

Interviewee: Patricia Paugh
Interviewer: Evelyn Sheehan and Molly Weiland
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Overseen by Dr. Pica, Assumption University

Abstract: Patricia Paugh was born in Teaneck, New Jersey in 1956. In 1974 Patricia moved from Long Island, New York to Worcester, Massachusetts to attend college at Assumption College. Patricia graduated from Assumption with a degree in psychology. After graduation she married James Paugh and had her son, Jim who is now 45 with two kids of his own. Patricia eventually went on to further her education; she became a reading specialist at Worcester State University, got her master's degree in teaching from Harvard University, and received her doctorate from Boston College. Patricia is currently a professor at the University of Massachusetts Boston, but has also taught at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Boston College, and many elementary schools in Worcester and the surrounding areas. In this interview Patricia discusses some of her experiences as a teacher over the years, as well as the path that led her to becoming a teacher and a professor. She also discusses some of the hardships and challenges that she sees in the profession and struggles she faced as a woman and a mother working to make a difference in other's lives. In this interview she also shares some of the success over the years, like writing three books and being a part of both national and international communities regarding education and literacy.

ES: Do you just want to tell us some basic information about yourself?

PP: So, my name is Pat Paugh and I'm a graduate of Assumption in class of 1978. And let's see I came to Worcester [Massachusetts] for college, so I'm from New York but I've lived in Worcester ever since so that's a long time. What else, let's see I am a professor at University of Massachusetts in Boston. I was an elementary school teacher for a long time before that—all in the Worcester area. I've done all my graduate work in Massachusetts, teaching in Massachusetts and it's great to live here in the heart of Massachusetts because you can get anywhere. Let's see what else, I have a son who is much older than you and two grandchildren who are three and five and very excited about having them in my life and I live very nearby. Is there's anything else you can think of that I...

ES: How long did you live in New York for?

PP: So I was born and grew up in the greater New York area so I lived as a child in New Jersey and I went to high school in New York, north of the city at West Point. And I came to Assumption, that might be an interesting story...

MW: Yeah.

PP: Because my parents who—very Catholic family and my parents, this is kind of a generational thing that you guys don't face, but my parents they wanted me to be well educated but they were still at that point in time concerned that I should take big secretarial courses in school. They wanted to make sure—they weren't sure about college and things like that. So when it came time for college they wanted me to go to the Catholic college that was right next to the town they lived in. I wanted to break out and go someplace else. And so, I applied to all the universities in New York and the only way they would let me leave the state is a friend of theirs was from Shrewsbury [Massachusetts] and my mother worked in West Point and the man was an archivist and he was from Shrewsbury and he said, “There's this nice Catholic college in Massachusetts.” So, they said, “Well if you go there, you can leave the state.” It was the best thing ever because Assumption has been a wonderful experience and I'm still so much part of the community so there's a story.

MW: That's awesome.

ES: What made you want to pursue your career and become a teacher?

PP: Well, that's interesting because I came here to Assumption and I really didn't have a lot of—I went to a public high school, so I didn't really have a lot of counseling and I really didn't know what I wanted to do. And I had moved as a teenager to this high school where I was in and that was very disruptive, so it was really my social life was more of my goal in high school, so I really wasn't sure. And so when I got here I kind of took some courses and they have the liberal arts which is good, what I didn't do was take math and science which is a real mistake in my subsequent years so I took your basic math, you know. But I became a psychology major and I also—there was a professor here—a lot of my stories about Assumption—there was a professor here who was also a teacher in Worcester and I took a course with him and he became a mentor and I got really interested in teaching and Assumption afforded opportunities to do independent studies and working in the Worcester schools and I loved doing that. So, I became a teacher and then after like 20 years of that and like I taught all around here. And I became a mom right after I graduated from Assumption, so I balanced a lot of that, like finding relatives to do babysitting and teaching. So yeah, I became a teacher then after that I had lots of questions so I went to graduate school like three times. [laughs] And so I went to Worcester State [University] and became a reading specialist. Then I went to Harvard because they have a program for teachers that you can get a master's degree and take any course possible so that was really cool and that led me to doctoral work at Boston College. So that's kind of what I did and now I teach teachers literacy.

MW: That's amazing.

MW: What kind of-what types of grades did you teach before becoming a professor?

