

Interviewee: Polly Tatum  
Interviewers: Alexandra Furtado, Jennifer King  
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Transcribers: Alexandra Furtado, Jennifer King



Worcester Women's Oral History Project

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**Abstract:** Polly Tatum was born in Leominster, Massachusetts in 1964, where she lived from childhood into adolescence with her adoptive parents. In this interview, Polly talks about the challenges she faced during her many years in education. She enrolled at Worcester State College, achieved her undergraduate degree, and went on to get her JD while simultaneously raising a family of three daughters. Polly shares a message of motivation and strength in professional and personal lives. Being adopted as an infant, Polly also emphasizes the importance of family. Polly had both a biological and adoptive family, so her passion for family law and adoption services is evident. She also describes her volunteer work with Girls, Inc., the YMCA, Martin Luther King Empowerment Center, and the Worcester County Bar Association where she was the third woman and first person of color to serve as president in the organization's 125 year history. Polly shares a bright hope for the strength of women, and encourages women of the future to seize all of their opportunities.

**AF:** Alright, so let's do this. So, you consent to be recorded correct?

**PT:** I do.

**AF:** Okay, perfect. So, what is your full married name, and if applicable, your maiden name?

**PT:** So my maiden name is Polly Ann Jones; and my married name is Polly Ann Tatum.

**AF:** And when were you born?

**PT:** [ ] 1964.

**AF:** And you have been married?

**PT:** I have been married, I'm divorced.

**AF:** You are divorced, and the name of your previous husband?

**PT:** Spencer Tatum.

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**AF:** Okay; any children?

**PT:** Three girls.

**AF:** Any grandchildren?

**PT:** No.

**AF:** Not yet?

**PT:** Haha, not ready for that.

**AF:** What cultures or ethnicities do you identify with...your family background?

**PT:** That's a hard question. I was born and raised in Massachusetts, and I was adopted as a - an infant; raised in a Christian family - African American family. And when I was about twenty-one or twenty-two, I found my biological family and have a strong relationship with them, and they're from Bermuda.

**AF:** Oh, that's very interesting. So, tell me about your adoptive parents and your biological [family].

**PT:** So my adoptive parents were one of the first African American families in Leominster, Mass.

**AF:** Oh!

**PT:** And that's where I grew up, and they had some dysfunction; and they adopted five kids and I was in the middle, and my adoptive mother died when I was thirteen, and then I ended up going to live with some good friends of mine, and so that's that family. My biological parents had a scandalous affair when they were in their early twenties and ended up making the decision to give me up for adoption; and it was during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1963, so, they were actually stationed at Fort Devons - the old Fort Devons.

**AF:** Oh wow.

**PT:** They are both Bermudian, but I was born here so I got American status.

**AF:** Wow. So you say you lived in Leominster; did you live anywhere else?

**PT:** I lived in Leominster through the beginning of my senior year, and then I moved to Fitchburg, Mass., which is the next town over; and I stayed in Fitchburg from 1982-1984,

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and then I moved to Worcester, and I've been in Worcester since 1984.

**AF:** Oh okay. So, what was the neighborhood generally like that you kind of grew up in?

**PT:** I would say that it was working, poor neighborhood. Most people in Leominster and Fitchburg worked in factories....

**AF:** Mhmm.

**PT:** ... and that was a big industry back then, plastic factories. And some families worked there for thirty-plus years, and so that's how I would describe the neighborhood that I grew up in.

**AF:** Okay; and so, how did you come to live in Worcester?

**PT:** So I graduated high school in '82 during the recession and wasn't thinking about going to college – my guidance counselor told me that I would make a good secretary – and couldn't find a job, so I worked in all these different factories and realized that I didn't want to be doing this for the next thirty years of my life.

**AF:** Right.

**PT:** Nothing wrong with it, but it was hard work and low pay. So I came to Worcester, and started college at Worcester State.

**AF:** And so, do you live in Worcester currently?

**PT:** Yes, so I've been in Worcester since 1984.

**AF:** Okay, and do you have any other family that lives in the area?

**PT:** I have – I still have family on my adopted parents' side in Leominster. And, I'm still close to my ex-husband's family, who – they are a big family here in Worcester.

