

Interviewee: Parlee Jones  
Interviewer: Sara Newstein  
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Abby's House, 77 Chatham St, Worcester, MA  
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**Abstract:** Parlee Jones was born in Leominster, MA in 1966 and moved to Worcester, MA as an infant. Except for spending eleven years in Brooklyn, NY, Parlee has spent nearly her whole life in Worcester. Parlee currently serves as a shelter advocate at Abby's House women's shelter in Worcester and has served in this position for over ten years. She describes how activism changed the course of her life. In Brooklyn, she encountered community organizations and a sense of pride in Black culture, which she worked to bring with her back to Worcester. Parlee highlights the groups she's worked with, from the Black Elks Lodge, to Juneteenth, to an informal group of likeminded women with whom discusses the pertinent issues of today. With regards to social justice, Parlee emphasizes the importance of coming from a place of love, and loving self first. The powerful journey she shares is full of challenges and lessons, setbacks and breakthroughs that have shaped the remarkable woman Parlee is today.

**SN:** Ok, fantastic. Alright so, thank you so much for talking with me today.

**PJ:** Not a problem.

**SN:** Let's see, let's start with just about your life, childhood, and growing up in Worcester.

**PJ:** Let's see so my mom and dad, met at Fort Devens and got married and had me and we moved here when I was about two. We lived on Eastern Ave and moved to Hooper Street where they bought a house. And my mom actually lived there until she passed away about three years ago or four years ago, I think now. And great childhood coming up. Lots of friends, you know, sisters, hardworking family. Mom and dad both worked. Good life.

**SN:** Yeah, great.

**PJ:** Good life.

**SN:** And let's see so growing up in Worcester, specifically, the neighborhood you were in?

**PJ:** Yeah Hooper-Hooper. Bell Hill area, Hooper, Plumley, 25 Hooper were housing complexes where we were able to make a lot of friends between Plumley and Hooper and Belmont Street Community School. I like to say I went to Belmont before there was a bridge, and they did get a bridge before my time was done there but, it was great. You know, it was a very diverse community at that time. And you know there were people of all ethnic backgrounds, and shapes and sizes and colors and it was good. We were there when Memorial [Hospital] was just a little space. And we rode our bikes all over the place and it was great. It was amazing.

**SN:** Have you seen that neighborhood and the city itself change a lot as you've grown up?

**PJ:** Yeah, one of my pet peeves these days is the fact that Belmont Street is actually like a major highway.

**SN:** Yes.

**PJ:** You know, because, Hooper you know, families live there, families still live there. It's one of the poorer communities. There is not a lot of activities for kids in that area. I mean there's Green Hill [Park] and Bell Pond. But there's no community center or place where those kids can—like we had Prospect House in that area back in the day. And the school had open house activities during the week for kids, like in the evenings and stuff. And unfortunately a lot of that is missing not just from that area but from the city in general.

**SN:** Right.

**PJ:** So...

**SN:** So, did you spend a lot of time at those organizations growing up?

**PJ:** Mhmm, I definitely did. Prospect House and they used to do black debutante program. I was part of the black debutante program. I was in the Miss Black Worcester program, long, long ago. And there was just more of a sense of community back then. For me, I mean they still maybe have it. And like 25 Hooper or Plumley, but I don't think it's the same as it was back then.

**SN:** Right.

**PJ:** People were a little more trusting and open.

**SN:** Okay, let's see so what about school? How was your experience in elementary school? Middle School?

**PJ:** I had good experiences. I enjoyed school, I enjoyed education. Still maintain friendships from those times. I was successful. I did the jobs for Bay State Graduates Program at Doherty [High]. You know, it was school. [Laughs] It was school. It was good. I also wanted to mention I was also part of the Black Elks which was the Quinsigamond Lodge so they had a marching corps and I was a member of that also.

**SN:** Okay so, Black Elks, was that a community organization?

**PJ:** It was, it was called the Quinsigamond Lodge of the Elks. There's a number and all that, but I don't know what the number is [laughs].

**SN:** Okay interesting. Let me just write that down.

**PJ:** I can probably forward you pictures.

**SN:** Oh I would love that. That'd be incredible thank you. And then, let's see, any college experience?

**PJ:** I just—I put some college because I did a couple classes so all my amazing stuff is life experience. Yes, so not too much college, but a lot of life experience. The world has been my university.

