm. And do you remember sort of impressions of just what the campus was like, what the university was like during the period that you were there, which was the late seventies?

KJS: Early seventies, yeah.

JD: Okay.

KJS: Mid-seventies. Yes, you're right, '74, and I finished my PhD in '82, so. Very green, beautiful trees down the mall along 30th, 31st, which I don't believe are all there anymore. Many have come and gone. The redwoods in the main quad were still fairly small then. They were eight foot, ten foot trees, and now they're enormous. There was a little bit of building, but I think much of the active building began after I was an active student there. The university was, I think, fairly stable in terms of size and numbers of students. The focus was very much on technical fields, and less so on the fine arts. That began to grow, I think, after I was an active student here.

JD: You mentioned labs, but were there particular projects, or grants, or research that you were involved in during those—and I guess you can talk, kind of, about the master's and the PhD together, if you'd like.

KJS: The master's work was supported by a National Science Foundation RANN grant, Research Applied to National Needs. And it was a survey of the work in Coos Bay, the region of Coos Bay, related to dredging, related to fisheries, related to economic conditions in the towns of Coos Bay. So it was a very large, interdisciplinary project. I got to know civil engineers and chemical engineers, and others who were active in oceanography. They were in a separate college. So, a fascinating network of skills and interests being applied to the work there.

JD: Mm-hm. And as you were going through your programs, was your focus sharpening, and you knew by the time that you were done with your graduate degree where you wanted to take your academic work? [0:15:00]

KJS: The master's work was really quite distinct from the PhD work. The PhD work was focused on systematics, and so geography, and the work that I did as a post-doc, and later with the National Marine Fisheries Service really began to look at more applied issues of fisheries, of squid fisheries on the west coast. One of the post-doctoral projects I worked on was figuring out how to count squid acoustically, for biomass assessment, which is a very important issue in terms of governing fisheries.

JD: Mm-hm. And so as you're speaking, I'm thinking, there's certainly the scientific aspect to the work that you were doing, and the studies, but fisheries are also very much part of the economy of the Pacific Northwest. How did that work overlap, or did it not, in those two ways?

KJS: I was certainly exposed to some of the Pacific Fishery Council issues and the politics around them. By this time my father had been active in fisheries research himself. He developed a system for coated wire tags for salmon, and many other creatures since. So I was hearing something about the fishery politics related to salmonids from him. But the other kinds of fishery politics—both the group that had been involved in the RANN project and others in Oceanography, and

the civil engineers and other colleges, were working issues that impacted fisheries up and down the west coast. So there was lots of exposure, and lots of fascinating conversation and debate about how best to deal with the issues.

JD: Mm-hm. And in addition to the studies and the research that you were doing, was there kind of social aspects, either campus traditions, going to games, going to dances, events? What was life like for you on the OSU campus?

KJS: I was not involved in athletics endeavors, at least organized sports. I was a runner before too long, and so I was doing that kind of thing. But I didn't go much to games. I regret to say I'm not much of a football fan.

JD: [Laughs]

KJS: The track team was doing well at that point, I think. I was not involved in going to dances; that's more of an undergraduate endeavor, I think.

JD: By the time you're in graduate school, there's more seriousness and attention to what your goals are. And you were talking a little about, to some extent, outside influences about fisheries. What were other events of either national or international importance that were going on during your school years that came to campus, whether in the form of guest lecturers, or presenters, or just kind of events that happened that would be debated and discussed?

KJS: Hm.

JD: Anything that comes to mind?

KJS: Well, Richard Nixon resigned just before I arrived at OSU, that summer. It was '74, I believe. Linus Pauling was becoming a more visible presence at OSU during the time I was there. I actually got to hear him speak, but not there. I got to hear him speak while I was at Stanford [laughs], which is kind of odd. I'm trying to think; what else was cooking? [Pause] That's what comes to mind immediately.

JD: That's fine. As we're talking about social or personal life, you also got married during this time period.

KJS: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

JD: Talk a little about—the fact is, no one has just an academic life.

KJS: Right, right.

JD: There's life of all kinds going on concurrently.

KJS: Mm-hm. In 1978, '77 or '78, I went back to the Episcopal Church [0:20:00], and sort of looked around for a religious community environment, and found a reasonably welcoming one there at Good Samaritan. And in the summer of '78, my later-to-be husband arrived at Oregon State as Chair of the Mathematics Department, and started attending at Good Samaritan. And we met formally at a dinner in the fall of '78, and started dating, and married the following year.

