

## **A CONVERSATION WITH BETTY SIEGEL – CAPTIONING SCRIPT**

### **Susan Hoffman:**

SHE WAS A COAL-MINER'S DAUGHTER IN THE MOUNTAINS OF KENTUCKY, BUT HER PROFOUND LOVE OF LEARNING AND HER ABUNDANT OPTIMISM CARRIED HER OUT OF THE COALFIELDS TO THE TREE-SHADED CAMPUSES OF ACADEMIA.

BETTY LENTZ, KNOWN TODAY AS DR. BETTY SIEGEL, WAS BORN IN CUMBERLAND KENTUCKY IN 1931. INSPIRED BY HER FAMILY AND DEVOTED TEACHERS, SHE GAINED DEGREES IN HISTORY AND ENGLISH, AND PSYCHOLOGY.

SOON SIEGEL WAS BREAKING DOWN ACADEMIC BARRIERS, BECOMING THE FIRST FEMALE DEAN AT STATE UNIVERSITIES IN FLORIDA AND NORTH CAROLINA.

IN 1981, SIEGEL BECAME THE FIRST WOMAN TO HEAD AN INSTITUTION IN GEORGIA'S UNIVERSITY SYSTEM. AS PRESIDENT OF KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY, SIEGEL WOULD TRANSFORM THE SCHOOL FROM A SMALL COMMUTER COLLEGE TO THE STATE'S THIRD LARGEST UNIVERSITY. WITH HER OPEN AND ACCESSIBLE LEADERSHIP STYLE, SIEGEL HAS BEEN "DR. BETTY" TO THOUSANDS OF KSU STUDENTS AND STAFF.

IN ADDITION TO BEING A COLLEGE PRESIDENT, WIFE, MOTHER AND GRANDMOTHER, SIEGEL IS ALSO INVOLVED IN MANY ORGANIZATIONS, SETTING AN EXAMPLE OF GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY.

IN 2006 SIEGEL STEPS DOWN FROM THE KSU PRESIDENCY TO ENTER WHAT SHE CALLS THE THIRD ACT OF HER LIFE.

### **Susan Hoffman:**

Dr. Betty Siegel, president of Kennesaw State University, thank you so much for this conversation. It's a thrill, and it's always so fun for me because I always do a lot of research for these particular programs and I'm always very excited when I actually get to meet the person I'm going to interview. I want you to tell me why you go to Waffle House across from Kennesaw State University every morning for breakfast?

### **Betty Siegel:**

More people identify with my going to the Waffle House and I have been going for years, and the other day at the Waffle House one of the waitresses said: "Dr. Betty" - that's what they call me, Dr. Betty - "Why do you like the Waffle House so much?" And I said: "Well, there are a lot of obvious reasons. They have wonderful breakfasts and the atmosphere is congenial. But I started thinking about it. When I was growing up in Kentucky, my father was a coal miner and, knowing that, you'd know about Harlem County and the coal mining area. My mother and father eloped in high school and they

had two little children in the two years after they had married and my sister and I were very close. And my mother would get up early in the morning when our house didn't have any central heat and she would start the kitchen stove and she would invite my sister and me to come in. She'd warm our clothes before the stove and she'd cook breakfast for us and she'd let us read at the table while she cooked breakfast. So, I associated, I think, with the Waffle House, with the feeling of warmth and being allowed to read at the table. So, it's an hour-long session and my students come by and they talk with me and the faculty comes by and townspeople. And so it's sort of my gathering place and it's wonderful.

**Susan Hoffman:**

Your connection to the world?

**Betty Siegel:**

Yes, my connection to the world.

**Susan Hoffman:**

When you grew up in those mountains in Kentucky you said that you learned Mountain values, what are Mountain values?