PP: So mostly, let's see. I student taught here at Main Street School in kindergarten and then around this time, so a long time ago before you were ever in existence, they were cutting budgets and taxes so getting a job was really hard so I remember I interviewed in Worcester to get a teaching job in elementary school and someone pulled me aside and said, "You're really good but you're not from Worcester, you don't know anyone." So, this person gave me all these different places to go like around Worcester outside. So being a mom and also trying to figure out you know whether I wanted to be a teacher during these times because they were cutting the budgets in school, so I got some temporary jobs and then my mother-in-law lived out in western Mass [Massachusetts] so I took the baby and I taught in Ware, Massachusetts, I don't know if you guys are from Massachusetts but...

MW: Yeah.

PP: Yeah, yeah so, I taught there for a while and I commuted back-and-forth and then the baby became a toddler and I wanted him to go to school here in Worcester, so I put him in nursery school here and I taught in a couple of communities around here. And then I was at an art museum event and ran into someone who taught at Independence School, which is a school here in Worcester called Bancroft school, and so there was a job there, so I took that job and taught first grade for many years, and it allowed my son to go to school there which was really cool like private school. And then yeah so that's what—I mostly have taught kindergarten through I think like seventh grade so most of the earlier years of schooling and so now I teach teachers...

MW: Yeah.

PP: ... in those areas but literacy is my area.

MW: Nice.

ES: What did you like better, teaching children or the adults? [laughs]

PP: Oh you know that's really good question! [laughs] I have thought about that a lot, because I assumed, I don't know how any elementary school teachers you may know, but you go to school you got all the stuff and you're doing things with the kids and I thought that well that will change because I'll be a professor. I still go in and I have all this stuff [laughs] you know, so and I don't know how different it is to be honest. I really feel like good teaching is good teaching and it is really interesting to actually think about it's not quite as different as I thought. And I actually

love both. I love, love my students and I love my students at UMass Boston, I was at UMass Amherst, I taught at Boston College as a doctoral student, but I really love UMass Boston students. They're pretty cool, they're a lot of working students, they have families and new undergrads. And so I love it; I love both.

ES: That's cool.

PP: It's been a good career because when you go off on your career if you have a passion for what you do it really does make a difference so, I hope you find your passions.

MW: Thank you. Is there anything that like led you to want to jump to becoming a professor and like leaving teaching elementary ed?

PP: Yeah, I love teaching and when you're teaching schools are constructed in ways that help some kids succeed, but there's a lot of really smart kids who aren't well served by school and so over the years—and I also was in the school that was a private school so all the kids in those schools were going to go to college. And so, after a while I had started in the public schools, I really wanted to think about both of those issues, so I went back to graduate school and then that led to do what I'm doing now. And the job I have now, I worked in Springfield [Massachusetts] when I was at University of Massachusetts Amherst and now in Boston [Massachusetts] and I work in Dorchester [Massachusetts] part of Boston so I'm really able—it's a very different job. I work in urban schools. I'd love to be in Worcester because Worcester has so many opportunities, it's a really cool city. But I really love, it was a switch to actually maybe serving in a different way and getting my head around kids who aren't necessarily served in normal schools. I have written some books and I do a lot of presentations and I am now, this job affords you the opportunity, like I know your professor, I know a couple of professors here, and it affords you the opportunity to not only teach, but also talk to people around the country to really think about the questions that I have about education. So, good question, it was a good question.

MW: Going off of one of our questions, what do you think the pros and cons of the path you've chosen like of education?

PP: That's a really good question. [laughs] For the pros and cons... And being at it for a really long time... Well the pros are it's the type of profession, like when I started and they were cutting the budget and I had a kid and it was a lot, I actually thought about leaving so I remember going to New York City [New York] and going to all of these like some kind of workshop of like all the things you could do with your skill set and I remember sitting through all these things and business things thinking I don't really want to do these things, so I'm going to come back and just persist. And so I guess I learned that I really loved the job. I guess some of the cons would be, and you're at a different point in your life it's really good to talk to folks that are like there's such a generational shift, like I'm probably older than your parents [laughs] but at the time I was

