

Interviewee: Patricia Eppinger
Interviewers: Eliza Cassella and Elizabeth McCarthy
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Abstract: Patricia Eppinger is a community volunteer and mother of three young children. In her professional career, she worked as a management consultant for McKinsey & Company for eleven years. She has taught Management Communication to MBA students at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth and the Sloan School at MIT. Patty received her undergraduate degree from the College of William & Mary and her MBA from the Tuck School of Business. In this interview Patty discusses her involvement with the United Way's Women Initiative of Worcester, the Ecotarium, the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts, and her children's school. She shares her excitement about her husband's role in the renovation of the Hanover Theater and her hopes for Worcester. Patty reflects on what it was like working as a woman in the field of management and the need to balance work and family.

EM: So, I'll just explain to you again what the oral [history] project is all about. Umm.. yea, like I said it's just, were interviewing women around Worcester that seem to be significant. It's city wide in Worcester and the Worcester area. Our class, we read a lot on the feminist movement and a lot of women's rights movements, and stuff like that, and so our interview is going to pertain to all of that. So I'm going to ask you questions about your life and about things that you would think are significant in your life. Just some personal stuff... I guess I'll begin with just general family and stuff like that.

PE: Sure

EM: What's your full name including your maiden name?

PE: Patricia Ann Zillian Eppinger

EM: Ok, and where were you born?

PE: I was born in Mineola, New York... in Long Island New York

EM: And children? I know we've met one of them already

PE: Three. I have a ten-year-old daughter and seven-year-old twins, boy and girl.

EM: Oh ok, what are your cultures and ethnicities that you identify with? Your family background.

PE: I am majority Lithuanian, so in the Russian block, um, have some German and Irish.

EM: Me too, (laughing)

PE: Yea

EM: Ok, and what's your current husband's name?

PE: Fred... Fred Eppinger

EM: Ok, Can you tell me a little bit about your parents and where you lived before you moved to Grafton?

PE: Sure, is -- my parents as a child? And then... yea... the first four years of my life we lived in New York, and then my dad took a job in Virginia, which is where my family still is. So that was, gosh, forty-three years ago, they've been in Northern Virginia outside of Washington D.C. and I have three brothers, all of whom still live in that area. And then since then, I met my husband when we were in graduate school, and that was at Dartmouth in New Hampshire, and we moved Atlanta, Boston, Denver, Hartford, and now Worcester.

EM: Wow.

PE: Which is his home town.

EM: Oh, Ok, yea I think we might of, someone might have told us that, I'm not sure. Ok, and so you said that your siblings mostly live in the same area.

PE: They do.

EM: So you don't have much... do you have much family around Worcester?

PE: Umm.. Not on my side, on Fred's side we had quite a few family members. [Sneezes] Excuse me. Many of whom had moved away. His oldest brother has been living in London for twelve years, there moving back to Shrewsbury in March.

EM: mmhmm..

PE: And then we have a nephew, and his wife and two kids who live in Holliston, but pretty much the rest of the family is spread out.

EM: Ok. Umm, I guess I'll ask you a couple questions about Worcester then. The first one would be what challenges do you think Worcester faces as a city, and what would you change about the city?

PE: Alright, you know it, the challenges I think, are all real opportunities for us right now, as so much of the population has been moving west from Boston, we sort of need to grow into ourselves as a city. I think we always just sort of felt like we were some mill town in central Massachusetts and we've just got such an opportunity as people are moving this way to sort of expand who we are and to you know attract more people who maybe can't afford to live in Boston, or who'd like to live in areas that have a little bit more land. So I think that's great. I think our challenge is our history. That a lot of people look at, I mean, I-I-I didn't really know, I'd never heard of Worcester before I met my husband, and he grew up in Spencer outside of Worcester, and we'd always said we'd live in neutral territory, so to come back here was kind of a big deal. Umm, and, it's, even my sister in law, who, the one moving back from London said when we were living in Atlanta at the time, said Atlanta's so wonderful, it's so young and vibrant, clean, ya know Worcester's this old city, and it--it, I don't think of it that way just because I think I didn't grow up here. But I think that persona or that connotation exists in a lot of people's minds, and I think that's probably our biggest, biggest challenge going forward is just changing how people think. And then, you probably know just as college students, it's, it's funny ya know, cities now as people are sort of moving outside there isn't a lot for you guys to do downtown, that's changing.

EM: yea..

