

## THE STORY GOES | RACHELL HATHAWAY | BANK OF AMERICA

**MOLLY:** Hello! It's Molly and Kiran with SA2020, and this is The Story Goes, a partnership with KLRN, your local public television station here in San Antonio, Texas. The Story Goes is a podcast that allows for a more complete telling of San Antonio's story by chatting with humans and people who work inside organizations and are doing the thing in a much different way. It's also a podcast that focuses specifically on politics and religion. (KIRAN laughs) Rachell Hathaway—

**RACHELL:** I'm ready.

**MOLLY:** Inside joke! Inside joke, and it's fine. We're not talking politics and religion.

**RACHELL:** We shan't, we shan't.

**MOLLY:** We can't. It doesn't matter. It's fine. Rachell Hathaway is joining us today. One of our favorites.

**KIRAN:** Yes, we are longtime fans.

**MOLLY:** First time caller. Isn't that like a thing? People say that?

**KIRAN:** Yes.

**MOLLY:** Big fans. First time interviewer. Rachell works at Bank of America. We've had the pleasure of working with you in your role at Bank of America. Also, graduate student, philanthropist, Board member, volunteer.

**RACHELL:** I am a San Antonio girl, and I love my city. Yes, yes, yes. (1:23)

**MOLLY:** You're doing all the things, which I appreciate so much, and that's kind of why we brought you in. We want to be able to tell a more complete story of human beings, who are legitimately working to help our communities collective well-being. You feel a responsibility to your city, which I appreciate so much.

**KIRAN:** Let's start there. I want to hear more. Can you tell us how you grew up in San Antonio? Where this inspiration for a commitment to leadership, and service, and responsibility to the city comes from for you? (1:58)

**RACHELL:** Absolutely. I would be fibbing, if I just said, "I knew. I had this vision." I am sincerely just a product of the city. I grew up on San Antonio's eastside. I graduated from Sam Houston High School, class of '95. Whoop, whoop! So, there were a lot of different experiences I went through when I was a young child, that I didn't realize at the time, that it was shaping me into the women I would be, and what I feel is an obligation. It wasn't there. It wasn't innate and that

I was born with. I didn't volunteer as a child. It wasn't one of those community responsibility things that we just talked about in our household. You survived. That's what we did. We did what we had to do to continue living each day. So, that being said, transitioning fast forward to needing a job, and seeing all of the ATMs that that Bank of America had, just monopolizing our city at the time, I thought this is a pretty big company. I might need somewhere to work. (3:08)

**MOLLY:** I love that you're like—

**KIRAN:** I saw ATMs everywhere, they must be hiring! They need people.

**RACHELL:** I was like, "they have all these ATMs!" So, quite honestly, my desire to work took me to Bank of America. I had great mentors that saw something in me that I didn't really see at that age. Being 25, I've been with the bank for 17 years, doing this particular work since the age of 30, so about 12 years. So, just gaining some perspective, the funny thing that I like to say is, I remember reading about the poor, little inner-city children, and I didn't realize I was one of them. I didn't realize, and then when I came into corporate social responsibility, I thought, "Wow. There have been people working behind the scenes for years." Really just trying to balance out the institutional racism, institutional inequality, and things of that nature. Once I started to learn that, it grew my desire to be a part of what makes a difference and what impacts the city. (4:13)

**KIRAN:** Tell us more about what it means to be working there at corporate responsibility.

**RACHELL:** Absolutely. So, again as I mentioned, I started out at the bank at 25. I was a customer service representative. This is interesting to me, but every role I've had at the bank has pretty much been created. So, it's not something that was there. So, I'm a true believer in the manifestation of our destiny, and thinking of what we create, and things of that nature. Fast forwarding 12 years ago, coming into the corporate social responsibility role, not having the clear understanding outside of the administrator piece, I have a background in Business Administration with a concentration in Finance. So, budgeting and things of that nature were really what my focus was—

**MOLLY:** I immediately am like, "great, help me at home." (laughs) I need help so bad. (5:07)

**RACHELL:** That is my thing. That within itself... don't get me started on financial literacy because I have children. That within itself has a big component of understanding that I had when I was younger, that I just assumed everyone had, and that was not the case.