**Betty Siegel:**

Well one of the things I like about the Mountains, I'm Scotch-Irish and my family is an old, old family in Cumberland Kentucky. I think that I learned what Robert Cole said in a book called *Children of Appalachia*. He said that mountain children were remarkably tenacious in spirit and healthy in mind, and of course I choose to believe that. I like it. I think that the values of the Scotch Irish who settled in Appalachia were those that honored work, the dignity of the person. It didn't matter what you owned. It mattered who you were. Let me tell you a story that my grandmother taught me. Whenever I would be talking to her about families or people, she would say with a smile: "They're really not sorry people", and I wondered what that meant and then she said: "They work! They work!" And I thought, that's a tenacious term - you know, they work. And I like that, that they want to make a difference and they have humble roots often, but I truly find myself being a mountain woman. The men went to work in the mines or to work the land and the women were the ones who really loved education. I remember when I was in the first grade I went to school in this little mountain community and sitting on the stage was my mother and my grandmother and my great grandmother and they invited me to come up and sit with them. And they were being honored for their love of education. Now this is a big memory of mine. I remember swinging my legs and looking around in that gym and thinking, you know, this is something, these women and what they had meant to education in that little community.

**Susan Hoffman:**

You were Valedictorian of your high school class and you said that your teachers made you feel special. Why was that so important?

**Betty Siegel:**

I think it's from those teachers I learned that it's not the place where you're taught or the moneyed school you go to, it's the importance of the inspiring teachers, the redemptive power of a caring teacher and all along the way I felt privileged with the teachers that I had and I became a real proponent of teaching. My whole life has been one in which I want teaching to be, as Parker Palmer referred to so beautifully in his work, "The courage to teach, the courage to teach with conviction and, by that same token, to inspire students," which they do.

**Susan Hoffman:**

So you went to Cumberland College for two years, and you decided at that point that you would go on. You went to Wake Forest...

**Betty Siegel:**

Yes, Wake Forest.

...Where you, earned your Bachelors in history and...

**Betty Siegel:**

In English.

**Susan Hoffman:**

...And then you took a right hand turn into child psychology? Why?

**Betty Siegel:**

In English I learned about motivations and why people did what they did and what were the consequences of their actions and it was like plotting a life and looking at life. As a child I always grew up listening to stories. Mountain people are storytellers, they don't tell jokes. So, as children, we sat listening to elders in our families telling about history and telling about what they, the stories. So to me then that resonated and then I became interested in how you do you pick a career, how do I want to serve, how do I want to use what talents I have and so I felt drawn to teaching, and I started off teaching in English and History and then they added a course. This was in the fifties. Nobody was teaching psychology. They let me teach a course in psychology at Elle Brown High school in Hickory, North Carolina and then from that it propelled me into my masters level and then into the doctorate, in which those three courses were coming together. So when I had a chance to do a post doctorate, I wanted to do it in clinical child psychology. So, that's the evolution.

**Susan Hoffman:**

And you did all that, you were single and it wasn't until your mid thirties that you ultimately met your husband and married and they're academics as well. And I'm going to let you talk about that. You had a very established career; a lot of education and propelled yourself into a situation where you could go on to be the first female dean at one school and then the first female dean at another school. But the point is that you were breaking barriers at a time - you married later, you had children later, you had

advanced your degrees and then you became the first female Dean at a couple different schools. And much was made of that?

**Betty Siegel:**

Yes, it's interesting about how Serendipity plays a part in your life. My husband and I accepted a job at the University of Florida after he had finished his doctorate and I had done my post doctorate. We'd come from Indiana University to Florida State, University of Florida. I showed up six months pregnant. This was unheard of, unheard of in 1967. And I don't know what possessed me but I had the chutzpah to say to the faculty to the men that I'm going to have the baby during the quarter break don't worry about a thing it's going to be all right. They died. I laughed and said that they kept water boiling on the third floor of Norman Hall for me but I literally did finish my last exam. This is the stuff of legend in our family. I finished my last exam as I told the men I would. My husband and I went out to eat, to bring the baby into the world on that day. We went out to a movie, we went out to shop, and we went from a movie to the hospital on the last day of exams and I had my baby in the hall in the hospital. And my husband took all the exams, I graded the papers while I was in the hospital and they took, my husband took all the exams into the to my office before any of the men did and I became known at the University of Florida as "that woman". That's serendipity, isn't it?

**Susan Hoffman:**

"That woman." That woman that could do it all?

**Betty Siegel:**

And in 1969, I was named the distinguished teacher of the year award for the University of Florida. The odds of that...

**Susan Hoffman:**

Of all of it, and then having two children back to back 15 months apart.