**AF:** Okay.

**PT:** So, it's an extended family.

**AF:** Yeah. So you have strong ties to the city of Worcester.

**PT:** I do.

**AF:** So what kind of challenges do you think the city faces?

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**PT:** Oh you're asking me *that* question! [Interviewers chuckle] Actually I think Worcester – let's start with the strengths: it's affordable, I think it's a safe place to raise kids, I think that it's a good community to be a part of in terms of just having a sense of community. I think the people here are really good people, I think if you want to get involved in activities or get involved with social activities or volunteer activities, this is a great community to do that in. I feel like it's centrally located, so you can get to all areas pretty conveniently.

**AF:** It's accessible!

**PT:** Negatives: the fact that you have to, you know, travel a distance to do any good shopping. I don't feel like the city in terms of the administration, in terms of organizations are all that diverse. I feel like the school systems are very diverse in terms of the student body, but in terms of the staff, it's not very diverse. And the downtown area definitely needs a lot of improvement. I feel like a big Cheesecake Factory downtown, and we'd be good to go.

**AF:** Absolutely.

**PT:** And other, you know, stores and other entities would follow. But it's a work in progress like any other city, struggling with their downtown infrastructure and trying to, you know, see it come back.

**AF:** What kind of change in Worcester have you seen over the time that you've been here?

**PT:** I think that the younger generation is definitely more diverse. So you see a more diverse student population. There's a lot more immigrants that have come to the city and called it home. Again, some things stay the same, but, you know, the fact that we have the new Hanover Theatre and we have some arts, those were all positives.

**AF:** I love the Worcester Art Museum.

**PT:** Yeah Worcester Art Museum, Hanover Theatre, and we got musicals and plays and live entertainment so – and I've seen more growth in the restaurant industry, there's more restaurants, I think like that canal district, Green sStreet area is definitely a move in the right direction.

**AF:** Let's see...what distinct characteristics make Worcester the place that it is? In your understanding.

**PT:** I think that the fact that it's, geographically, it's a large city, but it's a big town. So you do have your pockets of neighborhoods, but I feel like it still has a lot of that

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“small-town” feel.

**AF:** Do you think - or what do you think women’s experiences in Worcester have generally been?

**PT:** I think with any area, the experience has been, you know, there’s folks that are pioneers and who, you know, have paved the way for other women coming behind us; and there’s opportunities, but you have to go out and seek those opportunities.

**AF:** Okay so that kind of covers like the general, you know, questions; but as far as education goes, we had an interesting question...

**JK:** You said that your guidance counselor said – told you that you should be a secretary?

**PT:** Yes!

**JK:** How did that make you feel then? Was that something you considered?

**PT:** No, because I’m not that great of a typist. So I learned how to type on an old, manual typewriter, but in general it made me feel like she didn’t believe in me and other people didn’t believe in me, and I’m the type of person who is very resilient. So if you tell me I can’t do something, that’s just going to make me try even harder. So I really didn’t pay her any attention, and forged my own path.

**AF:** It kind of spurred you on?

**PT:** I think that, plus, you know, the way I grew up, and not having the support system that I thought everyone else had also kind of motivated me to make something of my life.

**AF:** Okay, well...where did you attend school?

**PT:** So I started at Worcester State, and it was a college back then; and I did, probably...I think I did three semesters there, and then met my former husband and had a child, got married, ended up stopping school for about a semester and working full time because I had this child I had to support. And then I went to a non-traditional college that incorporated work experience, so it allowed you to work and also go to school, weekends, and have a family, and balance things; so I ended up getting my undergraduate degree at New Hampshire College in Manchester. I think it’s Southern New Hampshire University now.

**JK:** SNHU.

**PT:** Something like that. And so I commuted there twice a month for the whole

weekend, and finished school. I think at the time I finished I might have had three children, at that time.

