



Archives in Context

Season 6 Episode 1: Jacqueline Price Osafo

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SPEAKERS

Jacqueline Price Osafo, JoyEllen Williams, Nicole Milano

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TRANSCRIPT

JoyEllen Williams 00:00

When it comes to management and preservation of cultural heritage and records, one size does not fit all. That's why the San Jose State University School of Information offers not just one but to 100% online master's degree programs that focus on archives and records management. Customize your studies in the master of Archives and Records Administration, or Master of Library and Information Science Program, visit I school that sjsu.edu.

Nicole Milano 00:45

From the Society of American Archivists, this is Archives in Context, a podcast highlighting archival literature and technologies and most importantly, the people behind them.

JoyEllen Williams 01:03

Hi, everyone, and welcome to season six of archives in context. My name is JoyEllen Williams and I'm here with my cohost, Nicole Milano.

Nicole Milano 01:12

Hi everyone.

JoyEllen Williams 01:14

Today we are speaking to SAA's new Executive Director, Jacqueline Price Osafo. Jackie is a certified Association Executive with over 30 years in association management. She received her MBA from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, and has held high level leadership roles in various associations, including the American Health Information Management Association, the Water Quality Association, and the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy. Jackie currently serves as chair of the Black, Indigenous, People of Color Advisory Task Force for Association Forum. Welcome, Jackie.

Jacqueline Price Osafo 02:00

Thank you. Thank you so much, JoyEllen, how are you today?

JoyEllen Williams 02:03

Doing great, so good to be with you.

Jacqueline Price Osafo 02:05

Thank you both for having me. And Nicole, how about you? How are you doing today?

Nicole Milano 02:09

Doing very well. It's nice to see you both today.

JoyEllen Williams 02:12

Yes. Jackie, one of your signature phrases is "I love associations." Tell us about your background and what drew you to association management?

Jacqueline Price Osafo 02:24

JoyEllen, like you said, I've been doing this for my entire professional career. Actually, my background in education was early childhood education. So from a kid, I actually wanted to be a teacher. And I fell into this business, honestly, by doing something as simple as stuffing envelopes. A friend of mine was working for the Emergency Nurses Association. And they needed someone to come in part time to stuff envelopes. And I said, Okay, I'll do it. I was working second shift at a bank. And not only did I stuff the envelopes, but my natural curiosity, open, what I was stuffing and started reading and was just naturally drawn to sort of the mission and the vision and some of the things that the association was doing. I was like, wow, this is pretty interesting. Maybe I should consider it and I just started asking questions. And a job became available. And I applied for a job. So I started working for the Association as a receptionist. So I was the receptionist for a year or so with the Emergency Nurses Association. And my phrase comes from the fact that, you know, associations make the world a better place. And what does that mean? That means that all the things that associations do when it comes to legislation, we move legislation, it's our members who do that. It is the research desk, mostly funded by our foundations, or research that we're doing as the organization that move things forward when it comes to shifting things from the consumers perspective. And you know, many folks have no idea that we actually exist. So in my sort of small, quiet world, I say associations make the world a better place. My family is still trying to figure out what I do for a living. And I just keep telling them I just keep working for an organization organizations. When I was with the Water Quality Association, they said WPA sounds more like a radio station. So I worked for a radio station while I was there. So but I love doing this job. I honestly, I can't see myself doing anything differently.

Nicole Milano 04:22

So you mentioned, your family's still trying to figure out what you're doing. And that's a great segue into archives because a lot of archivists' families have no idea what it is that we do. So our second question, Jackie, is

prior to learning about the executive director position at the Society of American Archivists, what were your views, if any of archivists and the archival profession?

Jacqueline Price Osafo 04:44

Well, great question, Nicole. I think my view was that person who sat in that quiet place in the stacks of the library, so and that person held what I call secret information. So you had to get permission to go to the stacks and you have to get permission to sort of access the fiche machine at that time or to give whatever it is that they have that you're interested in. So it was sort of like this person who sat in this quiet dark area that had access to me to secret information. And so that was my vision. And it was information that I was interested in because it was a secret. So you know, for me, it was like, well, it was a secret in my curiosity was always piqueing. How can I get back there? So I just remember being in grade school and going into the neighborhood library and asking, How can I get back to the back? Like, how do I get to the back of the library, I don't want to see what's in the front. But I want to see what's in a back of the library. So that was my view. When I started in this business, I mean, and it sat in my head for a very long time until I started this job. So yeah, the back of the library, the secret information.

