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Interview with Jane Allen

Sarah Bush

Jane Allen

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Interviewer: Sarah Bush

Interviewee: Jane Allen

Date: February 9th, 2012

Place: Danville, Ohio

Sarah Bush: Ok, and we're recording. So, um, hello, could you first start off by telling me your name and today's date?

Jane Allen: My name is Jane Allen, and today's date is February ninth.

SB: Great. Great, so, um, how long have you been a postmaster? How long have you been with the postal system?

JA: I've been with the postal service for close to thirty years, and I've been a postmaster for nine of them.

SB: Wow, and always in Gam- always in Danville?

JA: Brinkhaven is where I am postmaster, I'm the officer in charge in Danville.

SB: Ok, ok. Um, so, tell me a little bit about the post office in Danville. Like, what kind of people come in, and what is your relationship like with them and what are the relationships like with each other?

JA: Ah, it's mostly rural. A lot of Amish. And everybody's just, ddf, I guess would be the word. That's what everybody comes for. You know, they come to get their stuff, but they also come to visit too.

SB: Um, yeah, so just being in there for a few minutes there was a lot of sorta joking around.

JA: Yeah, everybody knows everybody whether you want to or not. [laughs] It's nice.

SB: How does Danville compare with Brinkhaven, whether there are any differences between them or similarities?

JA: Brinkhaven is not as busy monetarily, that the sense of community is around the post office because it is the only thing in the community, so if they don't have that, you know, they come in and ask me have you seen Mrs. So-and-so, I haven't heard from her in a couple days. If I haven't seen her then there's a problem and somebody's going to be knocking at her door to check on her. That's what, you know, that's kind of the rub with a small community. Everybody does look out for everybody.

SB: Yeah, so, the reason I was interested in Brinkhaven was because I know that Brinkhaven was on the list of post offices to maybe be closed, and I was interested in, in that, and how, what the response was from you, or what the response was from the community when they heard that.

JA: The community is heartbroken. They'll still have service. I mean, you know, they're not going to be left without service, but they will be left without the face. We're the only government official in town, the only person they see as a government person, a federal person. So, they'd be left without that and they feel like they're getting shafting. For the Amish it's just a complete handicap to take the post office.

SB: Um, yeah, so, is there any chance it won't close, that there's any chance it'll stay open?

JA: There's always hope, ok, until the final nail is driven in. We had the community meeting. Unfortunately it was a really cold, wet, miserable night and no Amish showed up to state their case. I stated their case for them as best I could, if you and I have to go an extra five miles, it's an extra five minutes, a few extra licks of gas. It makes a big difference to someone in a buggy going down the highway.

SB: I guess I didn't realize there was such a big Amish population right around Brinkhaven.

JA: Yeah. Once you get to Brinkhaven pretty much northwest- northeast out of there, is mostly Amish. So the clip-clop's a normal sound.

SB: So who organized the community meeting?

JA: The postal service is required by law to have a community meeting, but the mayor, Gary Worster, did a lot of getting people together to come in and state their case. So.

SB: So, who showed up, who did show up from the community?

JA: Um, just a, most of the people who didn't want it closed were there. Thankfully nobody came in who thought it was a good idea. You know, cheering them on to close us. So that was good.

SB: So what was the case that a lot of them stated, what were some of the things that they felt?

JA: Well, a lot of home businesses. Um, there's a gentlemen in town down there who's an author, and he ships his books, he ships his manuscripts to you know publishing companies and such. He says you know, I'm struggling as it is, if I have to drive five miles each way to send something, I can't afford to send it. You know, that's kind of the case. And, not being rude, but eastern Knox County is poor. And most of the people down there, a lot of them don't drive, either they're too old, or they just can't afford a car.

So they're kind of in town because, that's where they are. For them to get out and get here, to leave there to come in here, is a struggle.

SB: Mmmhm. I noticed also when I was at Brinkhaven the community bulletin board with fliers on it and stuff. Is that how the word gets passed about things a lot.

JA: Yeah. If the church is having something or the community does a Christmas tree over on Main Street, that kind of the thing, the signs will be put up when it will be, who needs to be there, and what's going on. It's kind of cool.

SB: Do you live in Brinkhaven?

JA: No. But if I was going to move into a little village I would like that. It's nice.

SB: Yeah, it sounds like a tight-knit place.