growing up, a lot of times the only choice was to be a teacher or a nurse if you're a woman. And so I feel like I got—I was fighting to get my education and leave the state and stuff but there was still that kind of a be a teacher or be a nurse, which are both wonderful professions and I love mine. I guess as a person your age I guess I would've liked more opportunities to think about different careers because now—but now in retrospect that I've done this and I'm a literacy educator, I would've majored in linguistics. I was a psychology major but you look back and I would love to know more about how language works and different languages work and I wish I had done more. I'd been able to become multilingual in my years of schooling and I should've taken some science class [laughs] but that's another story. But I guess just looking back I feel like as in my generation I would've loved a little more mentorship in terms of trying out or even just having my education being a little broader. But I've been lucky enough to be able to pursue things, you know as an older person, study things that I didn't back then. So, I guess that's the pros, the pros and cons. The other con is I worry now about the state of public education. That's my area and I teach people your age and a little bit older, who are preparing to become teachers, and I think the politics around it is really hard and I, you know, between Covid, what's happening, you know, I don't think the public—society—invests enough in public education. And people going into teaching it is, it's a much harder job I think than I face because I just worry about teaching the kids and I think teachers now I have to worry about a lot more. You're not given the resources you need and then you get blamed for it. So I am troubled, not for myself, but for the state of education right now because we really—we don't worry about giving money to defense, but we are having teachers buy their own crayons, you know, so I worry about the support for people going into teaching and the support for public education. So, that's not a con for me but I think troubling for my field.

ES: How do you feel about the choices you made in your life, and do you have any regrets about them?

PP: [sighs and gently hits the table] You always have regrets [laughs] you always have things you want... Well, you know, I feel pretty good. I feel like from the—like I said the generation I'm in, I still was at a point I had to push to have a career, like I had I—you will never, I hope this is something you will never face, but I did have to stand up to family, who thought you know I should be a wife. I still had to push back and I always had to stick with—I wanted to preserve my family. You see people that work all the time and their families suffer and I love my son and I'm very proud of my son and he's a wonderful person and he has a wonderful family and so I feel good about that. I feel good about the time I invested with my parents before they passed away, and I also feel good that I kept my own compass. And I was pushed to not do some of the things that I did and I'm glad I stuck with it and it's been good for me and you know I think it's good, I hope you guys probably don't—hopefully don't have to face those kinds of issues. But its yeah, I can't remember if that was the question [laughs].

ES: I know you mentioned like the Covid pandemic did that affect you in anyway at all?

PP: Well definitely affected, I mean for me because I drive to Boston so it affected my job and that I really have not been back into the schools. I have spent a lot of my time working with teachers in schools and that totally stopped a lot of my teaching. You guys, were you here during Covid?

MW: I wasn't, I was still in high school.

PP: Yeah, that's what I—so did you do your classes online?

MW: Yeah.

PP: And all that. So that, you know, I did. I am really happy to be back teaching face-to-face but I don't mind like meetings and things [laughs] so I had to drive in to see the students but it's great. I get to do a lot of stuff right here on zoom, so I don't have to drive into the traffic every day. So that effect—that's kind of a silver lining. The students that I have and their students in the schools are greatly affected, I think mental health—are you in health here? You're in social rehab and you're in the health sciences or social...

MW: Yeah, human services.

PP: The both of you, you know, are called upon now I think to probably, there will be residual affects with people, mental health issues and that's the thing I'm just trying to get my head around like my students come in after spending the day as paraprofessionals or whatever in schools and kids, kids and families are really suffering still and I don't know how were going to get out of that. So, the good part of me is I don't have to go to meetings, but the overarching piece I think is, it's tough, it's tough for people. And I'm glad you're both in serving or helping professions because I think we'll be a long way of kind of solving some of those issues. So, that's how Covid affected my world.

MW: You talked a little bit about writing like a few books and speaking to other people and presenting.

PP: Yes.

MW: Could you like talk a little more about that?

