

Interviewee: Paulette Bluemel
Interviewer: Alexandra Caulway and Felicia Baltazar
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Transcribers: Alexandra Caulway and Felicia Baltazar



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Abstract: This oral history tells the story of Paulette Bluemel, a wife, mother, and teacher who spent many years of her life in Worcester. In this interview, she discusses her origins, her family history, her education path to success, and the pleasure she found in raising children. She also offers advice to young women of today, pointing out new struggles that come with more freedom. Along with that, she explains her opinion on the politics going on right now in society and the changes she has observed over the years. Paulette is a woman who has experienced many changes in her life and also made an impact on the lives of those around her, through her teaching, role as a mother, and in furthering her education.

FB: Ms. Bluemel, is it okay if we record your oral history on today's date November 19, 2010?

PB: Yes.

FB: Okay. What is your full maiden name?

PB: Paulette Burr (??) Kling. K-l-i-n-g. (ph)

FB: And your married name?

PB: Paulette Burr (??) Bluemel. B-l-u-e-m-e-l. (ph)

FB: Where were you born?

PB: Chicago, Illinois. Chicago, Illinois.

FB: Have you...what is the name of your current husband?

PB: Van. V-a-n (ph).

AC: So, do you have any children?

PB: Two.

AC: Grandchildren? [laughs]

PB: Four

AC: Four?

FB: What are your children's names?

PB: The oldest is Kristen, and the younger is Lee. Two girls.

FB: Did you have any specific significance in giving them the names, like did any names have meaning?

PB: No.

FB: No?

PB: No, just liked them.

FB: What cultures or ethnicities do you identify with your family background?

PB: The family I grew up in was Scandinavian, and...large part Swedish, also, on my mother's side German and Danish, so Northern European.

FB: Can you tell us about your parents?

PB: My father was one of the owners of a manufacturing plant in Chicago that his father had originally started, and he worked there his whole life, sold it when I was probably in high school, but it was very busy during World War II, it was manufacturing of machinery, so that was in great demand. My mother -- I don't think my mother worked one day in her life, as far as I know. [laughs] She was a housewife. Enjoyed that.

AC: And we know you lived in Chicago, but where else, you know, besides Worcester and Chicago?

PB: I went to school in Indiana, and University of Illinois and (___???) Illinois, and after we came from (___???) to Worcester, so I had to live in very many different places.

FB: At what age or what year did you arrive in Worcester?

PB: That's a hard question, let's see. [laughs] Think it was sixty-five [1965].

FB: Was there a specific reason, Worcester?

PB: My husband took a job at Worcester Tech [Worcester Polytechnic Institute]. Stayed there his whole career, and retired from Worcester Tech.

AC: Do other family members besides your immediate family live in Worcester?

PB: No.

FB: What changes have seen in Worcester over time?

PB: Well, the demise of the downtown shopping area, the center of Worcester being a vibrant area at one point and then completely losing any shopping. Amazing to me. And Holden, where I have lived, really -- there's the opposite effect. It has become busier and much more crowded and more traffic. Gone from having a center when we moved there, of having in the center a small grocery store, small drug store, hardware store, and now they've got tanning salons and exercise in that area and nail salons and-

AC: Changed a lot. [laughs]

PB: Going from the, you know, essential mundane things [laughs] to the extraneous.

FB: Okay, so, what were the names of all those schools you attended?

PB: Went to Willard Elementary School, Roosevelt Junior High, oh, Bark River Forest High School, DePaul University, University of Illinois, and Assumption College.

FB: Okay. What were the programs in college that you decided to major in and get involved with?

PB: I think my undergraduate was economics and psychology, masters I was in a Ph.D. program at University of Illinois for a while, and school psychology. Stayed in that two years. Then...oh I got a masters in teaching. And I came to Assumption as an adult and got a CAGS in counseling and something.

AC: So you said you really kind of found yourself in graduate school?

PB: Mhmm.

AC: Just because of the professors or the different environment, do you -- do you really know why?

PB: Probably maturity on my part, but I think it was also getting out of the home environment and also meeting professors that had different views. For instance, simple things like history courses where someone had an opinion different than the one I had, you know, been taught as a

child, that some of the presidents that I had been taught were terrible were really very good presidents. So that sort of makes you think about a lot of things, not just presidents.

FB: Yeah.

AC: So after you finished your education, what did you see as your options, or did you go different places?

PB: No, we were here. I got my final CAGS after I had two children, so at that point...I don't remember how quickly after I finished I started working, but I went to work after that. I worked earlier too, teaching, special ed [education] in Champagne, Illinois.

FB: So, would you say that your graduate education really changed who you were, or just changed more of your views?

PB: Well, I think both.

AC: Both?

PB: Yeah. But it was -- it was a program that (____???) Illinois - I didn't change views as an adult when I came to Assumption.

FB: Okay. Do you work outside the home?

PB: Not now. I did. When the children were in school.

FB: Okay. When did you begin working, and what did you do?

PB: Well I started, as I said, when I was-when my husband was still in school and we were still in Champagne (____???) was teaching special ed. Then when he got a job, we moved here, and by that time, well two children, so I stayed home, until number two was about fourth grade, something like that. But while she was growing up I was taking classes here.

AC: Mhmm. So how would you say you balanced, you know, the different priorities and responsibilities, and along with that the interests in your life?

PB: I think I've been very fortunate because I could stop working when I wanted to and concentrate on young children and then I could go back to work and I could be in education, which I think is a very compatible job with parenting.

AC: Yeah. [laughs]

PB: Versus some others

FB: Yeah

PB: And I think it worked pretty well.