JD: And then also while you're still in school, your daughter Katharine—

KJS: Mm-hm, Kate.

JD: Kate was born. Perhaps just a few details about her?

KJS: All right. We married in '79. Kate was born in 1981, and in the midst of my trying to finish writing my dissertation. It didn't accelerate the writing; let me put it that way! [Laughs]

JD: [Laughs]

KJS: But I finished in the middle of '82, and defended it successfully, so.

JD: Well, and I was going to ask you about doing a rigorous graduate program, and being pregnant, and then having child, and kind of what were attitudes about that within the department?

KJS: Challenging. Challenging. When my major professor heard that I was going to get married, he came into the lab and he said, "Well, is this the end of science?" As though one could not be married and still a productive member of a research team. I think he got over it, but it was not a happy time. While I was pregnant I was working at the lab in Newport, and commuting back and forth a couple times a week. And I was healthy through that, and it wasn't a big issue.

Our daughter was born in July of '81, and I had finished all the research by that point and was really just needing to sit down and get it put to paper. Most of the—let me think. The computing had been finished before she was born, and in those days it involved punching Hollerith cards, and taking boxes of these to the computer center to run the program, and writing all the programming one's self. [Laughs] Things work very differently today!

JD: [Laughs] Technology plays a role.

KJS: Yes, and actually, I wrote my dissertation on one of the very first so-called portable computers. It was eventually called a "luggable." It weighed 25 pounds, and was about this big.

JD: [Laughs]

KJS: And it used those old five and a quarter inch disks, and it took quite a number of them to put a dissertation together, so. [Laughs] We can give thanks for some progress.

JD: Absolutely! Absolutely. Well, and I think it's one of those important point to make, though, is that whether you're talking about Copernicus, or—people still did complex calculations and put together all kinds of interesting scientific analyses. It just took a while, and needed other forms of technology. [Laughs] But it was possible to do. You don't have to just rely on computers. And you also bring up an interesting point in answer to my question, about gender issues. You clearly had scientific interest kind of inculcated in your growing up, but the sciences are, often, generally not that hospitable to women. Did that come up throughout your studies, or your early career in oceanography?

KJS: The year I started graduate school at Oregon State was apparently the first year that women were permitted to go to sea overnight on the research vessels, which stunned me. [Laughs] It just stunned me! The first time I was the chief scientist on a crew was on the *Cayuse*—and this would have been probably in '75 or '76—the captain wouldn't talk to me, because women didn't belong on his ship. I got through it. My only real encounter with that kind of overt discrimination, gender discrimination, had come in junior high school, when we switched school districts and I started a new school, and I couldn't take wood shop or metal shop. [0:25:02] Girls had to take cooking and sewing. I was livid; I was absolutely livid! But there was no budget.

JD: Mm-hm.

KJS: Some of that's changed. The more subtle forms of discrimination I think are still there. You look at STEM programs, and how underrepresented women are, and girls. There's still, I think, a great need to encourage girls to take as much math as they can, and to think broadly about what the future might hold for them.

JD: Absolutely. So you finish your graduate program, and then you do go on to work, I believe you said, with—

KJS: Worked for the National Marine Fisheries Service in Seattle for a year. It involved really a lot of writing and publication work, finishing up some samples that had been collected in other programs, that hadn't been analyzed, doing some feeding habit studies of whales and the cephalopods they'd been eating, that kind of work. And when I finished there that year—it was a temporary position, and I knew that—we came back to Corvallis. There weren't any jobs. I applied for jobs from Hawaii to Washington, DC, and there just weren't any. It was the mid-eighties. The bottom had fallen out of the federal research budget when Reagan decided to pursue Star Wars rather than basic research.

And it was a really grim, grim time for me. At the time that I was beginning to realize that if I wanted to continue in science I was going to spend all my time writing proposals, rather than doing science, three people who were in the

congregation we attended asked me if I'd ever thought about being a priest—just out of the blue. I hadn't, and the short version is it took me five years to discover that I could say yes to that! [Laughs]

JD: Did they articulate what they saw in you that prompted them to think that being a priest was a place for you?

KJS: I had, over the last several years, been taking courses, one course a term kind of thing, in the Religious Studies Department, just out of curiosity.

JD: Mm-hm.

KJS: They knew that. They could see, I think, the conversations I was encouraging among others in the congregation, of the adult education kind of work I was doing. I think they saw something having to do with leadership in me, but it was not a package that had ever occurred to me.