**AF:** That's intense.

**PT:** I was working full time and going to school part time...It was intense.

**AF:** And what did you get your degree in? Undergraduate.

**PT:** So my undergraduate degree is in Human Services.

**AF:** Oh okay. And I see you're a lawyer now, right?

**PT:** Yeah.

**AF:** So, you went to law school, I assume?

**PT:** I did.

**AF:** Where did you go?

**PT:** I went to Mass. School of Law for my JD, which is your first law degree.

**AF:** Mhmm.

**PT:** And, so let me think back, I went to school...let's see, my youngest was five months old and I started law school nights, and I was working full time in Human Services.

**AF:** Wow.

**PT:** And it took me about three and a half years to get through law school nights, and I finished in '94.

**AF:** Okay. What were some of the challenges you faced in education? Clearly you were working and raising a family, so I'm sure it wasn't easy.

**PT:** That was the challenge. Sleep deprived; didn't have computers back then, so I typed everything out on a word processor, so I used my secretarial skills. The challenges were working full time, raising a family, having three children, my husband at the time was just new to the police force, so he was working nights, and just trying to balance everything.

**AF:** Seems like it was definitely a bit of a struggle.

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**PT:** It was a struggle, but – so I guess from undergrad to law school because I went straight through, it took me ten years; and anything worth having...you have, you fight for it, so that's what I try to instill in my own daughters. But to do it all over again, I wouldn't have the energy to do all that.

**AF:** [Laughing] It's definitely an undertaking, I would say.

**PT:** It is.

**AF:** A serious undertaking. Upon finishing your formal education, what did you see as your options? After all was said and done.

**PT:** So, once I finished law school I took a job with the city of Worcester in their law department as one of the city attorneys doing civil litigation work; and I did that for about two and a half years. But I also was an older student, and so I always wanted to have my own practice, so I was looking for a way to combine both of my professional backgrounds: law and human services. So I started my own practice, and that's how I got into family law, and mediation work, and elder law work because it combines both of my backgrounds.

**AF:** Yeah, it seems like a good coalescence there.

**PT:** Yes.

**AF:** What support networks and mentoring have been important to you?

**PT:** So, support networks were my community of friends and mentoring, you know, I had mentors along the way who were my seniors or elders, who were both men and women, who saw some potential in me and were encouraging me, when times got hard, to continue and just finish what I had started.

**AF:** It's always good to have those support systems. I know we have guidance counselors at school, and it's always nice to have someone to go back to, who kind of understands.

**PT:** And I have to tell you, there are three people – three or four people – that I'm still in contact with.

**AF:** Really?

**PT:** To this day and some of them I've had a relationship with for thirty years.

**AF:** Wow; it's nice to have those roots.

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**PT:** It is!

**AF:** Definitely. So as far as work goes, you work outside the home, primarily?

**PT:** This is my office, and so I spend the majority of my time here...weekends, nights, during the day [laughing]. And, to me, it's always been important to work close-by, especially as my kids got older and were busy with activities, to be able to have that flexibility to be able to attend their events and be there for them.

**AF:** Right, definitely important. So when did you begin working, and what are you kind of doing? What are your big projects lately?

**PT:** So I started my practice in June of '97, and I like to say that I help – I work with the entire family. So I do some adoption work, of course, because I'm adopted I certainly had an interest in that area; and so, the adoption work I do is basically either step-parent adoption or same-sex couples who are looking to adopt...because Massachusetts is an agency state, so the only people I can work with are those who are somehow biologically connected to the child – one person's connected. And then – so that's probably 20% of my caseload. I do some divorce mediation work, which is the biggest chunk of my work, which is working with both couples to help them divorce in a peaceful, private manner. I'm probably *the* most experienced divorce mediator in the county – I see anywhere from ten to twenty per week. So I do see a lot of couples; and I do some representation where I act as the attorney for one party if they can't mediate for one reason or another in the context of a family law matter. And then lastly, I went back to school to get an advanced law degree, which is called a LLM, in elder law and state planning; and I finished that in 2009, I went to Western New England School of Law, and so now, I'm doing elder law work as well as another practice area, where I'm working with seniors who are either doing estate planning or are trying to qualify for Medicaid, to go into a nursing home, and doing some asset protection strategies for them. So that is what my workload consists of.