PP: Yeah. So going from being a teacher to this university job has sort of opened some doors and I didn't really expect to do this. I just had all these lingering questions about kids not being served in school. So I just kept going back to school. And the good part is, when you go back to school, if you get to the higher levels, don't pay for it. So I found a really good doctoral program that funded me, and that was really good. And that sort of opened the door to higher ed, which is a really interesting area. So part of your job is to teach. But the other part, you may know this from your professors, is you write and you do research. And that's why I know about all this

stuff. And also able to present at conferences and things. So that has opened doors for me, because going to conferences, I get to go all over the country and I have a whole other network of people now that professionally and have become friends, like all over the country and internationally. So it's pretty cool. And then from there, the research that I do is I collaborate with teachers to do research on their classrooms. So my areas are literacy and I also do literacy. That's why I wish I took more science because I do work with engineering educators, so I do literacy engineering in elementary school. So it's really interesting. So from that we do a lot of data collection that's similar to this. And then writing. So I've written lots and I feel good for someone who didn't set out to do this. So I have lots of articles and I've written and I have three books, and one was done when I was a doctoral student about teaching, reading and literacy. And the other one is called an edited book. So a lot of people have written about some issues around something called critical literacy, where you get kids that like questioning what they read and you use multicultural books and so forth. So it's so that's been cool. And then my last book is about teaching of reading. And that's a big issue now about the best way to teach reading. So it just came out last April. Just had a book party yesterday at UMass Boston.

MW: Congratulations.

PP: Yeah, I'm really excited about it. So that's been something I don't think when I started out I ever thought I would do that. And so it's been kind of a cool thing that's happened. [laughs] Yeah.

MW: Very cool.

ES: Where are some of the places that you traveled?

PP: For my conferences and stuff? Oh, it's been great. So nationally, just name any city in the US [United States of America]. And then I've gotten to go to Bologna, and your professor will like that, Italy and got to go to Greece for two conferences. What was the other one? There was another international one, I can't remember... Anyway, so it's been pretty cool. The places I have not gone and that's where I feel like I will go places, but I just feel like I wish I were multilingual. In terms of I haven't done anything in like the South, South America or Asia and I could do those things, but where I would go now in my job would be to look at there's so many kids now that are multilingual in our schools. You're not going to teach in a classroom without kids that are multilingual. And so I feel looking back, I wish I had the power. Like I say to my students, "You're a kindergarten teacher," and most of many of my students at UMass Boston are multilingual, but I'll say, "You know, you're monolingual English speaker, you got these kindergarten kids and they speak three languages. So who's operating at like a higher level of like...." And they're like, "Oh yeah." [laughs] So it's more like I think there's power in languages. And I feel my career has led to that point, and I feel a little stymied that I myself, I have to, you know, keep like trying to like learn another, you know, really become proficient in another language. So anyway, that's I wandered a little bit.

MW: That's okay.

PP: Yeah. [laughs]

ES: Have you been involved in any volunteer or community work in Worcester?

PP: Yes. When I was a teacher at the Bancroft School I took my—yeah, I did a lot of that work. One of the things I really loved was I took the first graders, they used to have the Higgins Armory here. So it was this—it's over in the Greendale area, and it was this museum. I don't know if you've ever heard of it, because it's now closed, but it had armor from Medieval times and really cool collections, which has now been moved to the Worcester Art Museum. But I used to take my students there all the time. So then I joined the board of directors and got really involved over there, and that was pretty cool. And what else have I done? See, I'm ready, I'm ready to come to come back to Worcester because I've been in Boston and Amherst for so long. Something else I did, I was on different boards. I'm on a lot of volunteer work with organizations like nationally, and I'm just trying to think of what I did here in Worcester. I was part of Christ the King Parish, which is a parish over in the Tatnuck area and did some work on the Food Bank and Mustard Seed, things like that. I can't remember because it's been a while, [laughs] because I've left I've been out, I've been living in Worcester, but I've been in other places. A lot of my volunteer work is now I edit a journal like that, it's not a Worcester thing. So I'm doing a lot of things outside of Worcester. But let's see... With my husband we were involved with the Worcester Historical Museum, which I think houses this, I'm not sure if Assumption or Worcester Historical Museum houses this archive. But they're involved, I think, in the Worcester Women's History Project. Where else? I have to remember because it's been a while. I'll have to think about it more.

MW: That's okay.