JD: [Laughs] But after your pondering of five years, you did decide to go to divinity school. Perhaps talk a little about how you chose the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, and what the studies entailed, and where you kind of imagined you would go at that point.

KJS: When this became clear, that I was going to proceed in this direction, and I satisfied the expectations of the Diocese of Oregon, which is necessary to pursue ordination, I chose to go to Mount Angel for a year, to which I could commute. My husband was due for a sabbatical, and he delayed his sabbatical a year while I went to Mount Angel, stayed home, and then we all moved to Berkeley, and I went to the Church Divinity School of the Pacific for two years. He had a year's sabbatical and then he came back to Corvallis, so we lived apart for a year, which actually has been a theme. [Laughs]

JD: [Laughs]

KJS: It worked well. It was two rather different environments, one very monastic one, and the other very much in the center of urban realities.

JD: Mm-hm.

KJS: In a very diverse community of educational institutions in Berkeley. Great mix. I think I got a good education.

JD: And then when you completed your master's, which was in 1994?

KJS: Correct.

JD: Then you sort of began a bit of hybrid for a while.

KJS: Mm-hm.

JD: Talk about that. That brought you back to Corvallis.

KJS: It did. My husband needed to return after a sabbatical, and really did not expect to move. There weren't any full-time jobs. I had three job offers; they were all part-time, and there was one at home. There was one in Corvallis! [Laughs] I worked half-time in the parish. I was a hospice chaplain for five and a half years there [0:29:59], and I also taught at the university in Religious Studies and later the Philosophy Department. It was a great mix, and it in some ways provided me the luxury of drawing clearer boundaries between the different work I was doing, and I think being able to touch more lives in the breadth of that kind of ministry. I had a wonderful engagement with the students. I enjoyed that very much, and I miss it. Wonderfully creative.

JD: And at Good Samaritan, do I understand correctly that you had some responsibilities that sort of were more kind of directly with the Hispanic community in the area?

KJS: Yes. Yes, I was responsible for adult education in the congregation, and after I'd been there, oh, I don't know, a year or so, a new Hispanic Latino missionary for the Diocese of Oregon was hired, and he lived in Corvallis, and he was a layman. He began to gather a congregation, and he came to me and said, "Well, will you preside at the services?" And

I said, "Hm. I've had two weeks of Spanish!" [Laughs] "I'm certainly willing to try, if you promise you won't laugh too hard.

JD: [Laughs]

KJS: I'd had ten years of French by the time I got out of high school, and so Spanish was a relatively easy shift, but there was still a whole lot of learning to do. It was a challenging experience, and one for which I'm very grateful. We got a congregation going there, and it comes with all the challenges that cross-cultural ministry does everywhere: different cultural expectations, different ways of communication, conflict between groups who have different understandings about how things ought to be in their church.

JD: Mm-hm.

KJS: But it was a real blessing, and a great challenge.

JD: And so after several years there, you ended up being—is it appointed?

KJS: Elected, yeah.

JD: Elected as the Bishop of Nevada.

KJS: Mm-hm.

JD: That's a slightly different environment, and location. Talk about that, sort of coming to that, and that shift.

KJS: Sure. In early 2000 I had some sabbatical time coming from my work in the parish, and I chose to do some research, basically, to interview congregations in the western part of the US who were exploring the possibilities of much more dispersed leadership in their congregations, using the gifts of all the members of the congregation to serve the needs of the parish itself, and, one hopes, to serve the needs of the larger community. And so I took three months in different chunks, and drove around the western US, interviewing these people.

I went to visit a congregation in Sparks, Nevada, and as I left the priest said to me, "Well, what you've done here is a lot like what a bishop does when a bishop visits. Can I put your name in for the election process?" And I just laughed at her! I said, "That's absurd. I have not been the rector, the priest in charge, of a big congregation. I've worked full-time in the congregation for less than a year. That's just absurd! And I'm a woman! I'm too young!" You know, craziness.

JD: [Laughs] A long list!

KJS: Yeah. But I left there and drove across Nevada in a snow storm, into Utah, and went there. It became clear to me in the midst of this that as crazy and even terrifying a prospect as this seemed, it was something I was supposed to be part of, part of the process. And by the time I got home, I said, "Okay, all right. Yes, you can put my name in." And I was shocked when I was elected.

JD: Can you talk just briefly about the process of becoming elected?