**AF:** It sounds...it sounds very intense.

**PT:** It's intense, but it's diverse enough, and it's working with people; so most of my day is spent, not in court, but in the conference room working with families to help them find solutions to whatever their legal issues are.

**JK:** What would you say is your favorite type of...you said all of these different options?

**PT:** I like them all, but I have to say my favorite work is probably the adoption work and helping people, you know, see their dream of becoming a family come to fruition. That's always a happy occasion.



**AF:** I was just about to ask what that work has meant to you, especially being adopted I feel like you'd have ties with seeing those things come to fruition.

**PT:** I do; and since I don't have any grandchildren, and since my youngest child is twenty-three, it's always nice to see the babies and, you know, to see how happy people are and to see that their family unit is coming together. So I feel like any parent who wants to be a parent should have that opportunity to do so, and adoption gives them that vehicle to enable them to do that.

**AF:** So, what are or were your primary responsibilities in terms of housework?

**PT:** [Laughing] We just switched gears.

[All laugh]

**AF:** I know; these questions are all over the place.

**PT:** Well, when I was married, I have to say, that my former spouse was a great help in terms of doing the chores. He did a lot of the domestic chores, and that's probably a source of contention between the two of us, but I was a tad busy. And then...[??] being a divorced parent – I don't say that I was a single parent because I wasn't, we co-parented – but being a divorced parent with three daughters, they all had chores. And then when they left, then all the chores fell on me which I didn't realize how much I missed them until they all left.

[Laughter]

**PT:** So, you know, you just try to balance and do the best you can with household duties.

**AF:** Yeah, the next question is literally: how do you balance different priorities, responsibilities, and roles? Like, how do you balance between that - all that going on at home, and all this going on at work?

**PT:** Well, I don't think anybody balances it to the extreme, unless you have help.

**AF:** Right.

**PT:** And, I have – I have help at work, I don't have help at home. But I don't make that big of a mess at home, so there's nobody home anymore. There's not really a lot to do.

**AF:** Right; it's just one person.

**PT:** Well actually, that's not true. I have a middle daughter that lives with me.

**AF:** Oh alright.

**PT:** And she has a busy schedule too, so we get around to it. But, when you're older, what you realize is you gotta let some things go. It's not that big of a deal. So as long as, you know, the general area is clean and neat when people come over to visit, you'll get around to your room, you'll get around to your closet.

**AF:** Yeah.

**JK:** You should tell my mom that.

**PT:** It's just not that – to me, my values, it's just not that important.

**AF:** Right, right. How would you characterize the personal and professional costs of your chosen path? How about the benefits?

**PT:** Say that one more time?

**AF:** How would you characterize the person and professional costs of your chosen path?

**PT:** Oh, the costs. That accent, that Rhode Island accent...

[Laughter]

**AF:** Oh, sorry! Tripping you up!

[Laughter]

**PT:** Personal costs...of my chosen professional path?

**AF:** Yeah.

**PT:** I think the costs were the way I did it; because I had children and was raising them at the same time and trying to go to school, and build a practice. I think the costs were we were always on the run, and I really don't know what they ate growing up.

[Laughter]

**PT:** I have no idea how they got a meal.

**AF:** At some point, it happened.

**PT:** It happened! And I have friends, who are at-home moms, and they would, you know, prepare a meal every night and sit down with their children, and the children had the most wonderful table manners. And – but they were just as stressed as well.

**AF:** Right.

**PT:** So, you know, if you asked each one of my daughters something different they would remember some story differently. But I feel like it was all worth it; I don't think that I really lost too much.

**JK:** Wouldn't do anything differently?

**PT:** I don't think I would do – I wouldn't know how to do anything differently.

**AF:** What type of work did your husband do?

**PT:** He – well my former husband is a Worcester police officer.

**AF:** Oh right, you did say that.

**PT:** So he is with the gang unit, and he works with a lot of teenagers, and so that's the kind of work he does. It's dangerous work, but I feel like we're both good examples for our daughters.