PP: But I have to say the one thing about living in Worcester, when I was doing my dissertation for my PhD, I was at Boston College. I was working with these four recent graduates who were teachers in Boston and so we spent the whole year they were doing research in their classrooms. But what I would do is bring food from Worcester, like from Ed Heider's, like Middle Eastern food and stuff. So I kept saying, "You guys really have to come to Worcester because it's such a cool place," because I just think Worcester is a great place culturally, like you have the art museum and you have great food. And there's a lot going on here in Worcester. It's been a great place to live and sort of jump out to the rest of the world from, like, I don't think I would move into Boston now that I've sat in traffic. It's cool, it's a cool place. So good question. I'll go home and go, "Oh yeah, I did that and that and that." I can't remember what I did.

MW: Would you mind talking about some of the stuff you do like nationally, you were talking about the journal you edit?

PP: Yeah. So part of the thing that's been cool about moving into higher ed is you then have this whole community, nationally and internationally. So because my area is literacy I've joined these two professional organizations. One is called the National Council of Teachers of English, and one is called the International Literacy Association and the Literacy Research Association. So I go to conferences and sort of network with people and there then do all kinds of interesting work. Like a project I'm doing now is in the media there's a lot—you guys aren't in education,

but if you were in elementary education, now the issue of teaching kids how to read is really like big. It's in the news all the time. So one of my projects now is what I'll do this afternoon. I have two colleagues in Illinois, so we'll meet on zoom and we're going through all this media like New York Times articles and things, looking for metaphors on how the authors are trying to sway the readers. So it's really cool, it's like a crossword puzzle. So I do this classroom research, but this other stuff is kind of fun. And then the other thing is the engineering and literacy. That's where I've been able to travel to Italy and present on that. And then the other thing is this critical literacy where we want kids to be questioning, [hits hands on the table and points at interviewers] even you guys, you know questioning what you read don't always take for granted what you see in the press or especially your generation, like on social media. And so that's an area and I've been able to do more international conferences there. So yeah, it's great, it's opened my horizon. I'm here in Worcester doing all these cool things in Worcester but I've been able to—and for someone who didn't come from a background where my family ever, I mean, I wasn't on a plane until I was at the end of high school. So, you know, it's been cool to—the world has opened up for me through the job that I do. So that's kind of neat. And the other thing is there is a great conference, this is how I know some of your professors I won't name them here, but there's two professors here that you guys have really great professors. One is in education that I know and one is your professor in human services, and they present also in New England in Portsmouth at a conference, a conference called the New England Educational Research Conference. And I can't remember which one of them, a couple of years ago, actually brought some Assumption students who gave at an academic conference a really powerful presentation.

MW: That's cool.

PP: So I'm so proud to be an Assumption graduate even as I've seen all—I mean I've been at Harvard, I see all these major universities. And I look back here and Assumption has really grown in really good ways. So, it's really neat to see what's happening down the street.

ES: Has religion played like a big role in your life?

PP: Well, that's interesting. I don't know if you want to get into this [laughs], but being raised Catholic and I'll be very blunt, you know, being raised Catholic that's—and I don't know if you guys were or not, but how you are raised in your faith is something internal to you, whether you reject or accept, it's who you are. And so being raised Catholic is who I am. But I do—I have to—I do strongly disagree with some of the issues around women's rights, you know, LGBTQ rights. I do have some disagreements with the church. So it's good to see, when I was at Boston College the Jesuits were there and I really found an interesting, like a questioning intellectual environment. And I think some of the Assumptionists here, too. So, I think it's great that Assumption now has a Jewish president and sort of thinking across because we, you know, we're all in this world together. I'm still a person of faith, but I really challenge my church or my Catholic church to be connecting across faiths and looking at their mission, which is to actually, you know, be one [laughs] with the world. So that's my statement about [laughs] about that. But I have to say I was married here and my son was baptized here at Assumption and that chapel

really is a place that, you know, I come here and I walk a lot on the weekends when there's parking, [laughs] glad I got a parking space today. But sometimes I'll just go and sit in the chapel and it's really a peaceful place. So, yeah, so that's my, that's my faith. And you can tell from my story before my family was very, very Catholic, very religious, they wanted me to go to a Catholic university. It was a little wild here when I was here. [laughs] But they didn't quite get that. It was the 70s, you know.

MW: I had a question going back to talking about what you were like doing in like conferences and stuff and like that question you had about serving the children. Like how in public schools children aren't always served like rightfully, I guess. Have you found some of the answers you were looking for to those questions?