KJS: Sure.

JD: What do you do?

KJS: The diocese that's looking for a bishop draws up a profile of what they're interested in, and solicits candidates. They whittle the list down to a manageable number, and then they usually invite those candidates for an interview. In this case, it was a week of driving around the diocese to see the scope of it, and to let people in different parts of the state of Nevada, and even Arizona, interview the candidates. [0:35:00] Then the delegates from each congregation go for a convention, and they vote. And they vote until they have a majority of the clergy and the majority of the lay people who agree on the candidate they want. That's what happened in October of 2000.

JD: And so then you and your family—?

KJS: Our daughter at this point was in college.

JD: Okay.

KJS: At the University of Portland. My husband said, when I was elected, "Well, I've been a professor for 37 years. I can retire. I think I will at the end of the academic year." [Laughs] So he stayed in Corvallis until August of 2001. I moved to Nevada in early 2001, and started work.

JD: I realize this is a very large period of time, and subject, but what did you do as the Bishop of Nevada? What were your responsibilities?

KJS: The responsibilities of a bishop are really for the well-being of the congregations in the diocese, and I think in particular, encouraging those congregations to be effective agents of transformation in the places where they're located. I think I was elected in Nevada because of my interest in this particular way of dispersed leadership, and encouraging people to use their gifts where they are. Nevada had a history of that kind of understanding for a couple of decades, and I think they were ready for the next step in growth in that way of seeing the work. And that's what I spent my time doing, encouraging change, hard as it is. But, how can we do this more effectively? How can we be more present in the communities that we're serving?

JD: Your work there must have had an effect, or been noticed throughout the Episcopal Church, because then in 2006, you were put forward to be elected as the position you now hold, of Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church.

KJS: Mm-hm.

JD: You were the first woman to—well, you were the first woman to be elected. I don't know if you were the first woman to be considered.

KJS: Mm-hm, yes.

JD: That sounds like a pretty interesting process to hear a little bit more about, please.

KJS: Some of my colleagues, the other bishops in the Church, and there are about 150 active bishops, by the time I'd been in Nevada three years or so, a couple of them started to ask me if I would think about letting my name go forward for that election process. It happens every nine years, and we knew we were looking toward that in 2006. And again, I thought it was absurd, that it was totally ridiculous. Not only was I a woman, and relatively young, I was not the bishop of a big, historic or numerically large diocese. I was from the west; all of the other presiding bishops have come from the east, from the historic centers of the Episcopal Church. And I'd been ordained a relatively short period of time. I had not spent my adult career, if you will, as an ordained leader in the Church. And so again, I thought it was totally ridiculous. The process of election is a little different. The bishops do the electing. The rest of the clergy and lay delegates—they're called deputies—to the General Convention consent to that, or don't consent, but they confirm the election basically.

JD: Okay.

KJS: It was an interview process, again, with a committee which started about a year before. They did the interviews beginning about a year before the election, and they put together a slate four or five months before the election. And the bishops, in their spring meeting, asked each of us some questions for a couple of hours one evening, and that was the extent of the interview process. And then at General Convention, the bishops gathered to vote on a Sunday [0:39:59], and we stayed there 'til we finished, in four or five ballots.

JD: So this is clearly a very solemn responsibility, and a very serious election, but I couldn't help thinking there was a bit of elation, at least perhaps among certain women members of the Episcopal Church. I heard about women going around wearing "It's a girl!" buttons.

KJS: [Laughs] Yes.

JD: [Laughs] I thought that was just kind of a fun reaction.

KJS: Yeah, it was odd. [Laughs] It was odd. I think everybody else was as surprised as I was. Nobody expected that that was going to happen.

JD: And so then, there's of course the very elaborate and ceremonial induction. Is induction the right word?

KJS: Investiture is what we call it, yes.

JD: Investiture, thank you. I knew I didn't have it quite right. Which was in November of 2006 at the Washington Cathedral. It sounded like such a grand event.

KJS: It was.

JD: And if you could recount just some of your recollections or emotions about that, being the first and perhaps—I hadn't even thought about from the west, until you said that just a moment ago.

KJS: It was a very moving experience. That's the public affirmation of something that's already been in training for some time. There were a number of people from Corvallis who were able to be present for that, which was a great delight, people who'd become wonderfully good friends during my time here. And at the same time, it's a loss, and you grieve the loss of the communities that have been an active part of your life, as you move into a new role. A great gift.