JoyEllen Williams 05:50

So aside from this idea of secret information, what made the executive director position at SAA appealing to you?

Jacqueline Price Osafo 06:01

So, I go back to information because I was that probably annoying kid. I don't know how my parents tolerated me because I was like, Who, what, when and why? And I asked a ton of questions, like, I think about what I did to my mom, it was probably pure torture, because I follow her around the house asking questions. And what attracted me to this position is information. And it just sort of like, you know, when I went to the website, I was like, wow, there was so much information, I was up in the middle of the night, like reading and looking at trying to find more information. But the fact that that archivists maintain information, maintains our history just really blew my mind, when I think about the care that you have to give the objective, the objectivity that you have to hear, give when someone wants to access that information. So, and I looked at what was this field doing when it comes to, you know, as a person of color as a woman when it when we think about diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility. I mean, you guys have been working on this since I'm going to say we guys now so, SAA has been working on this since 2002. And when I compare what my colleagues are doing to what we have been doing, we're hitting it out of the ballpark. You know, and I know some of us may feel that it's a slow train. But from my perspective, when I do a comparison, it is a fast moving train. And our train has been moving for a very long time. And some folks are just starting up their engine, like we have probably 20 cabooses and they just have one caboose when we look at diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility. So again, it was just access to information and the care of information that attracted me. So lots of things. But yeah, it wasn't a difficult sale.

Nicole Milano 08:01

Jackie, you mentioned your views of the archival profession before joining SAA but what have you learned about archives and archivists since becoming the executive director? Has anything about the profession surprised you now that you've had a chance to meet many SAA staff and members?

Jacqueline Price Osafo 08:17

I guess my surprises have been pleasant surprises honestly. Nicole, when I think about the season that we're in right now, the hurricane season, you know, and what we are able to offer our members and how we can support our members through through the NDRFA grant that we offer for folks experiencing disasters. That wasn't a surprise, but it was it was pleasant to see that, that we support each other when we look at the profession, the AWEF what was what was done during the pandemic. Again, not a pleasant not a surprise but it was pleasant to see that we reach out and we go beyond what we do as a profession and we help each other out so those things were very, very impressive what COPP and COPA is doing as we look at public policy and public awareness and the role that we play in that--all pleasant surprises so nothing that I was disappointed or that shifted my thought or made me think I made a mistake but all things that confirm that I made the right decision so all pleasant surprises.

JoyEllen Williams 09:21

Jackie, I just love your positivity and your go-getter attitude. And I'd like to know what are the opportunities and challenges of succeeding an executive director with an 18-year tenure?

Jacqueline Price Osafo 09:37

Well, I mean, challenges of course, because when you walk into a space of someone who has been in this space for 18 years, they're big shoes to fill. Nancy Beaumont, she she did some amazing work. And uh, you know one of her last words to me was Jackie take care of our baby. You know, and I felt that was so heartfelt that she was confident in me in terms of making sure that I take care of the organization take care of the members and the staff. So of course, big shoes to feel. And honestly, there's always a shift. There's a shift in how we look at things, there's a shift in direction of the organization, when you look at a shift in leadership, and there are going to be some prickly moments. Of course, they're supposed to be prickly moments, because otherwise, why make a shift, and there's going to be some great moments. So I'm excited about all the amazing opportunities is going to show up in the next few years in the next year, the next six months. So all great things, but shift happens. And it's supposed to happen. And I may be a small disruption, but at the end of the day, you'll be very proud. And I will make sure that in the words of Nancy Beaumont that I take care of her baby. So I'm looking forward to all the amazing things that we will do as an organization.

Nicole Milano 10:53

So Jackie, you talked a bit about what SAA has already been doing, and really what pulled you to the organization. But where do you see the association heading in the next 5 to 10 years? And specifically, are there any goals or objectives that you personally would like to advance over the next few years?

Jacqueline Price Osafo 11:10

And so I'm gonna press pause on that question. And you know what, I'm going to press pause on that question, because I am only celebrating, what, two months and a few days here at SAA, so since I started on July 12. And the reason why I'm pressing pause, because, like archivists, I like information, I like to know the facts. I like to collect data before I make a statement. So while we're in this season of strategic planning, the end of the season, the foundation, looking at how they're doing things, how they wish to do things, I'm going to press