PP: Yes and no. So yes, in terms of...and that's what my book is about and a lot of the work I do with people is about is showing there's a... [gently hits hand on the table] Schools are based on like a model of people working in the factories a long time ago. So, if you're someone that fits into kind of a range of expectations, school works for you, and it's not always the smartest people that school works for. But there's a lot of other people who are very smart that go to school and because they don't fit into that norm, they get sort of othered and it could be that you speak multiple languages, you're learning English, it might be you learn differently. And so I've been—my experience as a teacher was that there's some really—and my brother, I have a really interesting brother who didn't do well in school and has been very successful in life. So, school is set up a certain way. And so at conferences and things, I love to network with people who can show—and this a lot of it is working with teachers because you walk into schools, you see really good teachers they're often not, it's not about the kids being compliant in the classroom, it's about really opening up kids and so I could go on forever about this. So, that's one of the things I feel having this network of people I'm able to share things that aren't traditional school and sort of by publishing and by networking and social media now you don't just write a book, you can get out there and I'll be talking to teachers at the Mass Reading Conference at the end of April. So it's you really want to trust teachers and support teachers as much as possible, and also those students that there's no reason they should be thought of as deficient in schools and yet the way schools are structured, they end up that way, like being treated that way. So, what was I going to say? See, this is the problem when I'm so interested in this [laugh] So blah, blah, blah. I was just going to say something else about that. Sorry, let me just think.

MW: That's okay.

PP: I'm just saying, so just how kids are set up in school. I have the opportunity to do that and I had another thought that I just that I just lost.

MW: That's all right.

PP: But yeah, no, it's. Oh! I guess my regret is I'm also after all these years of doing that the structures of schooling and power in society are hard to change. So you go in thinking, “Oh, I'm going to change all this,” and I think I've come to the point that I'm really pleased with the lives

that I've been able to touch and have touched me. It's much harder to think about being—you have to be an activist, and those structures are much harder. It's much more than just the way you're teaching. There's power involved in who gets what education. I mean, you guys, I'm glad you're getting a college education and I hope you're not in debt for the rest of your lives from it. But, you know, I feel like there's a lot of things I'm frustrated about that haven't changed in schooling and opportunities for schooling for students. So that's after all these years, I'm like, “Oh my God,” you know? So that's some of what I'm kind of like regretting. I feel good, like I feel really good about my career. I don't necessarily think I've changed the world. But I definitely would say to you guys and to the teachers I work with, you need to be more than just you're serving the people. You're serving, and you want to do that, but you also have to be aware and be an activist. Like politically, whether you're in health sciences or I mean, social, you know, I mean, you guys are both in areas that are serving people. You're not in the corporate world making lots and lots of money, so you have to stand up for yourselves as well as the people you're serving and that's hard. So that's my looking back on education.

ES: This kind of goes with—I feel like a lot of the stuff that you said, but how do you define success in your life? And has that definition changed over time?

PP: I think part of my professional life—I was a really shy kid, really, really shy and so developing confidence in myself and I think at my age as a woman too that was something I had to, I'm still working on it, and part of like learning to stand up at a conference. I remember when I was a teacher, and I've always had like leadership potential, but I've always been very shy about—like I'm not confident. I remember when my son was in the school where I was teaching and he just got there he was like in second grade or third grade, and I was on some committee, and they wanted me to stand up and like say something to the school. I told him to pretend he was sick so I could go home because I was so scared! [laughs] And so now I feel like I've had to keep forcing myself and so my job has helped me to do that. So now I'm pretty—I spoke here at one of the honors convocations, and you know, I present all the time and it's still always hard, but I think building up—the thing about me looking at my career, it's helped me build confidence in myself. And everyone should be confident in self, especially if you're a woman, you know, in who you are and I think that's probably the biggest success. And then the other thing I feel like the job I do, I learn, I meet lots of people who are different from me, and I think I learn from that and that's been a really gratifying thing and if I've done well for people or for students or whatever I, you know, it's a success. So, does that answer your question?

ES: Yes.

MW: Yeah. Kind of flipping to the other side of that, like if you think you're going through a tough time or something, how do you kind of like get yourself like through those moments?