JA: It's, that's good and bad. Everybody knows you, but then again, everybody knows you.

SB: Right, of course. Yeah. What, um, so, are all of the boxes, there's no, like, delivery, it's all just by post office box?

JA: In Brinkhaven, in town, it's all P.O. boxes are free, because they're guaranteed the right to free delivery. Nobody says it has to be to their door. So, they live in town, they can come to the post office, and it's free. Out around Brinkhaven there's a rural route, and he delivers out, anything I think is more than a half-mile from the post office they have rural delivery. So that works.

SB: So, if Brinkhaven were to close down, would Brinkhaven become a rural route? Or, would there just be P.O. boxes somewhere else?

JA: Well, that's on the table. When they had the community meeting, they were asking the people if we do lose you office, would you rather have what they call a CBU, which is an outside, like you have at an apartment complex it's the big thing outside with like P.O. box locks on them, or would you rather put up rural mail boxes. Because they plan to go with what the community wants, to the degree they can anyhow. So they were given the choice, and it sounded to me like they kind of were wanting to go with rural mailboxes, but who knows.

SB: Is it the same in Danville in terms of P.O. boxes and rural routes?

JA; Mmmhm. Everybody in town has the opportunity to have a free one, and they do. It's a good deal, it really is.

SB: I guess I've covered all my basic questions. Is there anything, any other thoughts that you have, you know, why the post office is sort of unique or special in communities, especially small ones. I guess we already talked about that.

JA: Yeah, I think it just is a government presence, and where else can you go that is somebody who doesn't show up that always, Mrs. Smith always comes in at 9:15. If she's not there by 10 o'clock somebody better be sending an alarm. Now, even in Danville, although it's quite a bit larger- you saw that, they will still, well I always meet Jean here at six, you know, at this time, have you seen her? Was she in early? So you know it's just one of those things, that everybody looks out for everybody else.

SB: Yeah. How do you see the role of the post office being in the future, as, you know, technology becomes more of a presence with email and everything?

JA: It's going to have to change to survive, there's no two ways about it. I'm not into change, I like things to stay, but it's going to have to change. Foreign countries have done a lot of things. Most European countries have banks in the post office, the post office does their banking. I believe it's Japan that they have a thing, you can get your email. It's an email, real mail type thing. I would send it to you at your post office by email, and they print it out and stick it in your mailbox.

SB: That's interesting, I've never heard of that before.

JA: It's a strange, I don't necessarily get it, but that's the drift, I'm that doesn't exactly everything there is to know, but I think it's an interesting thought.

SB: So you were saying that you were sort of resistant to the change. Do you think a lot of people feel that way?

JA: Oh yeah. As you get older everybody resists change, I think. But not all change is bad. Some of it is painful. I only need three years and I don't care.

SB: I guess that's most of my questions.

JA: The thing is, this will be, it affect people who don't realize they're going to be affected. If they close Brinkhaven it will affect the customers, it will affect me because that's my office, which means I'll have to find a new home, basically. But, whether I stay here or whether I'm somewhere else, whoever's running this office will be affected because all those customers are now going to be their customers. So it's not just one community that gets the effect. And, you know the goal is of course to lower costs, so you know they're not going to bring in more people. Those that are here will do more.

SB: So how much time do you spend here in Danville versus over in Brinkhaven?

JA: I spend the same amount of time, it's a 40 hour week. But here I work my full 4 hours, I mean I'm kicking until 40 hours a week. In Brinkhaven you work hard when you

get there in the morning, get all the mail ready, put it for the customers and so on and so forth, and then as customers come in you're busy off and on during the day, but you're not steadily busy.

SB: Right, right. So how often do you go back to Brinkhaven, if you're the postmaster there?

JA: Well, I'll go back whenever they let me go back. Right now I'm officer in charge up here, so I'm going down there I'll be working one afternoon a week just covering so Jennifer that's down there doesn't work overtime. So it's fun.

SB: So it's interesting being both postmaster in one place and office manager in another. Does that mean that Danville also has a postmaster, another postmaster?

JA: They have a postmaster that's not been here much. She's always on details, she doesn't like being here. But I like being here, so it works for me.

SB: Ok, well this is really helpful. Can I contact you again in case I have anymore questions?

JA: Yes, that would be fine.

SB: Thank you, great.