**AF:** That's definitely important.

**JK:** Was that ever something you worried about? Him being in the gang unit for work?

**PT:** Oh just being a police officer in general, and just having a gun in the house. So I was just, always against that. And even to this day if I see him, I'll ask him, "Are you wearing your vest?" So, he's close to retirement.

**AF:** Oh really? Good for him.

**PT:** Yeah; it's time for him to do something else. Live on the beach somewhere.

**AF:** Yeah; somewhere safe.

**PT:** Right.

**AF:** So now we're moving into topics including politics and community involvement, so [referencing Jennifer King] if you wanna maybe take over there?

**JK:** Sure! Do you consider yourself “active” politically?

**PT:** I – that’s an interesting, I have been – I have worked on campaigns, I donate my time and my money to candidates that I believe in and I’ve been asked numerous times to run for office, so I don’t feel like I’m political in that nature. I like working on causes and working behind the scenes, but I’m not interested in having my entire life exposed to the political jungle.

**JK:** So you’re more like behind the scenes.

**PT:** Yes, yeah.

**JK:** Have you been involved in volunteer community work? We kind of just touched on that.

**PT:** Well, volunteer work, non-political, yes. I have served on numerous non-profit boards throughout the city of Worcester. One of my favorite organizations is “Girls, Inc.” here in Worcester, and I was on their board of directors for a period of time. I coached Girls Inc. basketball, girls third through fifth graders, and sixth through eighth graders for about twelve years. Coached all my girls, and my – one of my daughters came back and coached with me for a couple years.

**JK:** Oh that must be nice.

**PT:** Oh so much fun. I love it but it was such a big time commitment but I loved coaching at Girls, Inc. And now I’m involved with their leadership academy program which is a twelve-week program working with high school juniors and seniors so it’s a totally different age group. But I, I find that I like the direct impact of volunteering, versus I like the board work too because you can still make an impact on an organization, but I also like the direct impact to see, you know how I’m impacting someone else’s life. So, I’ve been involved with the YMCA, the Martin Luther King Business Empowerment Center. I was a chair for that and I’ve been involved with our Bar Association which is an organization of lawyers and our County Bar Association – we serve about 1100 lawyers throughout the county of Worcester and I’m a past president of that bar association. And I was the third female president in their 125-year history and the first woman of color, so that was an honor to serve in 2012. So I try to pick and choose which involvement, which activities and which organizations I’m involved with. I don’t want to just have my name on something, I want to make sure it’s something I believe in and that I have the time to devote to it so I try to limit it.

**JK:** Don’t want to put in like half your energy into something.

**PT:** Right because what you’ll find is once you are involved with an organization and you’re active and you do a good job a gazillion other organizations want you to get

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involved with it as well and depending on where you are at in your life you can do some things but some things you can't so one of the things that I found was when my daughters were busy in high school that I had to cut back on things, and then once I became an empty nester I wanted to cut back and just enjoy that for a moment and then get re-involved in whatever it was I wanted to get involved in.

**JK:** What led you to join the like Girls, Inc. organization, how did you...?

**PT:** How did I come across that? So I was looking for programs for my girls when they were younger and Girls, Inc. was a natural program for them so they were involved in their activities and after school programs, and you know I was a little biased because I had daughters and that was the organization I wanted to give back to because I felt that they gave back to my kids.

**JK:** Great, what (we jump around with all of these questions) What role has religion played in your life?

**PT:** Lets see, so when I was growing up I went to – I tried different churches but mainly Christian, so whether it was Baptist, Protestant, Catholic – and my girls went to a parochial school for elementary school – and then we went to a very diverse church, as they were growing up, African Methodist Church. It's played a huge role in my life, and hopefully in my daughters' life but I'm also not – I shy away from the structure like I don't want to be in an environment where you have to go to church every Sunday and you're spending three hours of your time in church. I moved more away from, just the structure of it but definitely its played a role in my life and I try to be a good person, be a good Christian and treat people well and live that every day of my life.

**AF:** So would you say that for you that religion is more of an inner experience, a personal experience, as opposed to something that could be more structuralized?