**Betty Siegel:**

Right. But to win that was the grandest, grandest honor, I've ever received. To be the distinguished teacher at the University of Florida, wow.

**Susan Hoffman:**

All right since you went there - I was going to wait until the end of this interview to talk about that because you have received so many awards and to think that distinguished teacher of the year is your favorite?

**Betty Siegel:**

Yes, it was an affirmation of what I felt I've been called to do, called to be a teacher. It was such a marvelous experience for me and the President of the University, President O'Connell, was so affirming and I'm quite sure that the recognition of that honor propelled me into being perceived as a likely candidate for a dean's job, so fortune smiled at me and it was wonderful and reaffirming.

**Susan Hoffman:**

And you were a dean for several years and then, in the early 80's, you decided it was time. You didn't set out to be a president, that wasn't your initial goal, but people had encouraged you and they kind of planted that seed. And you began looking and Kennesaw State came calling. Why did you want that job?

**Betty Siegel:**

Well what's interesting about Kennesaw. I was up for some other presidencies at that the same time and I was sitting in my office at Western Carolina University, which I loved, dramatically, loved my work and a woman came in and she said, "I've just been to a neat little place," and I said: Well where is that?" and she said, "I just spent the weekend in a little place called Marietta and visited a little sweet little school called Kennesaw," and I said, "Kennesaw, well that's interesting, I was just invited to submit my recommendations for that," and I looked through the desk, and "Oh here it is, Kennesaw, Oh, the deadline is today to submit" She said "Oh it's a sweet little place." "Oh, never heard of it, but I'll call" and I called and talked to the head of the search community and I believe this is the way it happened, I said, "Is it too late for me to apply? I've got your letter and I've just heard what a fine school it is." He said, "We'll consider your phone call a yes, that you would want to be, you know be an applicant:. Now how about that? The odds coincidences, serendipity.

**Susan Hoffman:**

Since you had other opportunities, Why Kennesaw State?

**Betty Siegel:**

I was intrigued by that little college. It fulfilled what I had been reading about Universities that would be the Universities of the future, and this talking about the early 80's, would be those that are in the Sunbelt. This was big, that they would be on a major attendance; they would be next to a major attendance area, like Atlanta. They didn't pick this out, but I was beginning to see this. That they would be on an economic thoroughfare - like I-75, I thought, you know, and they would be for nontraditional students. The minute that I saw Kennesaw I thought, my gosh, this is a proto type. I'd be fortunate enough to get this job I'd take it. My husband and I were walking on the beach the day that Diana and Charles were married, and we hadn't heard from the search committee. And I said, "Joel, I guess I didn't get that job". I hadn't heard a thing. And a we walked in and I said, "Well I love Western, it's a wonderful place, it's Camelot. We'll go back and I'll be an even better Dean. I'll try hard." And we walked into the condominium that we were in and the phone was ringing, and it was the chancellor. And he was calling me. He said, "Betty, we want you to take this job at Kennesaw State" and I said, "Yes!" And my husband said "How much does it pay?" and I said, "Yes!" I didn't care. And so that's the stuff of legend in our family as well that I wanted the job so much. I thought I didn't get it, so I took it without even knowing what the parameters of the job would be. I thought I was called to be here.

**Susan Hoffman:**

You were the first female president in the Georgia system of 34 schools and at that time that was a big deal too?

**Betty Siegel:**

It was a very big deal. They made a lot out of that.

**Susan Hoffman:**

Absolutely, but it didn't really dawn on you. As far as you were concerned, you were more than qualified for the job and one of your early goals was to draw in, retain, and recruit African Americans and other minorities. Because, at the time there was only six African Americans on the faculty, and that was an early goal. Why was that so important to you?

**Betty Siegel:**

I think diversity is strength. I think it's ethics in action. I think it's doing the right thing. And so I early saw that not only was it doing the right thing to honor and respect everyone regardless of any qualifiers but that we needed diversity. We live in a diverse society. You have to have role models and you have to have colleges and mentors who are understanding, so we worked assiduously to work at the university.

**Susan Hoffman:**

For you it was more than just diversity, you wanted inclusion.