FB: Is there a specific reason that you chose teaching?

PB: I wasn't- well, special ed. teaching. I chose that. But I didn't choose teaching after that, I chose guidance and school psychology.

FB: So was there a specific reason you chose special ed. teaching?

PB: I guess it was a job. [laughs] I liked...I liked special ed. I taught multiple, what they called multiple handicapped, on a one to one basis, which was not a classic situation.

FB: Oh wow.

PB: Yep.

FB: That's nice.

PB: Kids that need a lot of help...in the public schools.

AC: Yeah.

FB: Do you consider yourself politically active?

PB: Moderately.

FB: Moderately?

PB: Mhmm. I am going to get more active because I, I think I'm becoming more interested in politics instead of less.

FB: Oh really? Wow.

PB: Mhmm.

FB: Anything spike that interest? Or...?

PB: Well I think the Tea Party for one is just well. If you want the whole story I think they're crazy and I think it's time to do something about it.

FB: About it. [laughs]

AC: Yeah.

FB: Wow that's great.

AC: So what about volunteering or community work? Did you do a lot of that?

PB: I have over the years. I've been involved in our church, I've been involved in the RSVP [Retired Senior Volunteer Program] program downtown Worcester, working in the hospital as a visitor to newborn babies for years. I've been a member of the League of Women Voters, a member of a group that raises funds for abortions. I've been...what else have I done? member of the Worcester Chorus. I said League of Women Voters didn't I?

AC: Yeah

FB: Mhmm.

PB: That was a...early on that was a...

AC: Was that exciting?

PB: It was very...it was very good. Again, at the time it was a different organization than it is now.

FB: Yeah.

PB: We did more hands on studies.

FB: Oh really?

PB: Yeah.

FB: Wow.

PB: Well that's because things have changed and women are busier now. That's when the kids were small and I could do that. And some other organizations I can't think of.

FB: What role has religion played in your life?

PB: Well, we've gone to church pretty faithfully. I think we pick our friends in large part, or have, not in large part, in some instances from people that we know through our religious, you know, experiences. I guess that's it.

FB: So you mentioned how over the times women have changed. In what ways do you see that women have changed? Is it their jobs that are changing, that are changing their lives? Their political views, or...

PB: I'd say the greatest impact on the family.

FB: Family?

PB: Just observing what my mother did and what I did, and what my two girls do. I think there is tremendous difference. I think young women today have a very difficult life. Because they are trying to do everything, and they are trying to raise a family. At least my kids are trying to raise a family, work full time professionally, keep their husbands happy, keep the house sort of going, and, you know, they don't have time for social life...

FB: Yeah.

PB: ...of their own, which I think is sad and they realize it's not good. You know they don't have time to exercise, etc.

FB: Yeah

PB: So yes, there have been tremendous changes for the women that I have seen in my lifetime.

FB: Did you go through any difficult transitions in moving from childhood to adulthood?

PB: Not really. I think one period that was difficult was the first year that we moved to Worcester.

FB: Really?

PB: Because I had been working before that, and had a life of, you know, had sort of a life of my own. And when we came here I was...in a new area, without knowing anybody, and home with a young child, and isolated and that was, that was a difficult year, that first year.

AC: So, how...I mean I'm not sure if you've experienced this but, health issues impacting your life or in your family?

PB: Well, I've had parents die. That's a health issue. [laughs] My father died of lung cancer and my sister died of lung cancer. My mother had dementia, which was not a pleasant experience. My husband's had cancer. Those are major issues.

FB: How do you define success in your life, and has that definition changed over time?

PB: Well, I think I'm probably less introspective than many people because, for instance, when I was in college I didn't think about what I was going to do after I graduated. I just, you know, went along, took what I wanted. [laughs]

FB: Mhmm.

PB: I started interviewing at the end of college and I thought "Wait a minute. I should have been thinking about this before." And that's the way I've sort of experienced my life. I don't think ahead very well.

FB: Ok.

PB: So...state that again.

FB: How do you define success in your life, and has this definition changed over time?

PB: I never thought about success very much. I've -- I think I've had a successful life, in that I've been able to do pretty much what I felt was important and not had any major traumas. So...that's all I need.

FB: What would you consider the biggest success in your life?

PB: I think raising two children that are fairly well adjusted and productive.

AC: Based on your life experience, what advice would you give to women today. You've mention-You've mentioned that things have changed a lot.

PB: Mhmm.

AC: And future generations...

PB: I think my advice would be don't try to do everything. And I don't know how you work around that. I think part time work would be better if you have a young family, or at least decent childcare facilities. I have often that the business to have would be to have skilled people who could babysit when some child is sick.

FB: And do you feel you have a legacy?

PB: A legacy...Not really.

FB: No?

PB: Uhhmm.

FB: Now that we are working to tell a fuller story of the history of women that has been recorded in the past, what should we be sure to include? Is there anything else you would suggest we talk about?

PB: Well, I've been impressed lately with some of the things I've just run across, that emphasize how recently women have obtained rights to vote etc. and how little the young people today realize what went, what went into that. That the advantages that they have were very hard won and even I didn't understand what was, you know, going on, say a generation before because my family was not politically involved with changing anything. They were happy doing what they were doing. But I think that some sense of history -- well, perfect, Worcester Women's History-- [laughs] some sense of the history of what women have done would be important to young women today. And also talking to some people who were not that much older than you were trying to balance everything.

AC: Yeah.

FB: So thank you very much...

PB: You're welcome.

FB: For taking your time to do this for us. Thank you.

PB: Did we make it?

AC: Yep.

AC: Thank you.

FB: Right in your time limit.

PB: Yay.