

Erica: All right. So we are recording our interview and Abby I'll let you start with the questions.

Abby: Okay. Let's start with Erin. Why did you attend the Women's March?

Erin: I attended the 2019 Women's March because I've always been a very big believer in feminism and I also am very much aware of the issues that are affecting women today, predominantly like the sexual assault that's occurring, in our culture and stuff. And obviously the issues women face at the workplace, at school. Women of color are obviously facing far more issues. Women who identify as different sexualities are facing far more issues. And I think my awareness of that did kind of push me to go out there because the thing is, is that like saying you're a feminist is one thing and then going out and actually like showing up to the events is another thing. And I thought that that piece was really important.

Erica: So I went to the 2016 march and I went for a couple of reasons. I think I went...it's far enough back now that I have to kind of reposition myself. I went partially because I didn't know what else to do. It was a couple of days after, or a day after the inauguration, and I still couldn't believe even two months later that Hillary lost or that we lost. I was still in major, major shock. And to that point I hadn't really done anything other than sit around and think about how sad I was that this was going to be the state of our country. I had just moved to Kansas City a couple of months before that and had a couple of friends that were going to the march and the march was happening right outside of my house.

Erica: And so I couldn't help but think that I had to go. But at the same time, the emotional heaviness of what happened after the election was still weighing really heavy on me and I wasn't really sure what that was gonna look like. I've also been in a couple of situations where scary things happened in large crowds and so I have a little bit of a, like, I don't know that I want to be here in front of all these people...How do I get out?...What if something happens? So I had some fear about what it was going to look like. There were some threats about people that opposing groups that we're going to drive by and whether or not they were going to have guns and stuff like that. And because I was a part of some of the planning conversations for the 2016 march in Kansas-or the 2017 march in Kansas City all those things were sort of at the forefront of my mind.

Erica: But what it ultimately came down to, which is sort of embarrassing, is I stayed up in my apartment from like seven o'clock that morning until like 10 listening to them set up and listening to them test the microphones and all of the sort of ambient things that happen before something really gets started. And I saw, I heard them dragging the metal things to block off the street. And I heard people yelling outside about whether or not they could park in places. And then my husband and I started drinking coffee and I was watching the national march in Washington, and I had a lot of friends that had gone to Washington for the big march.

Erica: And I thought, I'm definitely like feeling heavy and hesitant about this, not only for safety reasons, but also just because I don't, I wasn't sure what it was going to do for me personally. I understood what it did from an activist standpoint, but I wasn't really sure if it was going to be healing or if it was going to make it worse. And I only had a couple of friends down there, and so the likelihood that I was going to find them in that mass of people was slim, you know. So I attended the march, I think because I was afraid of what it might mean if I didn't go. Not, not only because it was so convenient because I heard all of the noises and everything that was happening down there, but also because I knew it was a historical moment that I wanted to be a part of. And in part I felt like it might be a healing experience and then in part I thought that, you know, 50 years from now, I didn't want to say this happened outside my window and I didn't go. Which is a super embarrassing thing to have to say out loud and I think, you know, my stance on activism and marches and participation is really different now. But at the time that's definitely where I was.

Abby: Okay. So Erin, what was your experience like during your march?

Erin: My experience was actually really powerful and, in a way, validating. Because the thing is is that the place where I come from and especially the neighborhood and the demographic of people I grew up with was not very affirming about issues that surrounded women. And so when I would, when I was learning more about feminism when I was in high school, cause I say that I really became a feminist around when I was 16 or 17, but I would bring up these things and I would say like, oh the wage gap, or I would talk about racism and people would be like, oh racism isn't a thing anymore. Or they would be like, well women get paid less because they choose jobs that pay less. Or like there was just all these things that every time I brought up an idea it would get shot down.

Erin: And when you live in a world where everyone tells you that like, oh, none of these issues that you're actually talking about are real, it starts to feel really unsettling.

Erica Gaslight-y.