**Betty Siegel:**

I did - thank you that's exactly the better word. And inclusion means that you honor and well I'm always predicating my concern for diversity that grows out of three, four basic assumptions that I believe make ethical leadership, and the first one is trust, that we, by collaboration, can learn to trust each other- that we're not going to hurt each other and the second is respect and that all people are able, viable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly. That's inclusion. And optimism is another factor in that we all have untapped potential if we can just find a way to bring it out. And then the last one is intentionality. You intentionally try to do the right thing. You intentionally want to seek trust. You intentionally want to respect. And you intentionally can learn and exemplify optimism. I do believe in learned optimism. So, all those things deal with, I think why you are propelled to be inclusive. Why you're propelled to be affirming. Why you're propelled to be optimistic.

**Susan Hoffman:**

And as you do this you're growing a University that started at roughly 3500 students when you arrived in 1981 offering roughly 15 degree programs to a University today that has 18,000 students, 55 undergraduate and graduate degrees with an amazing connection with China. You've reached well beyond the community, beyond the state, beyond the country. You started with small things like for instance trying better integrate the University, and creating a freshman experience program that ultimately gained national recognition.

**Betty Siegel:**

I wanted it to be a college of meaning. I wanted it to be more than a collection of courses. I wanted it to be more than just a drive-in college. We used to have the term, “parking lot, classroom, parking lot.” I didn’t want our students to come and just have an in-class experience. I wanted them to have a total experience. I wanted them to have a life-changing experience. And so to me, adding those dimensions was very important to us. I early saw that we didn’t have diversity in our student body and today we have students from 132 countries, but we have 1600 students on our campus who are international. What a difference. We’re the international university. I want this to be a university of meaning and from that has come ethics, across the curriculum in our university. So we...

**Susan Hoffman:**

Part of which includes making sure that students are good stewards of the community? How do you take what traditionally would be a young, somewhat immature, probably somewhat self-centered student, into a good steward of the community?

**Betty Siegel:**

One of the things that I learned very early is that you’ve got to give something back and that to be self aggrandizing without wanting to do something for others would be not what I’d want us to learn in school. I’d want us as educators to really want to instill in others a responsibility for the common good, so very early we’ve been pushing our students, intriguing our students, inviting our students give something back and our University several years ago started a series of themes, and the themes I think reflect what you’re interested in and let me just go through some themes from Oh about six or seven years ago. Just to show you the progression of the University in progress. We started off our themes with, “The Year of the Arts,” we wanted our University to be a place where the arts could flourish because art is, as Anne Kramer used to say, “They fill the pot holes of the soul.” And the Arts figured prominently in my own life too. But then we moved into, “The Year of Service”. I said Kennesaw is going to give something back to the communities that we serve. The next year, and these are subtle changes but important ones, the next year was a theme of, “Collaboration”. Collaboration goes beyond Service to “with”. The next year was a theme of “Engagement,” and engagement is a theme difference. Engagement means that you mesh, you pull together. It’s like a chain-like experience. Those were three interesting terms and it propelled our University to think in terms of what we do in the communities that we serve. We became very focused on community activities. And so now I think Kennesaw is poised. We’re going to be almost 20,000 students this year. In the next four or five years we’re going to be 25,000 students. Daring to dream and do, to take on new and exciting areas for us to grow into and ethical leadership, global ethical leadership. And then you can see character education, you can see all these things fitting in. And so, our University in its growth, we must not just grow in size and stature and selectivity and specialization, we must grow in significance.

**Susan Hoffman:**

When I think of all that you have done I am simply exhausted, but there’s more. I mean you, you have an institute where you can basically train people who are interested in the

invitational leadership style. You're part of Safe America, a whole other organization that has a headquarters in Marietta, a building with your name on it that is very into and interested in teen driving. They started the state's first teen driving institute. But why, why teen driving? Why safety in America?

**Betty Siegel:**

But again it seems to me to all fit. If you really want good schools, if you really want good families, if you really want good communities, if you really want safe communities it all fits. It's a holistic approach to how you want sustainable and good lives for all earth's citizens. So, to me Safe America is the extension of my interest in children. It just fits.

**Susan Hoffman:**

It, but it just keeps going, you sit on many corporate boards, community boards, I mean of all shapes and sizes like the CDC Foundation, and the Boy Scouts of Atlanta, and I assume it's all living by example and giving back?