**SN:** So what other community organizations have been important to you?

**PJ:** I would say most important was probably the Prospect House because again, I self-identity as a Black woman and that was definitely tied to the black community. And AME Zion church at the time. The churches were kind of different, back then they had the—again the Black Debutante program, they had Miss Third World, anything that kind of taught you something, some kind of culture.

**SN:** And what was the name of that church?

**PJ:** AME Zion. I was a member of AME Zion back in the days. But I was also a member of Second Baptist Church. So did a lot of soul searching and now I'm neither. I'm pagan [laughs].

**SN:** [Laughs] okay, great. Alright, and then I was wondering if you could speak to your relationships a little bit?

**PJ:** Relationships with my significant others?

**SN:** Yeah.

**PJ:** Hmm interesting. I've, well, I've had some good ones and some interesting ones and some not so good ones. My children's father was probably the longest one. Which you know I was, nobody ever believes this when I tell them this, but I was actually a bad girl [laughs] back in the days.

**SN:** [Laughs] yeah.

**PJ:** I did hang out a lot down at the VIP. Hung out with a lot of Jamaican people that were coming in to Worcester at that time. And whatever came with that community. So I actually did a little bit of time in Framingham Women's Facility which nobody knows, I've never shared this. I, you know, it doesn't matter. I did it, it was long ago. Luckily I never reached general population. There was, it was totally different back then so I'm going back to like the late '80s. And if it wasn't for one woman who unfortunately was living another lifestyle than I was living, she helped me out a lot when I got—when I went to do my 30 days. And my kids' father, I had met when I was working at Job Corps. I worked the Job Corps for a while and his family gave me an opportunity to move out of Worcester and move to Brooklyn. Which actually was the start of a lot of my activism because I got knowledge of self through the Five-Percent Nation of Islam. So I was an active Five-Percenter for about 12-13 years. I owe my life to that space because it came at a time where I could've continued down the path that I was going which you know, was part of the reason I got locked up. Or I could follow this new path and find new things so I actually left Worcester and lived in Brooklyn, New York for 11 years.

**SN:** Oh wow.

**PJ:** Both of my children were born in Brooklyn. And that's where I really dived into who am I as a Black woman. You know, there's so much diversity in New York. There's all kinds of

cultural places you can—it's just, it's just amazing what's going on there. Lot of that is still not happening in Worcester [outside noise from a hair dryer] can you hear? Do you think it will be okay?

**SN:** I think it's okay I'll just move it closer to you [moves recorder closer to Parlee].

**PJ:** So I had a lot of fun in New York. Being part of the, the Five-Percent Nation of the Nation of Gods on Earth there was a lot of activity with other women. Learning my lessons and just enjoying New York, you know there's so much to enjoy. It was the best of times, it was the worst of times because a lot of stuff that comes along with that. My children's' father wasn't as nice as he could've been and I actually—once my children were born, once Sha-Asia was born in '97 and my son was born in '98, and I moved back this way in like 2000. So my kids were really young. And you know when I left New York it was either face homelessness, the projects, or a homeless shelter in Brooklyn with two children and I'm from Worcester and I don't know, New York is very, very fast and I wasn't that fast. So I said let me come back to what I know. So that's when I came back home, I lived with my mom for a little while. And my sister actually lived in this building.

**SN:** Oh wow.

**PJ:** So she was the first to come in contact with Abby's House and she went through this shelter system and got an apartment here at 77 Chatham Street and they let me double up, quote unquote, with my sister before double up was a thing.

**SN:** What is...?

**PJ:** So double up, double up is two families living together. It's one family's home but they both [?] to somebody else. So that doubled up family is technically homeless, but they're living with this other family. So Abby's let us double up and my sister got married and moved on out of Abby's house and they let me maintain the apartment here. Great way to get back on my feet. I'm very thankful and grateful to the part that Abby's has played in my life. You see I'm still here [laughs]. So I stayed here for a while. Oh I'm talking about significant others right?

**SN:** Yeah.

**PJ:** So actually, so we'll go back into that story a little later.

**SN:** I would love to.

**PJ:** I did marry a gentleman called Charles Thompson.

**SN:** Okay.

**PJ:** We are still married, but we are separated and he's here in the city, we're still friends. Couple other significant others, but one of my favorites is in Brooklyn. And he actually passed away, he had cancer. And he's no longer with us. But I love men.