Especially when you were experiencing some of these issues because my friends and I experienced like a lot of issues of like sexual harassment. And then at the worst case is like assault when we were in like high school and college. And it's very unsettling for that to be raised as like an issue, especially with like the MeToo movement or different things of sexual assault against women and for the whole world to just be like, no, that's not a thing. Or like you would be in a class and people would make rape jokes or all these other things and it kind of just like, I lived in this really like awful place where it was just like everything was being shut down. And to come to this place where it was all these women being like, yes, these issues are real.

Erin: Like, yes, everyone is having these problems. And I was also made aware of problems and intersectionality that I hadn't even thought of before. So I felt like that was really, really eye opening. There was a speaker at our Women's March who talked about minimum wage, which I, which I have been aware of has been an issue for a really, really long time. But she touched on the fact that a lot of the people who are affected by minimum wage pay are African American single mothers and a lot of them have passed away as a result of complications due to minimum wage, like being in unstable relationships for financial security, which resulted in domestic abuse cases which led to their deaths or a lack of access to healthcare, which led to their death.

Erin: And so we said their names out loud. And that was a really, really powerful thing for me. And it really, it very much struck me because I hadn't even realized that that was an issue before. And that really opened my eyes. And then also what I had said earlier about like me and my friends, with like sexual assault culture and everything is that there was a spoken word poet. She did a wonderful job, but she read a poem about like a deer in headlights. And like when a car hits a deer in headlights, the driver starts like screaming, like, "why didn't you move you dumb deer?" And I looked down my row of friends and I see just two spaces down this girl from me is crying. There's tears streaming down her face. And she starts sobbing like her breathing just became super unregular. And that just kind of like, I don't mean to be like terrible about it, but it kind of

reassured me that we were in a place where people knew that this is real and that this had happened to other people, too. So I guess that's what I did for me in a way like validation and in a way like reassurance.

Erica: Yeah. Of your position and experience as a feminist and like there were other people out there that were like you?

Erin: Yeah. There were other people out there that were like me and there were other people out there who experienced the same problems in being a woman that I had experienced because I felt like that often got shut down when I was at home when I was like, there's like certain issues that I've been facing and people are like, oh, that's not real. Or like feminism. Like why do you need feminism?

Abby: Well that makes me think too, a lot of times people think marches are to show the population or the world that this is an issue because everyone's coming together. But it also shows the people who know that it's issues that other people also see that it's issues. Yeah.

Erica: Yeah. I had a similar experience at the march in 2017 where, I think it was, maybe validation, but also just like seeing that people were coming together not as a performance, that it wasn't about - because so much of the media attention on the marches was about performance and what people were doing and what it might represent. And I'd gotten really hung up and like the two weeks before the march at trying to figure out if it was even significant that the organizers of the Women's March hadn't put out a statement yet about what the march stood for. The, the first march. Now they have a publicist and everything that does that for them. But the first march, it was very much grassroots. They didn't really have a chance to write a statement or to say, "This is what we stand for", "This is what we're marching for".

Erica: And so each march, the one in Washington and each one in each location kind of took on a life of its own. And the Kansas City one was really cool because you had groups of people, families, much like you kind of heard in some of Adam's, interviews, people are referring to like their moms and sisters and everybody coming. Families and children and church groups and groups of students, groups of women that were obviously friends that had come in from a long way away because they were bringing in like coolers and bags and they obviously had planned to stay the whole day. But I spent like the first 20 minutes that I was there, I was casually looking for the people