**MOLLY:** There's something about financial literacy just generally. So, I find that particularly interesting. Of course, you go into a bank if you like finances. You have a concentration in business and finance. Then, you're moving and sort of shifting, they're creating positions for you. You land in this space around corporate social responsibility. Did it click for you immediately? (5:47)

**RACHELL:** Oh gosh, no. I would say in more recent years, again started in 2007, just the administrative mostly. That role transitioned a little bit where I had a broader geography. I had a great leader, who was just getting me to think broader about the work that we are doing, again not really clicking. Then, I transitioned in 2015 to project management. So, my strength task and organization, I love that. In 2017, was when the opportunity came up. One thing I call out about Bank of America is that they are very invested in diversity and inclusion in regards to our employee workforce. I did my undergrad and everything, while I was at Bank of America. I started school, used tuition reimbursement, again, grew up with the bank. When it clicked was an opportunity in a leadership program that I went through with Bank of America, earlier in the year, that really just made me start connecting the dots. We have this saying within our organization is “starting the conversations, what would you like the power to do?” And I stopped, and I asked myself that, and I wanted the power to build a legacy for my family, for my community. So, slowly, it very organically within the past two years that the “aha moment” came of “your voice needs to be heard.” When they are talking about, I participated in what they call, “Courageous Conversations,” and so again, you’re talking about an organization that is investing in its people in a way that made a shy, little girl from the Eastside feel strong and confident, and see that my skills are applicable to the work that needs to be done in this community, and then to realize, you didn’t search out this role. You didn’t search out this position, but you are uniquely qualified based on your background, tie in your education, and layer that with grad school, and then having children coming through college and graduating. It’s at times quite overwhelming, but humbling, very humbling. (8:04)

**MOLLY:** There’s something very specific about you that in all the times I’ve seen you speak, or in the roles that you’ve put yourself into, so it’s Board Members, Committee Members, or as a just member of the community, you do it with such wholehearted for realness. There’s no sort of like, I’m half-assing this. You’re like, “I’m in!”

**KIRAN:** You show up hard when you say yes.

**RACHELL:** My personality, I’m very Type A. I wish I knew how to just kind of settle down, and not feel like I could do anything less than 110%. I don’t have the ability to do that, even if I’m giving 110, and you know, failure is a part of the process in some cases, it just hits me in a different way.

**KIRAN:** You’re in good company. (8:53)

**MOLLY:** We know a little bit about that. (KIRAN laughs)

**RACHELL:** That being said, when I had children, I was throwing myself in head first. It’s the way I operate as an individual. When I got into a point where I was able to settle down and focus solely on San Antonio. I really had to think, for the years you can imagine being within corporate funding and philanthropy, you get a lot of taps and asks. You serve on this board, and for different reasons. For me, personally, I always say I am not Vice President of Community Relations at Bank of America, Rachell Hathaway. I am *Rachell Hathaway*, who happens to be a

Vice President of Community Relations at Bank of America. That's one that guides me. When I did have the opportunity to sit back and say, "Okay, I need to get engaged in my community. Board service is the way to go." How do I kind of hone in on the appropriate organizations? How can I make my story and my background not just my work? You know, kind of apply to what this is, and what can I get from it as well? That was significant to me. So, I've landed with two organizations that I'm very proud to serve with. One is the San Antonio African American Community Archive Museum. The interesting thing about that is it shares such a rich history about the Sutton Family, who is a very prominent family in San Antonio, Texas. Through that, I learned that the Freedom Bridge over by MLKing, that street was built so the students could actually walk to school because it would flood in the creek in that area. Those are small gems of information within San Antonio that I wouldn't have knowledge of as a young girl in our education system, and it needs to be there. So, for me, that was significant to see the work of that organization move forward. The other nonprofit that I serve on currently is LIS, so the Local Initiative Support Corporation here in San Antonio. One of our focuses specifically is affordable housing. So, for me, I was 21 by the time I had all three of my children, so just going through that process, definitely living in poverty, within the poverty guidelines and coming to the point of being able to not say, "I have this much of my rent versus this much of my car." Affordable housing made a huge difference in me and my family's life. So, for me, hands down when LIS was coming and getting affiliated with San Antonio, to serve in that capacity in a way that I can tell the story of affordable housing. It is so significant. It's really important, but because of people who are like, "I don't want that in my backyard." But you don't want a VP of a financial institution in your backyard? Everybody has that human factor. We all go through things. So, I wanted my board service to reflect the life that I lived. (11:54)