**SN:** Yep [laughs].

**PJ:** [Laughs] I don't think I'll find another one here in Worcester because of the lifestyle I have now. I'm a little more picky, a little older and all that good stuff but I'm satisfied, I'm happy. I'm still always looking for love, I'm a hopeless romantic because I am a Pisces.

**SN:** Oh me too!

**PJ:** You are?

**SN:** Yeah [laughs].

**PJ:** When's your birthday?

**SN:** March 6th.

**PJ:** Oh I'm the 4th!

**SN:** Oh wow [laughs]!

**PJ:** Okay so that's—you understand.

**SN:** I do [laughs].

**PJ:** We're hopeless romantics. I love love and one of my biggest lessons I think in this life is trying to constantly come from that place of love with whatever you do. So that's what I'm trying to focus on now.

**SN:** That's fantastic so Brooklyn, which years were you there?

**PJ:** I was in Brooklyn in the '90s. Through all of the '90s basically. Yeah I got there like '89 and I moved back here in like 2000.

**SN:** Got it okay, so how did that city compare to Worcester? I'm sure so many different ways.

**PJ:** Yeah, well one of the things, one of the reasons that I do what I do is because in New York there's all kinds of culture. So you can bring your children all different places to see their selves or have some kind of cultural experience. And when I first came back here at that time there was not a lot of that happening here, especially around Black culture. That's where I want my children to know their culture so I had to make it happen. And that's where my activism and community involvement really stemmed from, making sure that my children saw their self in different places. Through my Bob Marley Birthday Bash or Black History Month celebrations or whatever it is, the Black Heritage Festival. Just all those I did so my kids could be involved.

**SN:** Absolutely. That's great ok let's see and then I wanted to ask you about the narrative readings project, "We Grow into Courage?"

**PJ:** That was powerful. That was such a powerful experience I learned so much.

**SN:** Yes.

**PJ:** I knew about SNCC [Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] and I knew about, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference but the words and the—I think that's where my realization came in that the youth are where these changes need to start. Bringing it forward like Black Lives Matter movement and any movement and it's kind of what I think, like old folks need to step back and let young folks do what they need to do because you look at the age of the women in SNCC, even Dr. King was 26. Malcolm was 26, it's youth. That's where they're ready to go. So that was one of the biggest pieces that I took away from that but just you know, Fannie Lou Hamer, of course just the experience that these women went through, I wonder could I have? You know what I mean? And even today I mean some people can't even stop watching football to help forward humanity. And it's just what they went through and what they did was amazing and hard and beautiful and ugly and all of the above. So it was a powerful presentation. I was honored to be a part of that, definitely.

**SN:** What kind of stories particularly stuck out to you?

**PJ:** Fannie Lou Hamer's of course. And then, I'll never remember their names but just the experiences that they shared from being in the jail cells. The woman whose house was bombed, the bomb went off after she went to the hospital. That was crazy. Yeah, all of them.

**SN:** Right I'm sure.

**PJ:** [Laughs] all of them.

**SN:** Okay and let's see so you started your involvement in Abby's house when you came back to Worcester in 2000?

**PJ:** Yeah 2000, maybe 2001, I lived with my mom and you know how that goes once you're grown and you have two kids. So they let me move in with my sister when my mom was like, "You gotta go." And I got back on my feet in that space. My kids went to school. Single mom, I'm still a single mom. And Abby's gave me the courage and the strength to be able to walk on my own. Through my time here at 77 I actually got a Section 8 certificate and found an apartment moved on, blah blah blah and all that good stuff. And Abby's asked me to come back and be on the board of directors. So I did that for a while, they always have a representative from the women who serve on the board and that was my job. And I'm honored and humbled and then I did that and Tess Sneesby said, "We have an opening for shelter advocates, you should come and do that." And I was like, "Tess, I'm a secretary. I don't know anything about that." And she said, "Well, you'll be fine. Just come on and do it." And they offered me a couple more dollars than I was getting at Head Start so I took that role on and here I still am. So guess I'm supposed to be here.

**SN:** Right.

**PJ:** I've enjoyed being part of the women that come through here. I'm the shelter advocate so I work with all the homeless women. Anybody that comes through the door that's looking for services gets to meet me in my office and we have a conversation. Some of them come and stay with us, some of them do other things and it's been an honor and a privilege to be in this space to help the women that we've helped.