that I was looking for. Right. But like I was also just walking through and listening to conversations and targeting my ears toward the ways that people were talking to one another. And I got there before all the keynote speakers started going on. And, you know, it was really just a bunch of people standing around in pods like you do at any event. And so my experience that I remember because after, after the keynote speakers started and everything, I really sort of stood at the periphery because of my fear of getting in a situation that I can't get out of. So, I could only hear a part of the speeches and stuff, but I spent a good 20 minutes at the beginning just kind of walking around and listening to conversations and it was so poignant to me to hear the kinds of things that people were talking about. And it's so far away now that, you know, so far back in my memory now that I can't even give you an example. But I remember tearing up and I remember listening to moms explain to their kids what they were doing there and why this was important. And I remember seeing... (pause) My husband refused to go with me cause he was like, "I don't want to go". Not because he didn't support the cause, he just had no interest in walking down the street and participating. And so, I remember getting particularly caught up in looking at other people's partners that had shown up and been there with them and I was listening to their conversations. And I don't know, it was a very like, surreal, almost kind of like out of body experience. And then I started taking some of the pictures that you guys saw it in that folder. And in part I was trying to document the signs, but another part I was trying to capture whatever I was feeling about the conversations about the people that were standing together without being a creeper and taking a ton of videos, right? But like to capture what that looked like and to capture, as a former artist, to capture the juxtaposition of being in Washington Square Park, with the Washington Statue and the Vietnam memorial and the American flag and the World War One Memorial Museum in the background and like understanding what all of this historical significant points meant to be surrounding us while we were doing this Women's March. I kept trying to get pictures of those things together.

Erica:

And to understand for myself - I'm still not sure that I've worked it out myself - the difference between why we show up to help one another, right, to find validation, to find relationships and to strengthen each other at these performative events. And then how that gets translated other places. How the media picks that up, how it gets covered. In the case in the 2017 marches across the country, what did like general impetus for those things were that everybody was saying, well, it's for this, it's for that. It's against Trump. It's against that. And then sort of

juxtaposing that against some of other people's conversations that I was hearing around the march.

Abby: So, and you guys talked a little bit about like what you thought the March accomplished for yourself, like with the validation and things like that. Was there any other large scale, what you thought the Marsh accomplished?

Erin: This is the other thing too that I think happens with like growing up with that background of like not being validated is that I was also taught that like this kind of rhetoric or this kind of activism doesn't do anything.

Erica: Mhm. I was taught that too.

Erin: Yeah.

Erica: And I think that's part of what I was trying to grapple with. Like walking around, I was like, I don't really know what we're doing here. I think, I think I know what we're doing and I think I know what I'm doing, but what are we really doing?

Erin: Yeah. So like when I, so the first Women's March happened when I was a senior in high school and I remember it vividly because I had a bunch of my friends over at my house and we had been, we were talking about it, but number one, I didn't think my parents were going to let me go because it was, again, it was a possibly dangerous event. I was 17 years old and they just didn't seem reasonable to send for me on my own downtown in Omaha.

Erica Yeah. Yeah. That's good parenting probably.

Yeah, probably good parenting. But it was also this kind of thing that like, yes, while the Women's March was like impressive to look at it and impressive to see a number, I was, I heard this rhetoric around above, like what does this accomplish? Like so what you marched, what does that mean?

Erin: Yeah.

And I think, and I think I'm still grappling with what exactly it means. I think that, number one it accomplished awareness cause as I touched on earlier, there were things that I wasn't aware of, intersectionality issues that I was not at all aware of. And that I need to do more to educate myself on. But I also think that it accomplished bringing people closer into activism

and stuff. So, my friend and I signed up for like Planned Parenthood things to help out with those kinds of situations. And then - cause the question is about what did I think this accomplished?

Abby:

Mhm.

Erica:

It's also okay not to know. I actually don't know what it accomplished yet. I'm still, I feel like I'm still figuring it out and I feel like in some ways, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you.

Erin:

No, no, no.

Erica:

I feel like in some ways it's like still rolling because the Women's March was the first big national showing of activism since, I would argue, civil rights. Right? It's the first big national movement in over 50 years that has continued to be a catalyst for other movements. And before the Women's March Black Lives Matter was doing the same thing but within a different, in a different way. And it sort of, for me, it sort of reignited the passion that I had for grassroots activism during the 2008 election because that was the first election I ever voted in. And I knocked on doors for Obama and got really excited about it and I had gotten a little complacent over eight years. And it reminded me that if you are complacent that, that your, your place in the world can quickly slip away. So I think maybe for the long term, it's served as a catalyst for other movements and a catalyst for like getting people on their feet to start other types of activism, maybe.