PE: But there isn't, ya know. And there isn't a lot of housing really in the downtown area that would attract young people to come back into the city, and I think that's what we need to be, ya know, you need to be a twenty-four hour city, or at least an eighteen hour city, for people to umm to really wanna be a part of it.

EM: And then maybe, with talking to your husband, do you know of any changes that have occurred, over time in Worcester? Like maybe from.....

PE: yea..

EM: ...maybe times that he talked about to you.

PE: Yea, I think that there have been sort of, some of them have been a little circular. Whatever. There have been some attempts to change downtown for the good, but maybe they haven't been the greatest, like the Worcester Common Outlets Area, now that there talking about trying to remove, right? That's right by the DCU center it sort of created a big block in the downtown area. And so I think that, when that happened, a lot of people thought that a lot of people would come down town to shop and to eat and that, and that didn't really happen, and so now they're talking about reconfiguring that. There's been a lot of, I guess there have been some old buildings, that ya know, warehouses, and all that have just sort of sat empty, and now people are talking about, ya know making them into, loft apartments and doing those kind of projects. Ya know I'm excited about seeing the theater downtown I, ya know, I'd like to see more of those kinds of activities, more restaurants. We've lived in places where there have been such vibrant down towns. I mean, ya know, we've lived in the city of Denver, we've lived in the city of Atlanta, we

lived just outside of Boston, even West Hartford Connecticut, where we moved from, right? You've got this great area where people can walk, and eat, and shop, and we just have sort of funny sprawl going on, and no real core to the downtown. So I'm hoping that some of these projects, I mean I know there are a lot of people who want to see the downtown succeed. Ya know lots of change, for the better I'm happy to see us do more with the rail line, just getting people into Boston, and out of Boston is a good thing. And I think that's gonna help us a lot too.

EM: Mmhmm, And then I'm gonna ask you a little about women in Worcester now.

PM: Sure.

EM: Do you think, what do you think some of the experiences for women have been over time, or just in general, in women in Worcester.

PM: Yea, my um, ya know, my observations really have been in the last four or five years since we've lived here, and I think there, there are so many opportunities for women, and I'm excited about that. Also, having lived in a lot of places, a lot of the communities are not as welcoming. Here, I feel like if you have something to offer, people are excited about it. Ya know, you look at the people who are very involved in the community downtown and there are a boat load of women who are doing great things, for Worcester and for women and girls in Worcester, which I'm very excited about. And you don't, you don't find that in every other city or it's very hard to break in. There's a real stratification or ya know, if you're not part of an old family, from a certain community, you can't find your way, and I feel like in Worcester, ya know, it's all hands on deck, whoever's willing to make a difference can do it.

EM: Yea, Okay and now were going to move on to your education. Where did you attend school, I guess starting from [*To Eliza: what would you think, high school?*] Let's start at high school.

PE: Sure, yea, all of my early years including high school were in Northern Virginia. So Bishop O'Connell High School in Northern Virginia, and then I went to William and Mary for college. Cause, I, most of my life I lived in Virginia... was an economics and government major there, and then went to graduate school at Dartmouth, the Tuck School of Business, got my MBA there. And so far, that's it, except for doing some teaching in that area. Teach at Dartmouth, teach at MIT.

EM: Mmhmm, Can you tell us about any challenges in your education?

PE: Yea, I would say especially, ya know, not so much in, well...high school's funny, right? [Laughing]

EM: [laughing] Yea

PE: So I don't know, I go back and forth with my own kids, would I send my daughter to an all girl's high school, theoretically, not having gone to one, because it's a tough time in girl's and young women's lives, I think. It was fine, I did great, I was involved in a lot of things. ...but there was definitely sort of a, a guy/girl thing in high school. Umm, college, college was great. I mean I loved William and Mary. I feel like, pe- ya know, people can do well if they pick something that they're really interested in, so I never really felt like there any kind of difference, from ya know, the girls and the guys in college. Graduate school was a little different because only 20% of my class was female, and umm, ya know, fewer- I think- fewer women necessarily go into grad, say graduate level business courses... it's changing, and it has changed. I got my masters in '86, it's ya know, been changing since then. But, but that was, ya know, that was a little more awkward, I think. I think you noticed it more just because there weren't that many women.

EM: Did you have any support networks or mentoring that were important to you? Throughout?

PE: Ya know, yeaah particularly in graduate school. It's only a two-year program and the sort of second year women really did kinda watch out for the first yearers which was really nice. And there were women's organizations you could be a part of, ya know which was nice. I wound up, I wound up becoming the first women student board president of my, graduate school, which I was excited about.