**SN:** Absolutely. So let's see and then you are also active as an organizer for Juneteenth.



**PJ:** Yep, yep that's my other little baby. I've been doing that for about—how long have I been doing that? Maybe seven years, seven eight years, maybe even ten. Have I done ten? My times just roll into each other. But Juneteenth so do you know what Juneteenth is?

**SN:** I'm a little familiar, it's celebrating...

**PJ:** The freedom of blacks.

**SN:** Freedom, yeah.

**PJ:** So Lincoln freed the slaves on, on June 1, 1863. The enslaved people in Texas did not get that news until June 19th, 1865. So, Juneteenth is a celebration that the day of all freedom for all Black people in America and quote unquote freedom. And all Black people of America, because we're really still not free, we still got some of the remnants that are happening. I love Juneteenth it's an opportunity. It's a great festival brings a lot of people together. We have food vendors, we have goods vendors, we have a history tent. Always have to have some kind of knowledge in places so that people can learn. And we have amazing entertainment. So you know, I also am blessed to be friends with some amazing women who I mean there's no official agency to it but we do a lot of advocating, like Worcester hosted the race dialogues. It was such a joke.

**SN:** Oh really?

**PJ:** Yeah, unfortunately. My disclaimer here, I'm, all of these systems that are in place are not set up to help people. My whole thing is, especially if you look at the experience of Black people, African American people in this country, you know the school to prison pipeline, the police brutality, the housing situation. Everything else that just goes along with that is what inspires me. You know Trayvon Martin was a big thing here in Worcester that sparked a movement. Where not agencies, just regular people got together to express the pain and the anger and their frustration behind what was going on. And for me organizations are kind of iffy but people, organizing people and making sure they stay true to the mission and to whatever the focus is without getting caught up in the money and the politics of it because unfortunately there's politics everywhere. You know education and all of that. So that's what really got me started. And in doing things, we did a couple—like we did a circle when Trayvon, when the verdict came down. You know, for people to talk about what's going on. And then Michael Brown right behind that. And then you know it—it just keeps coming, it's still coming unfortunately.

**SN:** Yeah.

**PJ:** So it's not just organizations I think it's more with people that I have connected in Worcester. To just do a grassroots...

**SN:** So what would these meetings look like—like a circle?

**PJ:** Yep, basically a circle. And of course you do need organizers for their people and place. I meet with the crew that's going to make it happen and make it happen. And you know, luckily we wait for people to show up, and sometimes they show up and sometimes they don't. And just take it from there so. We've been—I've been blessed and I've had a lot of good people in my life and people that are, you know, you create your communities. So my community, or even like my Facebook page which is like a community page. I truly, really don't have over 1,000 friends but I use that as a platform for sharing information.

**SN:** Yeah okay great! Thank you. Let's see so, let's see back to Abby's House. What kind of challenges and successes do you encounter?

**PJ:** Another pet peeve [laughs] safe, affordable housing. Where does it exist in Worcester? I mean we're building \$2,000 studios and you know trying to remove the homeless people from spaces where they can't be seen by those people that are applying for the \$2,000 apartments. And all of that good stuff. So my big thing is, it's where do these women go? Where do these families go? Where can a single mom who's not even making that \$15 an hour who's still at \$11 or \$12 an hour and it's her and her little one. Where does she live? Where is the \$900 apartment where she's not afraid to walk up the stairs? So, my biggest challenge with the job that I do which is servicing homeless women with and without children is where is the housing? Where are the jobs? Everybody's so excited and I'm excited about the \$15 an hour raise to minimum. But that's going to be over the next 4 years. So it's not going to be 15 today or tomorrow. It's going to be 11, and then it's going to be 12, and then it's going to be 13, then it's going to be 14, then it's going to be 15. Right now today, you need \$22.57 an hour in order to be able to afford a two bedroom apartment. So where are we going to be four years from now?

**SN:** Right, cost of living is probably just going to go up and yeah.

**PJ:** So all these things and then somebody—you know Section 8 is a catch 22. You have Section 8 but what about the families that don't. If a landlord can charge you \$1200 but I can afford to pay you monthly \$800 without stressing. But you'd prefer the 12, where do I go

with my little 8? So the housing piece is what stresses me the most. The success stories are the women that make it work. That make it work, that get up every day and because our shelter here—you're out of the shelter every day from 8:00 in the morning until 5:30 in the evening. The women that figure it out, that make a way out of no way. You know it's hard. It's hard.