Erin:

Maybe. And I was, I was also just thinking about it cause in processing what this could possibly accomplish, we just recently had a panel of women because Rockhurst has only opened its doors to women within the past 50 years, which is still kind of astounding to me because that's in some ways I still think that that's so ridiculous. But these women were talking about these challenges that they had faced and how much the culture has changed from when they started at the university to now or when they were actually students of the university to where we are now and how much further we still have to go. And so I was sitting there and I was thinking that like they worked really hard and they stayed in these positions and they kept pushing for what they wanted and what they needed. And I was thinking to myself that like I don't have a specifically a position to push for yet. Like obviously I'm not a university professor or anything like that, but like I am a woman and I do think that it's my duty to stay informed with other women. And so I think that like right now and grappling with this idea and not knowing exactly where

to take it, I think that this was a good place for me to start and now I just have to think about where to go next in moving forward.

Erica: Yeah. I think that's awesome.

Abby: That kind of leads into the question of, did the march catalyze you to do future action or how has your involvement in political activism changed since the march?

Erin: I think, I think it is pushing me to take further action and I just, because that's the thing that, like I said again, I don't really know cause sometimes these issues can feel so big because in talking about sexual assault or which is one of the many issues facing women and facing women in a variety of different ways, again based on like gender, but no, sorry, based on race, ethnicity, position in the world, like that kind of thing. That is so deeply rooted and deeply embedded in our culture. Because our culture is very much patriarchal and under this impression that men can do the things that they want and get away with it. That that's going to take a very, very, very long time to change. And it's going to take a lot of action for that to become not the norm. So it's like, it's hard because this march is saying that the balloons that you took pictures of like silence equals no, no, no.

Erica: Silence is compliance.

Erin: Silence is compliance. Expect us. Like that really moved me because I'm picturing like this giant group of women that I showed up with saying that like, we're not going to stand for this, like expect us. And just the power I felt with them standing there with me was really, really amazing.

Erica: Yeah. I think for me, other than just reminding me that you can't be complacent, right, and I think that the idea that we should continue to stand together. More than anything, it started pushing me to think about what happens before these types of events happen. And that's pushed me for the last three years to be involved in community organizing in Kansas City. And, in turn, pushed me into my dissertation, which is studying the work of community organizers, which I imagine will bleed into my continued careers and academic.

Erica: I think part of that listening that I did as I was walking around the march and listening to other people's stories. In some ways people were answering some of these questions that we're answering now and some of the questions that even Adam was

asking some of the women in the pre-march questions, right? Like, why are you here? What does this look like? They were just talking about that with one another. Right? And I started thinking about the differences between these kind of like performative pieces of activism, like marches and things that get picked up on the news, versus the kinds of community activism that we participate in when we're just standing with the people in our neighborhood or standing with the women that are a part of the same group as us or whatever. And how those smaller acts of community organizing lead up to these larger events and how individual stories play into this collective story, like this collective event of being at the Women's March. What were all the people's stories before they got there? And more importantly, maybe not more importantly. Just as important as the march, what happens in those, in between spaces in the neighborhoods or at Planned Parenthood or in conversations like this, right? Like how did those smaller seemingly invisible conversations and stories, set the foundation and build the capacity for larger movements like that? Yeah.

Erin: And I also think it's really important to recognize, like, it took me awhile to like recognize this, but nothing happens with a single person. Most change requires an entire community.

Erica: For sure.

Erin: And so just establishing this community I think is such a big thing.

Erica: Yeah. Yeah.

Erin: So, that thought kind of just popped in my head.

Erica: Yeah. Absolutely. I think that that's huge. And even the groups of women that organized the Kansas City March continue to stand with one another. They're members of the Progressive Women's Caucus and League of Women Voters and StandUp KC and all these other smaller groups that work within Kansas City. And there's like a coalitional network now that was partially formed when people were trying to figure out how to get this march done. Really when they're trying to figure out how to have a march when Kansas City didn't allow a march, right? But there were all kinds of really smart women and men involved in that process. And now all those people just have each other on speed dial for whatever it is that they need, which is super cool.

Erin: And I think it's also a really cool cause we were making friends with the women as we were marching.

Erica: Yeah!