**KIRAN:** I appreciate you sharing more about your own story and how that relates to the work that you do. I sometimes I catch in our language when we talk about service, particularly as a nonprofit or nonprofit organization, divide between folks who are leading organizations that are delivering services and those who are target populations receiving services. I'm constantly reminding myself, or trying to center myself in the aspects of our own identities that are shared. As people who serve on nonprofit boards, or are leadership, or work with nonprofits, it's bringing me back to something you said earlier. Reading about quote on quote "inner-city kids," and not realizing that the narrative was about you and your own lived experience. Can you tell us more about what was it within that narrative that did not resonate with yours? (12:44)

**RACHELL:** Absolutely. Well, here's the deal, you don't realize, for me anyway, I can't speak for everyone. But you don't realize your poor, if you have the necessities. You know there are some people who have bigger houses or nicer cars. As a child, you are simply processing that my daddy had a birthday party for me, and we had hot dogs. It doesn't correlate.

**MOLLY:** Yeah, I had a party!

**RACHELL:** I didn't get all the things I want, but okay, I'm living. It wasn't until, and this is why I love SA2020 so much. I'm a number's person, and it wasn't until kind of getting into this work

and getting hit down and looking at just the statistics of, if you have a child before a certain age, then you will more than likely always live in poverty. If you live in this zip code, you will more than likely have a shorter life expectancy. Just the fact that the information is being studied, it blows my mind. I think it's significant and important, but that revelation really came as I was sitting in a president meeting saying, "I like Communities in Schools because when I was in high school, my 12<sup>th</sup> grade year, I was pregnant, and nobody knew I was pregnant. I was hiding it, but the Communities in Schools representative said, 'you're always late to school. You're always, and they bought me an alarm clock.'" You know, when you're grown, and you start managing your own finances, and you're like, "I can't afford this. I can't afford that." You know that you're poor, but you don't know you're part of a study to see if we can change that. (14:32)

**KIRAN:** Which also comes in to the significance of representation. So, if we are going to be most responsive to the needs of the community, the more we are representative of the community we are serving, the better we are at our job.

**RACHELL:** If you want to get involved, and you're not comfortable, find out how to get comfortable. The first step is to just do it, to take a step, and to start your process to fulfill your purpose whatever that may be. (14:57)

**MOLLY:** I am like that's so hard sometimes. Particularly, if you've never been invited to a table, and I am allowed to say I don't really know what to say. There was something that you said earlier in the podcast about being invited to share your experience and being invited to share your voices. I'm curious, I assume there is a lot who you are as a human that propels you forward, and what is it around the table that could be helpful? (15:30)

**RACHELL:** You know, from a very business and strategic level, I would say around the table, you have a variety of expertise. I think where the big opportunity is having that diversity in thought. Just the fact that I think very differently from someone that came from affluence, but I sit in the same room and share the same goals long-term. I think that's really important when you're considering being at a table. Just know that whatever it is that you bring, and it may simply be your mindset, that's a start because we need to have variety. We need to have people look at things through different lenses. I think that in so many cases, you mentioned that I'm in grad school. We had a conversation in class the other night. There was one student that said, "You don't fit in if you're a person of color, specifically if you're a woman. We have so many more biases." And this gentleman speaks out, and he says, "Well, if you don't fit in, then that's on you. You're going to have to fit in." So, I had to kindly say like, "I am a very statuous Black woman. I change my hair weekly. I will never fit in, but I still bring value." It's not for me to continue to adjust who I am. Now, growth, growth comes with adjustment. That's the reality of the things. I want to be progressive, but there are things that are core to me as an individual. I'm a mother first. I care. I genuinely care about people. That is going to continue to be at the forefront of what I do when I have those conversations. Anyway, I derailed. (17:20)