JD: There were many parts of my reading and research, but I think often there's interesting symbols that occur during an event like that. I read that you debuted your sunrise vestments. Is that correct?

KJS: The vestments that were made—the fellows who made them called the design "new dawn." New dawn. They had a very good time doing it, I think. I said, "I want something that reflects the imagery in Chapter 61 of Isaiah, where the prophet says that—basically shares a vision of what God's creation ought to be like, where there's justice and peace for all. And that's what they designed.

JD: And do you get to wear those as you choose?

KJS: Mm-hm, mm-hm. I do, and I wear them frequently.

JD: I've seen some lovely photographs of them. I was very enamored of them.

KJS: And there's plenty of water in them, too. [Laughs]

JD: [Laughs] So then after the ceremonial events, there is the work of being the Presiding Bishop and Primate. Perhaps just describe a little what your responsibilities are, and some of the places that being the Presiding Bishop has taken you.

KJS: Okay.

JD: Perhaps both figuratively and philosophically.

KJS: Right. The Episcopal Church is present in seventeen different nations, from Taiwan to Europe, from Alaska to the northern part of South America—not everywhere in between, but Latin America, the Caribbean, North and South America, and six countries in Europe. I've been all those places. The expectations of the Presiding Bishop are to visit every diocese of the Church, and there are 110 of them, essentially. And a couple of them aren't dioceses—the group of churches in Europe, and the Church in Micronesia.

This is where I think the natural history and taxonomic formation that I had as a scientist really has been put to use in a different kind of way. Understanding the contexts, the cultural, contextual realities of the different parts of the Church [0:45:01], and what the demands are, and the possibilities in all of those different ecosystems, if you will, and how they need to interrelate, and how one can be a gift to another, in understanding different ways of being in different parts of the world.

To me, that's been a fascinating part of this work, and one that I think has not previously received the attention that it needed, to understand that the Church in Venezuela has to function differently than the Church in Taiwan, and the Church in France, and the Church in Tennessee. They've got different realities, and they need to apply the same framework, but in particulars that look very different in each place. I think part of my role has been really to encourage the wider Church, particularly the white, US part of the Church, to understand that diversity, and that it's a sign of health and vitality, and that without it, we die. We can't be a monoculture. Every farmer knows that growing the same crop in the same field year after year after year only happens with a whole lot of manure.

JD: [Laughs]

KJS: And insecticides, and pesticides. And that's not a healthy way to encourage a healthy system.

JD: Mm-hm. And as you've traveled to these very different cultures, and in your trying to figure out ways, and assist in ways for all of these, as you said, I think, to be different, but within this kind of unified framework, how has gender played out in that way? Because again, very different cultures.

KJS: Mm-hm. The difficulties have been more from within the white Anglo part of the US Church. When I was elected, one of the bishops stood up the next day after the election, and said, "Well," basically, "We can't have a woman! I want a different Primate." [Laughs] Something that's never been heard of before in the Church. I think it brought to a head something that had been developing over a very long period of time. A handful of bishops, they're bishops, and a handful of priests across the Church who really don't want to deal with women in leadership. The ordination of women that started in the Episcopal Church in 1974—

JD: Yes, it's the fortieth anniversary this year.

KJS: Yeah. Other new realities, the presence of other cultural realities, the growing Latino part of the Church, the ongoing challenge of affirming the leadership with people who aren't white and male in the Church, or straight, in the Church—all of that, I think, is behind some of that. And I've been, I think, a visible symbol of the reality that the world is changing. I think that's been one of the big challenges. It's been a gift at the same time, in that we can encourage people of all sorts and conditions to aspire to leadership, both lay and ordained, in the Church, and be absolutely clear that that's a good thing.

In other parts of the Anglican Communion, where I've gone as a colleague and peer to archbishops and president bishops and presiding bishops, I've been treated usually civilly. Face to face, most human beings find it hard to be overtly rude. We've not always had deep conversations, but we've had conversations. And the fact that we can have those conversations, I think, is the—is the beginning of something much greater.

JD: Mm-hm. I was intrigued, I guess, by nine years. Somehow that seems like a bit of a unique amount of time. But it seemed like a period of time that would allow someone to actually be able to accomplish things, and make a mark, or really kind of move some things forward. It's not so brief, like elected officials of two or four years, or something like that.

KJS: Yeah.