pause, and I'm going to ask you to come back and ask me that question. And six months in a year, because I like to collect data before I put my foot out there and say, here's what I will see us doing. But the one thing that I'm for sure and 100% about is I want the association community to know that we exist, I want the association committee to understand that they need to archive their history, because as an association executive, I have sat in a space where an association has decided on the 50th anniversary, what should we do? And no one knows what happened 50 years prior to that, you know, or when we look at communities, and we look at the general public. And as I tell people what I do, they're like, archivists, what are what is that, like, I'm like, come on, you haven't heard of us, like what's wrong with you, wherever you've been, but the community and the world needs to know that we exist, and the importance of why we exist, and the information that we hold, and why is important for us to have a space and your universities in your communities. And wherever it exists. Wherever you live, it's important for us to hold the space in there. And it's important for you to understand this space. So there are there are two things that are for sure about, but in terms of strategy, I'm going to hold my opinion. And I'm going to wait until we get our strategic plan out there. And our foundation folks move forward on their strategies. And I'm going to say come back and ask me again.

Nicole Milano 13:01

Well, we love that message of advocacy and helping others understand why we exist. And we're going to hold you to that, Jackie, we're happy to come back and re-interview in six months. Don't you worry.

Jacqueline Price Osafo 13:11

Definitely. Definitely.

JoyEllen Williams 13:14

Absolutely. We completely respect that. Thank you so much, Jackie. Now for a couple fun things. Jackie, can you tell us something about yourself that most people do not know.

Jacqueline Price Osafo 13:31

I think I've shared this, that I'm from a large family that I have seven siblings. I am the second sibling, my oldest sibling is mentally disabled. And he takes my breath away. Because he has managed to live in his world in spite of his disabilities. And I probably should tell him that, you know, that, you know, and that this is going to make me emotional that he's one of those people in the world who takes my breath away because he's managed to survive and do well. He has this this excellent ear for music. He knows how to play the piano. He knows how to play the guitar. And he learned by listening and god, even if you like if I took lessons, there's no way I wouldn't learn how to do that. But most people probably don't know that one of the people who take my breath away, doesn't look like you and I so my superhero is not someone you'll see on TV. My superheroes are people who, who have made an impact on my life. And I will say my parents first and then my oldest brother.

JoyEllen Williams 14:46

That's amazing, Jackie. And I imagine that as well your relationship with your brother has produced a sense of empathy, and that you know that you've that you can bring throughout your life. So that's, that's wonderful.

Nicole Milano 15:02

Yes. Well, it sounds like your brother has a lot of superpowers already. But if you could choose any superpower, what would it be? And why?

Jacqueline Price Osafo 15:10

It's funny that I was doing an interview earlier this year. And I was asked this very same question. And I started off talking about being able to bring people together in a room and bringing folks to the table. And not only do I focus on bringing folks to the table, but giving everyone a voice at the table. So that may have come from my relationship with my brother is giving those quiet people who are sitting by the sidelines, those folks that no one's paying attention to, I bring them to the table and I want to hear their voice, I think is important for us to care for what I call the least of these and at least to be least of these be folks so very different from us, from the perspective of gender, ethnicity, sexual preference, any of that, but making sure that everyone has a voice at the table. And when you put all these voices together the magic that you make from that. So what would be my superpower? After I described that to this person, he said, Jackie, then your superpower is a composer. I love music, and I love how different instruments make such an amazing sounds. So I'm gonna say I'm gonna go with what my friend said and say that my superpower is a composer and it's bringing the voices of everyone, regardless of your background, to the table so that we can make a beautiful sound.

Nicole Milano 16:41

That's a beautiful answer.

JoyEllen Williams 16:43

Thank you. Yes, Jackie, that was so well stated. Thank you so much. Again, thank you for joining us today. Honestly, I think I can speak for everyone when I say that we feel so fortunate to have you as a part of SAA. We look forward to working collaboratively with you to achieve new goals and to continuously advocate for the archival profession, as you mentioned. So thank you again, we truly appreciate your time and your words.

Jacqueline Price Osafo 17:18

Well, thank you, both JoyEllen and Nicole for asking me to sit in his face and to show up today. And thank you SAA for for believing in me and I'm super excited about what we'll do together and you know where to find me. If you need anything. You have any questions concern, you know where to find me. So, thank you once again, I truly appreciate it.

Nicole Milano 17:44

You've just listened to an episode of Archives in Context, the official podcast of the Society of American Archivists. Members of the podcast team include Bethany Anderson, Chris Burns, Mary Caldera, Nicole Milano, Lolita Rowe, Anna Trammell and JoyEllen Williams. Opinions expressed in this podcasts are our own and are not reflective of a particular institution. Be sure to subscribe and rate us on iTunes if you enjoyed what you heard. And join us again next time.