**Betty Siegel:**

It is. How can you be a part of the Community and not take part in the community? To me, I've said this so many times in my own life that community is not a place, it's what's taking place. I can't imagine being place-bound. I like to think that all of us are inquirers, citizens and we profit from our interactions. I want to be involved in activities. Atlanta is a place of service. If I ever saw a place that honored giving something back to the community. My mentors in my early years here said "Oh you've got to be involved; you can't not be involved in Atlanta".

**Susan Hoffman:**

What role does spirituality play in your job and in your jobs?

**Betty Siegel:**

I like to think of spirituality as being of spirit, of spirit. And to me I think leadership is one in which you enroll others in vision. But, it's bringing together people in a facilitated way. And I think in families I like to think of being a good spirit and schools of being spirited places.

**Susan Hoffman:**

It's a very instrumental role and chord in your life and has been. Do you mind that I tell people that your 74 years old?

**Betty Siegel:**

You know it's interesting when people give my age in the paper. I'm astonished. I think that's quite a number of years, but I started using it in speeches and I will often ask groups that I'm interacting with "How many of you are psychologically younger than you really are?" It's the most amazing phenomenon. Every hand goes up. And I play with that and I think it's become sort of like my signature because I keep telling them that, and



telling myself that, the psychological age is more important than the chronological age. I'm psychologically 39 I'd say and I have two young children just starting my career.

**Susan Hoffman:**

I should point out now that they're in their mid-thirties.

**Betty Siegel:**

My boys are now thirty-eight and soon to be thirty-nine, and I feel very, very young. When I see my age in the paper, I don't even talk about it. I don't even think about, nor do I think we need to think about it. I think we need to think in terms about how psychologically young we are and how do we stay psychologically young. Ethel Barrymore, I like to quote her, she said that, "A good life is like a good play - that it ought to have a satisfying third act."

**Susan Hoffman:**

Then should I assume that since you are leaving the presidency after nearly a quarter of a century in 2006 - you're not retiring, it's important to point out you're not retiring, - as you've mentioned, you are going on to teach Ethical Leadership over at Oxford and you will continue to teach at Kennesaw State University as well, but is this your third act?

**Betty Siegel:**

Yes, I am in the third act. Chronologically I am in the third act. I'm I think psychologically in the third act too. Although I'm psychologically younger in what I like to do but if I had to think in terms of spiritually. I'm in the third act. And I think that I'm really interested in generativity. I love the idea of continuing to be very excited by work. And true creativity; someone has said, is work that goes someplace joyful. I'm very joyful about what I'm doing. And so I'm not retiring. I'm stepping down from the presidency. So to me, to continue in a teaching mode, which I like to think that the presidency is also a teaching mode, it's just a different classroom. So that's what I will be doing.

**Susan Hoffman:**

Do you have any regrets?

Regrets!

**Susan Hoffman:**

Yeah

**Betty Siegel:**

I don't spend a lot of time regretting or thinking about things that might have been. I like to think about what could be the possibilities. Someone has said that pessimists curse the wind, optimists believe the winds will change, realists adjust the sails. And I like to think that I'm a realistic optimist. I'm constantly readjusting the sails in order to keep on being optimistic so I don't think in terms of regrets, I think about my blessings. I've been blessed.

**Susan Hoffman:**

Do you think if you were to have a conversation with your grandmother and your great grandmother that you would have made them proud to be that life long learner?

**Betty Siegel:**

Oh, my, Yes. You know, they were wonderful role models. My great grandmother's epitaph is, "She served her country well," you like that? My grandmother's epitaph is, "Servant to God, Community, and to Family". Good epitaph. Now my mother's epitaph is, "Perfect woman, nobly planned to warm, to comfort and command." Aren't those wonderful?

**Susan Hoffman:**

What is your epitaph going to say?

**Betty Siegel:**

Oh, My, I have been asked that and the first response that I gave, I'd like to be a minister for education. "A minister for education."

**Susan Hoffman:**

And you are.

**Betty Siegel:**

Thank you

**Susan Hoffman:**

And thank you for this conversation I appreciate your time so very much.

**Betty Siegel:**

Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

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