**MOLLY:** I don't think you derailed. I'm like oh yes, you're taking us with you.

**KIRAN:** Yes, we are with you. This makes complete sense.

**RACHELL:** Okay, okay. It's learning what I have to share and how I can share that.

**KIRAN:** Yeah, I appreciate the way you're telling your story is painting for us the responsibility of us, as individuals, and I'm pointing to the three of us as women, as looking at you as women of color, our responsibility as individuals to be uncomfortable for the sake of our own growth. To challenge ourselves to be able to move forward in our own careers. To take responsibility and to be able to say yes to this thing that's making me uncomfortable, while also holding our employer accountable to, "hey, the responsibility of people fitting in, or setting this table in a way that is smart is the shared responsibility of all of us." It's such a fraught conversation when we start to have a conversation about, or we start to say it's one person's responsibility over the other. (18:22)

**MOLLY:** Yeah. There's a component of you, as an individual, disrupting the way that things are, which is important. Then the system itself being ready to be disrupted, pivoting enough to do that, and that takes more than just one.

**RACHELL:** It absolutely does. Because I learned so much from mentors, and people within our organization, as well as external partners, you know, not really realizing the platform that I had. It's completely, it's that moment when you're like, "wow, this is my life. I never quite imagined myself in this space." And that's why it's so important to me that I'm 110%. It's such a, such a major responsibility for myself, that I placed on myself, as of the fact, that it wasn't intentional. I can't say that the work that I'm doing intentionally found me. Because of that, because Communities in Schools bought me my first alarm clock, or because City Year paid for my daughter's day care because I was a corp member. Those things resonate to me as a human. It's just being able to have conversations with those organizations now, some 20 years later, just things that I didn't imagine when I was 20 years old, or just 25 years old starting at the bank, but being very grateful that, don't get me wrong, I worked hard. Like I said, I've been in school since I worked at the bank. But still not just realizing my own potential, I feel like that could have been detrimental to me. It makes me feel a certain responsibility I guess with the work that I do. (20:26)

**KIRAN:** Yeah, you're pointing to the intentionality of City year, the intentionality of Communities in Schools delivering their programs that need it the most, and maybe that's as simple as delivering an alarm clock. You've alluded to this a little bit. What would you tell your younger self today? (20:43)

**RACHELL:** Calm down. (KIRAN and MOLLY laugh)

**KIRAN:** I feel like I need to hear that today.

**RACHELL:** About leadership, I would tell my younger self, you are good enough. What you think matters. Speak up more. Ask that question. Don't be ashamed, and keep kicking butt. I was

always driven in something. Even having my daughter at 17, I was going to make sure that she was the best kept child, and now she's a graduate of the University of North Texas. I'm very proud of that. My son is graduating in May with his degree as an athletic trainer. I have one more on the way out. These are things that when I was 17 and 21 with these young babies, not really having a clue on life in general, would look back and say, "Rachell, keep living. Hang in there. It's hard." The advice I even give my children and family members is it's a puzzle. You're trying to figure this out slowly, yet surely one by one. You put one piece together, and low and behold, the next piece is there. So, don't try to force it that much. I tell my younger self, but mostly just to keep living and keep learning and make connections, too. (22:02)

**MOLLY:** I love that so much. Everything you heard about today, and we'll make sure there's opportunities to engage in Board service or volunteer, is on klrn.org/thestorygoes. I mean, I guess we basically know we should just keep kicking butt.

**RACHELL:** With boots on. (MOLLY laughs) (22:25)