**SN:** And what kind of changes have you seen happen with the organization since you started?

**PJ:** Wow, that's a loaded question. So we're under renovation right now. It's like a 16 million dollar renovation. Yes, so the whole building is going to be revamped so hence, we're down here. So I spend half of my time there and half of my time here. For the next year that will be happening. And so we haven't expanded shelter beds. That was the whole thing because shelter is just a temporary, temporary fix. We need housing so hence, we have this building is seven two bedroom apartments. We have another building with 17 SROs [single room occupancy] and the building that's being renovated is going to be 55 single room occupancies for women so once that's complete, there will be big changes. But my biggest change is I've been at Abby's—I was the last new hire from what I call the old guard. When we just did whatever we had to do. Now we have, and I love the new Abby's, but like for the first time in 42 years there's somebody at the helm that didn't come up through the ranks type thing. So now there's policy in place where there might not have been a policy a couple years ago. So just adjusting to that. But it's also making sure that Abby's exists into the future. So that's the biggest piece of that transformation and change is hard regardless of what changes they are, so it's still all good. It's still all good. One of the things that's changed is—and it's been changing over the years—is the amount of time that we give women in this shelter. Which is reflective of what's happening in society. Because when I first started all they really needed was two or three weeks. And now sometimes it can go three to four months. And we try to cap it at three months. But as long as we see progress, we will get each woman as an individual. So...

**SN:** So, how much, how much space is there currently?

**PJ:** Over there?

**SN:** Over there, yeah.

**PJ:** We are down like 20 rooms. [A coworker leaves] I'll see you later, thank you. We're down like 20, maybe 20 rooms. So for the first time since I've been at Abby's we're not

accepting housing applications for our SROs because those rooms are offline while the building is being renovated. It's going to have an elevator, it's going to have all brand new systems. That building has been running like—it had the same systems from like early 1900s. So they're all new heating and electrical and, like I said, an elevator. It's going to be amazing. So I'm excited for the women that are there, and excited and, you know, interested to see who's coming next. Like once the renovation is done. What issues—you know opioids are a big thing right now, jumping back to shelter guests. Unfortunately we can't help everybody who walks through the door, you know I've tried [laughs]. And where we are now where I could give anybody the benefit of the doubt if they don't have certain things in place, we might not be the best fit for them. So that's I think the biggest change with Abby's is really who can we help. Who's ready to help themselves, you know, because we can't help everybody.

**SN:** Right. What kind of women are you unable to help?

**PJ:** Women that are not ready to help themselves. Women that are still actively using. So that's one change is that we actually do a drug test before women come into shelter and before we did not. So that's one of the big changes also. Medical women who have medical issues we're also not able to help. Because they are outside from the morning until 5:30 in the evening. So we're not an appropriate placement for everybody. So just coming to terms with that on my own. It may have always been that way but I would still try. Where now it's like no and just going back to the harm none, maybe I did a little bit of harm. I really don't know. But you know we just do the best we can.

**SN:** Yeah that's all you can do. I was curious so 16 million dollars for the renovation. Where does that money come from?

**PJ:** So I'm going to have to get you paperwork on that [laughs] because I don't want to mess that up.

**SN:** [Laughs] okay.

**PJ:** Because it is such important information but Abby's and one of the Women's Institute out of Boston was a big, big factor in this. Abby's had to come up with 2 million. That was our portion. Everything else was through grants and fundraising and all that good stuff. So I will get more information on that to you.

**SN:** Okay got it.

**PJ:** So it's correct information, I want that to be correct.

**SN:** So Women's Institute in Boston, is that like, sort of an affiliate to Abby's?

**PJ:** Nope, not at all. It's just an agency that reaches out to women's organizations to help them do what they want to do.

**SN:** Right. Are there any other organizations, maybe at the national level?

**PJ:** There are, but I don't know them off the top of my head. I wasn't involved in all that.

**SN:** Yeah.

**PJ:** Yeah but it's huge so I want to make sure I get you the proper information for that.

**SN:** Okay, awesome great. So let's see, if we could go back to Juneteenth. Let's see, how many people are involved in that organization?

**PJ:** So it started out, I think this was our 21<sup>st</sup>, the 21st Juneteenth celebration here in Massachusetts. But it was sponsored and housed with the Willis Center for about 10 of those years.