PP: Well, I think you have to look in yourself. I go to yoga [laughs] and I learned the power within me. So I think you build up a certain resilience and after a while I think becoming like an older, hopefully not elderly person yet, but an older person, you do learn to let things go so you realize that the world isn't going to end and you just have to rely on yourself and let bad things—

you have to deal with them and you have to be a problem solver and rely on yourself a lot and yeah... I think that was the thing. I think I worried a lot as a younger person about my self image and what people thought of me and I think that slowly you shed that and you're confident in yourself. So hopefully it's sooner in life, as young women that will be something that it doesn't really—there's a poet named Nikki Giovanni, I don't know if you know who she is? [nods no] Okay. If you're an English major, you probably would. So, she's a Black woman poet, she's about 80 years old now, but very, very prominent. And she just spoke at my, at UMass Boston the other day and this young woman got up and said, “What do you do as like a Black woman who when people are discriminating against you and this and that,” and she said, “You know,” and she don't give a whatever she said, “You don't worry about, don't worry Somebody in your school likes you, find the people that like you.” And it was so—oh, I wish I had heard her like a thousand years ago. But it was kind of like you just have to rely on yourself and worry less about, you have to handle things, you know, especially if someone else is being hurt or you're being hurt, but at the same time it's like, I guess, worry less about what people—and I was I was like, gosh, here's this woman, she's 80, she was really I mean, she looked about younger than me, like 50, she was amazing. But I thought, what a message and this young woman, who was probably your age and she was younger she was actually like a high school student or something and get up to the I thought, good for her, get up to the question thing and I thought, what a good message, you know. And so I feel like that's a really important message is to if they don't like you, don't worry, just do it. The other good message and this comes out of my job, is there's a... I see, see a minute. I think of the quote, and I can't think of her name. Oh, Shirley Chisholm, do you know who Shirley Chisholm was? [nods no] See, my students didn't either [taps table gently to provide emphasis] you should know who she is. She was the first Black woman congresswoman in, like, the 80s and she's, she's famous for a line called, “if I'm not invited to the table, I'm going to go anyway and bring a folding chair.” Isn't that a great line?

MW: Yeah.

PP: So, there's a children's book about her and about her activism, so I was sharing it with my students who didn't know her. You really should know who she is. But that was a great like—so they don't want you, if it's important enough, you'll be an activist to bring your own chair and get involved. So those are two messages that, I'm not quite as eloquent as those two people, but I feel like after living my life I would pass on to your generation.

ES: Well, I think we answered most of the questions, I do just have one last question. Based on your life experiences, what advice would you give to women today and in future generations?

PP: Probably what I just said, you know, pretty much. It's interesting and this is where I should interview you, but we won't do that [laughs]. But just like, what is your experience now? As you know, you're probably on the cusp of 20 or 20s, you know you don't have to tell me. [laughs] But, you know, I feel like it's a world where I don't think we can say, oh, progress goes like, all right I had these certain choices I was given and had to, like, push myself or push whatever; but I think there's other things that your generation and high school women and stuff are facing that are probably harder than, you know, than my generation in my context. So, you know, be true to

yourself, find community, find the people that are going to do you well and get rid of the people that aren't going to do you well and be involved like a city like Worcester is a great city because it's small enough, but it's a microcosm of people from all over the world and, you know, get out there and get involved. And that's opened my doors. I have a, I don't know if I should say this it'll get published, I have some relatives that have young women that are a little bit older than you, who haven't really like they've kind of gone on vacations that are at a resort or something, but they haven't, and one of them is just starting to get out and see the world. And I feel like the more you can take advantage of just getting—and the world could be travel, it could be right here in Worcester, you know, there's communities and food and all kinds of stuff that. So I guess that would be my in hindsight is just rely on yourself, get rid of people who don't care about you and then also, you know, find your community and use that to--I'm really troubled by the world right now and Gaza and children and the children at the border and it's like, God, you know, you're not going to be able to solve all that. But if you care and you can do a little bit of something to make life more human for people I think that your life is well lived, no matter how much money you make or whatever, and both of you are in professions that kind of do that. So, I say this to my students as well, I'm very proud to know there's a generation moving forward doing that sort of stuff.

ES: Well, thank you for participating in the...

PP: Oh, I love to talk, [laughs] when an opportunity to talk about yourself, you know, that's great, well good luck.