JD: [0:49:58] If you were to—I know you're getting close to the end of that nine years. Do you have sort of an assessment of where you've taken this, being Presiding Bishop, and perhaps next steps? Or are you waiting for that next group of people to say, "Why don't you consider?" and the pattern that's been going on, that you've talked about. [Laughs]

KJS: It's nine years because it's three General Conventions.

JD: Okay.

KJS: So we meet as a whole church in governance every three years.

JD: Okay.

KJS: So it's three of those. I think the greater recognition that we're not a national church, but a multinational church, and a multicultural one, a multilingual church—I think there's a much greater awareness of that across the Church. Have we fixed it all? No, not by a longshot. I think another piece that we as a whole body can take joy in is the fact that most congregations at this point are not focused on fighting about human sexuality. They're focused on the people around them who need them. The wider world that is hungry for a word of love, a word of caring, act caring, assistance in building a society that looks more like our dream for the world, rather than the worst thing you can imagine. That's what I think we've managed to do in these past years. And to say that there's a place for all God's children in this Church, that we are all made in the image of God, as good creatures, good human beings. We're meant to be in constructive relationship with everyone and everything that is.

JD: And if we might sort of, I guess, bring the circle closed, when you're thinking about your recent nine years, but thinking perhaps back to Oregon State University, the time you spent there, the things that you learned, the ways that you changed, if you were talking to an OSU student today, or even a faculty, what might you say to them about your time there, as well as where it's taken you, and what you might want them to think about, and look forward to?

KJS: I think that all education, and particularly higher education, is an act of formation in being a learner, that it's an opportunity to expand both one's mind, but also one's ability to learn, one's curiosity. And you never know that what you've learned here may be put to work in a way that you never imagined. If you're open to the future, and open to learning, you may be doing very surprising things ten years from now, or twenty years from now, that will draw on all of those gifts and learnings all through your life. It's a gift; it's a particular gift to be able to focus on one thing that does not often come again in one's life.

JD: That's great. Well, I'd like to offer you an opportunity for any last thoughts or comments, if there's something that we haven't touched on, that you want to?

KJS: I'm exceedingly grateful for my time at Oregon State. It was an environment of challenge, and excellence, and expectation, and the ability not only to work hard, but to be playful and creative in the midst of it.

JD: That's a great combination. Well, that seems like a fitting place to close. Thanks for your recollections and taking the time.

KJS: And thank you for your wonderful conversation. [Pause in recording]

JD: So we're going to do a quick addendum to our main interview here, because one of your skills is flying [0:55:01], and we didn't include that yet. So, how did that—I know that it's kind of a family tradition, but—?

KJS: I learned to fly; I got my pilot's license, while I was an undergraduate. And I was working on a research project off the California coast, Davenport, north of Santa Cruz. We were doing a research project really to lay a baseline for a composed nuclear power plant that has never been built. And we were doing intertidal and subtidal work, while diving. I had a cold, and I couldn't go diving, but I had passed the written for my flying test, and so I went and took flying lessons. And I finished in two weeks.

JD: [Laughs]

KJS: And one of the first things I did was to take one of my fellow team flying. And we flew over the transects where we were working, and took some aerial photographs to be put to work in the interests of science. I didn't get to fly much while I was in graduate school, but when I was elected Bishop of Nevada, I said, "This is how I'm going to get around. This makes all the sense in the world, to get current again and fly around this enormous piece of territory," 110,000 square miles. Indeed, in every community where there's an Episcopal Church, there's a landing strip, so it worked very well.

JD: [Laughs]

KJS: Flying is a way of seeing things from a radically different perspective than flat on the ground. You see things at 5,000 or 10,000 feet that you simply can't see from the ground—where there's evidence of water in the desert. You won't see it walking around, but from some height you will see both the evidence of erosion of different kinds of rock, and the

signs of living creatures, living plants. In places where there is a tiny bit of water, there'll be some green. To me it's a way of backing up and getting a bigger view, and that's something that's useful in most spheres of human endeavor. [Laughs]

JD: And do you still get the opportunity to fly?

KJS: Yes, but not very often. My airplane's in Nevada, and I'm not there very often.

JD: [Laughs] But it is a tradition that's carried on to your daughter?

KJS: Yes, yes.

JD: And she's flying very enormous—

KJS: She is, much bigger ones than I've ever flown.

JD: Is she still a First Lieutenant?

KJS: She's a Captain in the Air Force.

JD: That's great. Well, I'm glad we were able to capture that. Thank you.[0:57:50]