**SN:** Ok Willis?

**PJ:** Willis Center. The Willis Center is no longer here. And in the Black community it was- regardless it was just ugly. I don't even, you can google Willis Center and read a little bit about that. So when, when the Willis Center was shut down, due to internal issues, the festival was really no more. And it was like a 12-20 thousand dollar festival, with we had all of the resources from the Willis Center to help with grants, full time person to work on the festival, volunteers, all of that. And so once Willis Center disappeared, it was axed, a small committee of just community people decided to do it, and we did it and we've been doing for the last eight, nine years now. Gone through different members, I've been there. Yeah so this year we were a committee of seven. You know sometimes we have ten, this year was seven. And we're going to do it again next year. It's difficult, but we make it happen.

**SN:** Right. So where did it take place this year?

**PJ:** Oh at Institute Park. Because they already have the stage and it's so nice over there so we do it over there every year.

**SN:** Let's see I was wondering about your, the sense of social movements in Worcester that you see, how they are going, if they're successful, or what your perspective is on that.

**PJ:** So a couple years ago Mosaic was around and like I kind of—I'm still involved but I've really kind of checked out a couple years ago. Because of the disrespect to the community from the city. Around—and of course people will look into well they didn't do this properly, they didn't do this properly. A lot of agencies don't do things properly and they're offered help. This agency was not Mosaic. And again it goes back to the Mike Brown time. And that agency was actually attacked by—there's a couple, in my opinion, racist people on our city council.

**PJ:** And that agency was openly attacked and publicly attacked by Turtleboy Sports which is a racist blog of a bunch of unknown people that are just horrible. And just how the city took this person's word on what he thought was going on with the agency. And just a lot of stuff. People's livelihoods being affected by this racist person's viewing. Horrible, horrible things. Mosaic was run by, is run by Brendan Jenkins who's a local community person and he had that—that like took a lot out of people. I think because you fight, we had a little building, we had a place. They took that away. Because of you know they opened—they did like audits and stuff at the request of [City Councilor] Michael Gaffney because of what he read on this blog. So you know and people can say either, “Well they should have done this, they should have did this.” Whatever.

It's gone and they took a lot of air out of the sails of what was happening here. You know, there were people arrested. For the--they call it the Kelly Square Five. Was it five or seven? I don't remember it's been a couple years now. But now what do I see happening? Right now when the only other than my little stuff that I do with my collective little five friends is the SURJ movement, Showing Up for Racial Justice. Which is actually allies, an ally movement, it's actually a white organization. Everything that's been people of color driven has dissipated. Just kind of it's not existent at this moment.

**SN:** Okay.

**PJ:** Again private stuff with—like I know there was a lot of work with the Puerto Rico movement so there was a little committee for that. Or local for that. And now the immigrant movement, I know there's a lot of stuff happening with that. For me if black lives mattered,

all these other things, all of these other issues would be like non issues. Because once black lives matter, all lives matter. So, I support everything you know what I mean? I support but do I put my all and all in? Like I did before my heart is always there, but I really haven't been as involved as I have been. You know, because of my kids. My daughter's in college, making sure she's okay. And figuring out what do with my life now that my kids are grown. And all of that stuff, just trying to figure out what's next.

**SN:** Right, absolutely. So yeah going off of that. I was just curious how like if you encounter burnout, like feelings like compassion fatigue all that kind of stuff.

**PJ:** All of that I'm actually in the midst of that now. I think I get it because homelessness is overwhelming. Police brutality is overwhelming. Any pain—these children being taken from their parents is overwhelming. All of this, it's horrible. The little microaggressions with calling the police on people that are just living their life. It's all of that. So how do I deal with it? The ocean [laughs]. the ocean. Lunch dates or dinner dates with friends to talk about it. Being able to debrief, to talk about it with people that you love and care about. You know everybody doesn't have that. To just be able to share and whatever you can do, you know. Be it share a post, share a ride, however you can—I don't know [laughs]. You know, we gather together and a couple women that are involved, we get together and talk about and just be as women. Carrying the weight of the world.

**SN:** Yeah, yeah. Okay, let's see there's some great questions I want to see. So how do you define success in your life and has this definition changed overtime?

**PJ:** Success as a single mom, single-income household, for me success is getting my bills paid at this moment. Making sure there's a roof over their heads, making sure the lights are on, there's no wiggle room for anything else so that's being successful in that area. There's one thing, but also just being successful in life. I got up this morning, I made it to work. I do have that roof over my head. I am able to do extra things that other people might not be able to do. I can make it to the ocean. I don't know just depends where you are. Success: I got up. You know, I made my bed, I got dressed. I finished cleaning out that cabinet [laughs]. I got this to where it is. It depends on the moment. That is success for me I think.

