



Paula Gant is a Sulphur hometown girl who, through hard work and steadfast confidence in her abilities, earned a PhD in economics from Auburn University and has had a remarkable career as an expert in the field. In 2013, President Obama appointed her to a high profile post in the Department of Energy, where she served until the recent change in White House administration. She's currently taking a break before discovering where life takes her next. Paula lives in Washington, DC, with her son Mason, aka "the center of her universe," and their border collie, Sammie Girl. I recently caught up with Paula, and she shared her thoughts on her career, the state of our country's energy resources, and the importance of having mentors.

first person

with **Paula Gant**

by Angie Kay Dilmore

Who inspired you as a young person?

I had a series of really great teachers, from elementary through high school, who were instrumental in helping me form my identity. They called out particular aspects of my capabilities and made me see them. Three teachers in particular -- Renee Wright, Linda Dupuis, and Michael Danos -- asked me to step up to their expectations, giving me confidence in my intellect and creativity -- each in different ways. I owe them a debt of gratitude.

At McNeese, I majored in liberal arts and came to economics as a study of human behavior. Dr. Michael Kurth was my professor and counselor. He saw something in me, made me believe in something I didn't know was there, and convinced me to go to graduate school. He has remained a source of support and encouragement to me over the years.

As far as people I admire most, it's my mom, Joyce Areno Gant, who is the sweetest, kindest, most empathetic person you'll ever meet. She is very loving, but also one of the strongest persons I know. It is her example, how she has lived her life, that has given me the courage in difficult times to believe in my own abilities to get through trials in a way that is considerate of other people.

What was one of your earliest jobs?

During college, I worked for the Bel Estate in Lake Charles. Billy Blake and his family were very supportive of me and my education. My first job was filing well logs from oil and gas development. That was when they were on paper and I'd get blue ink all over my fingers from filing them. Now they're all electronic, of course. I learned a lot there about the oil and gas business, giving me practical skills in understanding how business works.

Tell us about your work at the Department of Energy.

Energy security and reducing greenhouse gas emissions were the two core focuses of my work at the Department of Energy. Initially, I was Deputy Assistant Secretary for Oil and Gas. I had responsibility for the research and development program at our National Energy Technology Lab in Pittsburgh. We focused on how to responsibly produce oil and gas resources, particularly shale resources that have been more productive in recent years, and how we produce those resources while we protect our air, land, and water in local communities.

Scientific research is the foundation upon which policy makers can make informed decisions. We know we have pervasive oil and gas resources across our country. Our ability to produce them economically has contributed not only to our economic growth but also to our national security. We also have the ability

to produce them in a responsible manner; our mission at DOE was to share that understanding. The office is also responsible for regulating the exports of natural gas, for example from the LNG terminals being developed in Southwest Louisiana.

In my second role, as Principle Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Affairs, I engaged with our partner countries who want to import the natural gas we export. I helped them understand that we do have very abundant resources, which increases their energy security, and ultimately makes the world a more stable place. I was also responsible for our engagements with other countries in support of our collective commitments to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions, collaborating with them and sharing what we know about efficient and clean production and use of energy, whether it's natural gas, wind and solar, or carbon capture and sequestration. We currently have the opportunity to grow our economy while also addressing our environmental objectives. We no longer have to choose between the

two of them. We have a greater abundance of energy resources in this country than we ever could have imagined. That makes us a stronger country from economic and national security perspectives. And that's been an exciting message to be a part of. For a girl who remembers waiting in line with her father to buy gasoline on ration day in the 1970s, it's an incredible turn of events.

What are your hobbies?

I love to cook -- I am from Louisiana, after all. Food is love. I learned to cook from my grandmother and enjoy sharing that with other people. My personal passion is Mexican cooking.

You're currently enjoying some down time. What's on your bucket list?

Top of my list is to walk the Heaphy Track on the South Island of New Zealand. It is a 50-mile trail starting in the mountains and ending up on the beach. The thought of having that much time to walk and experience the South Island's wild beauty while enjoying their fantastic food along the way is a dream for me.