**PT:** I see the benefits of both, and you can have that structure and not have your own personal relationship that you're describing, your inner, and can it be stronger for me, a personal relationship? Yes, do I go to church all the time? No, but do I believe in the structure? I guess, I think in our busy lives, it just depends on where I'm at, and I don't want to feel like I'm told that I have to go to church and I want it to be my choice and I try to make it my girls choices.

**AF:** Yeah, I think that's a good way to look at it, in my experience, because I went to like a parochial K-8 type of school and in my experience I found that that type of enforcement of religion upon especially children in can end up confusing them of what the real role of religion is so in my opinion its always better to have people find religion then it being crushed upon them.

**PT:** And that's the balance, you want exposure, you want to make your own decisions

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and as a parent, when you're an adult you feel that way but then when your – you still need to give your children some type of guidance. It's really your own values and how you incorporate that. So like I said I had church experience where it was a very strict Baptist church and it was fire and brimstone and they would show these movies where we were all going to hell for sinnin' and I said well, that's not really how I want my kids to be introduced to religion. And I've – they've gone to Catholic schools and they've gone to Catholic churches where you have nice, short, simple service for thirty or forty five minutes and I'm like, 'Oh I can do this every week,' [Laughter] and then going to an African Methodist church where it's a three hour ordeal every Sunday I'm like...

**AF:** That's a commitment.

**PT:** That's a commitment, so in our busy world I think there are different ways you can incorporate religion and think about it and I feel like some of the leaders of the churches need to listen to that and jump on board.

**AF:** I think that's a fair criticism, truthfully.

**PT:** We digress

[Laughter]

**JK:** Now moving into a couple health questions (we have gone all around with these), How has health issues impacted your life and those in your family?

**PT:** I haven't had any (thank God), any health issues, major health issues, and it's been a chore to find out my health history because again, I was adopted and when I was adopted it was a closed adoption so I didn't know until I was 18 that I was adopted and then like I said found my biological family. So I do have some medical history, but thankfully I don't have any health issues. I could be healthier. Could I exercise more? Sure.

**AF:** I think we all could.

**PT:** Right, it's a – it's not even the 80-20 rule sometimes depending on what life brings us so...

**JK:** Any like broken bones for your children or anything or for you when you were growing up?

[Laughter]

**PT:** Me broken bones? No, I had appendicitis at 9, and my girls were all pretty healthy, so they didn't really have any health issues. I never believed them when they said they

were sick...

[Laughter]

**JK:** Made them go to school every morning unless they were throwing up or something.

**PT:** Right, and their father was the one that would get the call and then he would go get them.

**AF:** In the cop car?

**PT:** Yeah sometimes [Laughter]. No he couldn't do that.

[Laughter]

**JK:** What are your experiences in accessing quality affordable healthcare?

**PT:** So again, I have great insurance through the city of Worcester through my former spouse. So I've had no issues as an adult with quality healthcare and access. When I was younger again, I didn't really have any health issues, so I guess I didn't pay attention to any?

**JK:** Right, are you still in charge of anyone's health care in your family? I know you said they're all grown up and only have one living with you right now.

**PT:** Not in charge, but being a mother of three daughters they tell me everything that's going on in their life, I always say little people, little problems, big people, big problems. If they are having some health issues then they share it with me and one of my daughters contracted malaria when she was abroad in college so I'm always worried about that flaring up and you know just worried about weight issues for girls and trying to eat healthy and making sure no one's over doing it either way, but essentially that's all their choices. My youngest one is – I think she still has the family insurance – the family health insurance, she is – again anything that is going on with them they feel the need to share so.

**AF:** Always an open ear as a mother?

**PT:** Yeah, but it gets to be too much, if it's something your sisters can handle first go to them.

**AF:** Right.

**PT:** And then clue me in and if it's something serious then I have to clue their father in.

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[Interviewers discussing]

**JK:** Oh so I've thought of some other questions while you were answering questions, how old were you when you had your first child? You said you were in school still?

**PT:** So I was – her birthday was September [ ], I was twenty, my birthday is September [ ], so I was 20 turning 21. Too young.