**SN:** Yeah. And then based on your life experience what advice would you give to women of today and future generations?

**PJ:** Hmmm. Love self first. And love self best. And come from a place of love. You know, be that love. You can't save everybody, but you can make sure that you're okay. You can

help, but make sure they're doing the majority of the work. Just love self first and best. And if it doesn't feel good to you walk away from it. Don't be afraid of that. I was afraid of that, my mother was afraid of that. But now I'm like, "Fuck that." Excuse my expression [laughs]. [Mouths word] fuck that. I can't help you because that's not going to help me. To be not afraid to do that, to just really take care of yourself and your kids.

**SN:** Yeah, that's great advice. Let's see. Is there anything else you'd like to mention or...

**PJ:** Well again, I'm honored and humbled. I've learned a lot from the narratives. And just for future women, again just, you know, women, women we hold up the world. We are part of the solution. You know, we have babies. We're the first teachers of children who are going to be the next Jesuses and all of that good stuff. Because for me, I mean we're all—if we are in the image of the Almighty or whatever you chose to call the higher power, we are the children and the child and the father and the mother are one in the same. So I am Mary, and I have Jesus. I've been Jesus, and now I'm Mary and I'm mourning Jesus. So as long as I'm looking at the world, through that, what would Jesus do, what would I do, what does coming from a place of love look like? What would just coming from a place of love do? So that's all, you know, just do that.

**SN:** Right.

**PJ:** Do that [laughs] come from that place of love. And know who you are. And again, okay, so one of my big things is Sankofa, I didn't talk about that at all.

**SN:** Oh yes, please. What was it called?

**PJ:** Sankofa. S-A-N-K-O-F-A is an Adinkran, Adinkra symbol which stands for go back and fetch it.

**SN:** Okay.

**PJ:** What that means is go back to your people, go back to your beginnings and learn that. Learn where you started out from. And that will give you focus for where you are right now, and focus for the future. So to know your past in order to move forward in the future. That's what it is. So it's an Adinkra symbol and for me it's like again the only natives in this space are Native Americans. Everybody else came from somewhere. So where did your people come from? How did they get here, you know what I mean? Especially the women, were they midwives, were they witches? Were they whatever because we started out as goddesses



we were one and the same. And then through time women, the ones who bear life, create life, became all these other things. We went from goddess, to midwives, to witches, to bitches.

**SN:** Right [laughs].

**PJ:** And we've got to remember that we were goddesses. And go back to that space because goddesses exist throughout the whole entire world, whole entire planet. We were one and the same, we were on equal terms, and then society just made the women become something else. So for us to remember who we are. Through all of that, through every stage where ever we were women, and just come back to that. It's heavy. It's heavy.

**SN:** You said that was an Adinkra symbol?

**PJ:** Adinkra symbol. So Adinkra symbols are, like if you look at African cloth, you look at Kintai cloth and you look at the different prints. Each one of those clothes actually says something. So these are Adinkra symbols are found on the cloth and each symbol has a naming and a name. So it's something else you can Google. Or I can send you the link.

**SN:** Okay yeah that sounds really interesting. Okay let me see if there's anything else, let's see, yeah I guess that's about it. Thank you so much.

**PJ:** You're welcome.

**SN:** I feel like I got so much wisdom from this conversation.

**PJ:** [Laughs] stuff that's going to make you go Google.

**SN:** Yeah, yes. Definitely going to do my research.

**PJ:** I love it, I love it. So do you have my email?

**SN:** Let me get that; I think I saw it.

**PJ:** I just gave it to you yep, it's here.

**SN:** Oh yeah right there. Perfect okay.

**PJ:** Okay so I'm going to put it on you. To say, "Hey can you email me?" Because I need to send you the stuff from Abby's. And I can send you the Adinkra symbols and whatever other little goodies that you need. Like do you guys need pictures and stuff.

**SN:** Yes I was wondering if I could also just take a picture of you?

**PJ:** Sure! of course.

**SN:** Wherever you want, whatever you think.

**PJ:** Of course.

**SN:** Okay so I'll email you about the Abby's stuff and the Adinkra symbols. Ok awesome, so I'll just make sure I do this correctly [shuts off digital recorder] and stop and this one (turns off phone recorder).