Erin: Cause I drove my group of friends down there with me or whatever. And my car is named Barbara, but Babs for short. So, we were saying like, "Oh, where did we park Babs?" And some woman turned around and she goes, "Oh, I'm so sorry, my name is Barbara." And I go, "That's my car's name!" And she was like, "Really? Why did you name your car Barbara?" And I was like, "Cause Barbara Streisand is an icon." And then we got into this conversation and she was like, she was like, "Oh we love you girls. Thank you so much for coming out." Like, "We also love to see young people getting involved" and then she's like, "We need to exchange numbers" and all this stuff.

Speaker 2: And just like within walking like 20 feet from the church where we started to a little bit down the road, we had already made these connections with other people, which is really, really nice.

Abby: That's cool.

Erica: That's really cool. Yeah, I love that story. That's awesome.

Erin: Yeah, she was awesome. Well, and then I had my sign which said, "I will donate my organs to Ruth Bader Ginsburg". And that generated a lot of conversation with me and a lot of conversation with other people, which is really, really nice.

Erica: Yeah, it was a timely sign.

Erin: Yeah, it was. I really, I really enjoyed that one.

Erica: For sure.

Abby: Okay. So the only other question was how did you hear about the March?

Erin: It's really funny because felt like the 2019 march wasn't as accessible in terms of like information and organization. Also, I understand that there were very large weather constraints because we were facing like severely cold temperatures. I can't remember how cold it was that day, but it was very, very much severe. So, they actually like changed the march route and they made it shorter. And then the, uh, presentations or like the speeches or whatever, were inside the Unity Temple church.

Erica: Oh, so you didn't have to stand outside.

Erin: Yeah so we didn't have to stand outside and freeze. But I found out through friends because I am a part of the social justice club, Voices for Justice. And someone brought it up that like, oh, if you're ready to go to like the Women's March or whatever, we're making signs, get ready. And I was like, oh, like I, because the year before in 2018 there wasn't even a march in Kansas City.

Erica: Yup. Yup.

Erin: So, there wasn't anything to go to. The closest one was either in like Lawrence, Kansas or Omaha, Nebraska. And I was like, I, for some reason I was like, I didn't even think that they were going to go ahead with this. Like this is crazy. But I found out through friends. And then I, I remember cause I was like, I don't even know where we're supposed to go. So I was like googling it on the way there and I like somehow found their webpage and I was like, okay. And then we ran into this mom carrying her two kids with women's signs and wagon and I was like we're following them.

Erica: They're going the right way.

Erin: Yeah.

Erica: So for me, the 2016 march, I kind of watched it unfold and had some friends that were on the steering committee and watched the conversations unfold. I keep saying 2016, 2017. And then 2018 there wasn't a march because the person that previously coordinated it was not able to, and then she sort of housed all of that information in her mind and it wasn't really written down anywhere, for how to get permits or like what happened before or anything. And so there were sort of this mad scramble like two weeks before the march was supposed to happen. And I remember watching that conversation unfold in the Facebook group and people were just like saying how much they wanted a march to happen and then not doing anything. And I never participated in the conversation I was just a creepy lurker, right? Like reading the comments. And I remember thinking, I even said to my husband, I can probably do this, like the park is right there. I could probably walk down to City Hall and figure it out, but there's so much like is she gonna get upset if we do it differently? Cause the person that was in charge was very much in charge of the whole thing. And, you know, what does this look like? How long does it take to get a permit? And so I just kind of lurked and listened and it looked like there was a

woman that was going to do it and then she was on there talking about whatever she was going to do for two or three days, and then she just fell off the face of the planet.

Erica:

So I had considered going to the Lawrence March in 2018. I didn't go to any march in 2018. I just looked and watched on the television. And then for 2019, I was, I had already found out about this archive and I had collected the archive collections materials and I was going to participate in either a march here in Kansas City and collect interviews just like Adam did in 2017 using the same format. Or I was going to do it in Birmingham because I knew that I might be going back to Birmingham, Alabama for my uncle's funeral...

Editing Note, added post-interview:

At this point in the conversation, we were interrupted by a phone call from a student. You can hear the rest of our conversation in the next audio clip.