[Laughter]

**JK:** Did you ever wish you had sons? Or were you happy that you had all daughters?

**PT:** No, it's a special relationship between mothers and daughters, I don't think I could have handled a boy. Do I want a grandson? Yes, so I mean it was nice having girls, I mean they bickered a lot so I was able to practice my mediation skills on them.

**AF:** Taking work home?

[Laughter]

**PT:** Taking work home, they were super active, they were all figure skaters and they all competed nationally, one competed internationally. They did a lot of activities, so I don't think that I missed out on anything having boys – I have a godson so I'm happy with him.

**JK:** There you go. Did you ever have any issues getting all your daughters to their like ice skating or..?

**PT:** Yes, there was always a – first of all we were outnumbered, two to three [Laughter] so – and they never took the bus to and from school because I had an issue with no seatbelts on the bus, so they were driving to and from school every single day of their lives and literally they could walk to school if they had to.

**AF:** Oh goodness.

**PT:** And their Dad and I just made it happen, we went to all – everything they had going on we went to it.

**JK:** That's great, do you think that your husband would have wanted sons or do you think he was happy with three daughters?

**PT:** He – no, he had a son – he had a son who's older, he does have a son so he was fine.



**JK:** Satisfied.

**PT:** Yes.

**JK:** When you talk about all the schooling that you did growing up, was school something you enjoyed going to? Or was it something like you wanted this – you wanted to become a lawyer so you had to go?

**PT:** Well I had to – I knew I had to create a better life for myself, I don't know I enjoyed it. I don't know that I enjoyed balancing everything. Actually I think it was kind of torture. [Laughter] After I think back, but I had a good core group of friends so I went to school nights for law school and we are all in contact to this day – we are all friends – and I was the one that had kids, so it's nice watching their kids and some of the trials and tribulations they go through with their own kids, and my best parenting tip, especially for girls – and you guys aren't going to like this, but this was my best parenting tip: all my girls were writers so we always got them a diary and we told them to write in their diary and that was their confidential private thoughts and we read it like it was a best-selling novel.

**AF:** Oh my goodness!

**PT:** And that's how we kept them on track and we knew how they were doing.

**AF:** That's insane.

**PT:** And it came out a couple years ago 'cause they were laughing going through my phone reading my text messages and I said, 'Oh really, so I can confess and tell them I have been reading their diaries all these years.' Now the tip with parenting is you can't let them know that you know that they are getting ready to sneak out of the house, or smoke a cigarette, or drink or whatever. You just have to kind of catch them, and they were – my girls were like – how does she know this, and how does dad know this? They just figured because he was a police officer, that we had eyes and ears in every corner, and I bet you, they are going to do the same thing.

**JK:** Like the old eyes in the back of the head.

**AF:** I'll have to keep this in mind.

[Laughter]

**JK:** When you were growing up did you play sports or anything? You said your daughters were all active.

**PT:** I did, I played – field hockey was my favorite sport – I played – I was a big

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tomboy, and I played basketball, but I wasn't a structured kind of kid so I would like to play pick-up at the park, and that's when kids went and played in parks somewhere. And like I said I had a lot of issues in high school, I barely made it out of high school and so, being physical, having physical activities I think, I can definitely see the benefits of it – that definitely helped me.

**JK:** Skipping over to your work area, do you have any great cases that stood out in your mind, or that really affected you or anything?

**PT:** So many, so I probably conducted over 2000 divorce and family mediations, and in the beginning the hardest cases for me were a couple that had a long term marriage, so they weren't the Kardashians, they weren't married 72 days, you know they might have a thirty-forty year marriage and back then you stayed together, happy or not. And their families were getting divorced and just watching the impact on this elderly couple who decided, you know what we can't live together anymore. And again for me, watching – seeing a guy cry, that really had an impact on me. So in the beginning I had a hard time handling it, I might have to take a break, they think I am taking a break for them but it was really my own personal break. Other case, you know just helping someone who, really finically can't afford my services and they are just trying to secure, you know, like basic benefits for their kids or a single mom who is trying to get child support paid consistently, or trying to get access to health insurance, so advocating for those kind of cases. And then an elderly couple who kept the husband at home when he went through his Alzheimer's and now, and now the mother's had a stroke and she has health issues and their children are away, and just trying to help them navigate to get the mom the best possible services she can get. So it's all varied, but it's all good work.

**JK:** Sounds like it. When you said you found your biological parents, how did they react when you found them?

**PT:** Oh girl that's a long story, [Laughter] okay so – that was on that list?

**JK:** That was not on that list that was one I came up with.

**PT:** So, let's see, how can I make this a short version so my – again it was a closed adoption – my biological mother was married to a guy who was in the military and he was abusive and they had twin daughters at the time when I think they were 9 months old, and she's in a foreign country and again it was during the Cuban Missile Crisis. So she went back to Bermuda and I think the husband was having an affair and she met up with my Dad who was her high school sweetheart and Bermuda is about as big as Worcester, so it was a small community back in the 60s, and they had an affair and got pregnant with me while she was married, and actually my father was engaged to her cousin, so it was a scandal [???]. A few people knew about it and she came back and was encouraged by her mother and her family to give me up for adoption. So I found her like I said I think 22 – let me think here, my oldest daughter's 26, so about 25 years ago. And

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it was just like something out of a movie or a book. So we had a great reunion, I flew in to see her – she was in St. Louis. And my Dad met us and we had a reunion and connected and so they were happy to reunite with me and they were happy to see each other, they haven't really seen each other in all those years.

**AF:** So it was a positive – positive experience?

**PT:** It was a positive reunion, like I said that's the short version of the story.

[Laughter]

**AF:** I guess just one question to kind of tie it all up in case you have any more [Referring to Jen]? Based on your life experiences what advice would you give to woman of today and future generations?

**PT:** Jeez, that's a tough question. You have to choose what's important to you, not what somebody else is dictating what's important to you. So you have to follow your own values and kind of manage it, there is no blueprint for what life is going to bring you. There are all these different changes to the plan, so definitely try to have a plan but be flexible to know that your life can go in a different direction and that doesn't mean that good, bad or indifferent. If you make a mistake, you grow from your mistakes, and really you're going to make mistakes – that's what life's about. How we learn from that, and try to be good people, try to treat people well, and don't sweat the small stuff for sure.

**AF:** So, you think that people's – women's ability to kind of grow into individuals with strength is kind of something that is important to the future success?

**PT:** Well we are definitely not those “binders full of women” like Mitt Romney was talking about. We are probably more than fifty percent of the population, we can do whatever we want to do. And again, it's our choices, your choice is something that's not conventional, it's your choice.

**AF:** I think that's fair, is there anyone else that you would suggest we talk to?

**PT:** About me?

[Laughter]

**JK:** No, just other woman that you think that in the Worcester community or anything.

**AF:** Had connections with the Worcester area?

**PT:** Do you have a lot of woman of color that you are talking to? Do you know?

**AF:** We don't actually know the other woman that even our classmates are interviewing. They gave us very basic information as far as name, how to contact you.

**PT:** When's your deadline? Isn't it coming up?

**AF:** It's coming up, but we can just have like a quick conversation it doesn't need to be as formal.

**JK:** And it's not necessarily even for us it's just in general, is there any women that really affected you or something.

**PT:** Oh that impacted me?

**JK:** For like future interviews that people will hold, not necessarily this time frame of projects.

**PT:** But do they need to be in Worcester or...?

**AF:** They need to have some connection to Worcester. If they lived here or worked here for some amount of time.

**PT:** Okay, so I'll give you somebody's name. Dorothy Williams Proctor, she was one of my mentors. So she was in Leominster, but she – we worked together in Worcester for a period of time.

**AF:** Okay, that sounds like somebody someone would want to speak to in the future. Is there any other questions you can think about asking [referring to Jen]?

**JK:** Not that I can think of.

**AF:** Any final thoughts?

**PT:** Well good luck to you too, with the project and graduation, and the rest of your life. Hopefully you will travel some and find some career path, and something that you are passionate about. So just don't follow the money.

[“Thank you's” are said around the table]