EM: Wow!

PE: But I think it's all because of that kinda network that, that helped in that way. And it was not discriminatory in any way, you just, you just noticed it. Ya know?

EM: Yea, mm hm, okay. And now we move on to work. Do you work outside the home?

PE: I do occasionally now. [laughs] I'm a graduate school professor, so sometimes I teach executive ed, sometimes I teach, ya know I'll teach a, a semester course. I'm not teaching right now.

EC: Where do you teach?

PE: Well, I have uh, I mostly teach at Dartmouth, which is why I'm not teaching right now, cause the commute...is...ya [laughing]

EM: Yea [laughing]

PE: Three hours each way. I have taught at the Sloan School at um MIT, as well when we lived in Boston.

EM: Okay, and then, what has this work meant to you, being a professor?

PE: I, I truly enjoy it. My, my, background when I finished graduate school, I went into consulting, and that was sort of an interesting experience, as a women just because there, there are fewer women that go into that kind of work and the other reason is because a lot of your clients are men...so ya know I did from '86 until umm.. Until about '97 or so, I was actually working in general management consulting. Most of that time was with a large consulting firm called McKinsey and Company it's a worldwide firm. And it was great, but ya know, small-ish percentage of women in that environment though the women were great mentors. And I think that really helped me a lot, cause you're on the road all the time, ya know, you, long hours and I was working a lot of that time in the south where most of the executives in business were males. So that created some challenges in itself. On the graduate school teaching level, I have had wonderful women I've worked with, and, and that's been a really nice environment.

EM: That's good, and then, what about work, like primary responsibilities around house work, around the home, and stuff like that, and if you share it with anyone?

PE: [laughing] So who does most of the work around the house do you think Lou?
[Asking her daughter]

EM: (Laughing)

PE: Ya know what, it was sort of, I think there have been times in our careers where my husband and I have made trade offs. When I, the first time I actually took a full time job teaching at, at um Dartmouth at Tuck, we were living in Atlanta.

EM: Oh wow!

PE: So, that was huge! And it was a big deal, he was traveling for work, and he would sort of accommodate me by flying to New Hampshire rather than flying back to Atlanta, ya know...we...that was pre-kids, but we sort of, at different times in our careers we've made those kind of accommodations. At this point, just because of my husband's work, it is pretty my accommodation, ya know...I'm the one, so I've got primary responsibility for these guys. [Looks at daughter, laughing]

EM: Mhm, [laughing]

PE: And all the animals I described, and their homes. And...uh.. And it's...ya know...it's okay. I don't, I have to be perfectly honest, I don't miss it right now, cause these guys are at great ages.

EM: Yea alright, we're just going to switch interviewing you. [Eliza and Liz Switch interviewing]

PE: Sure!

EC: Alright, Can you tell us a little bit about how you've balanced your different priorities, responsibilities, your roles, and your interests in your life?

PE: Sure...ya know it's funny, when I was younger, particularly out of college and out of graduate school, I was so focused on work, I mean that was just it. And, ya know, we didn't have kids, it was, I would work around the clock, I mean there were days I'd be working seventeen, eighteen hours a day. And it was just because I thought that's what it took. [laughing] And I thought that that's what I wanted to be doing, and then as I got a little bit more senior in my work I was able to mentor some younger folks, I was able to become involved in the communities I lived in. When I was in Atlanta I was the president of the board of the YWCA down there, and I kind of got a sense that there were other priorities in life, and it wasn't just like...if I wanted to I could stay at work all the time, and I would never get it all done. Right? And so at that point I had to say what's important and getting that other side of life, of just doing something that's important to the community maybe to further a mission or a goal that you believe in. And, that, so that shaped a lot of what I do now. I like working, when I'm working, but I also know that there are other parts of my life that are important. I do do a lot of community work here with boards in Worcester and in Grafton, kids school, that kind of thing. And, I hope that for my own daughters I would be a role model, in terms of doing a little of everything. Not...ya know not doing it all and not doing it all perfectly, but they know that when I, that when I am doing work, that ya know we do have to have to bring in extra support to get them to and from school, or...but they know that the work is important when I'm doing...ya know...I am going to be the incoming chair of the board of the Ecotarium and my kids refer to that as the place I work...cause I like to spend a lot of time there. And there, but what I do now I guess is...I try to choose things that are important to my family too. So, I do the Ecotarium work, I'm on the board of their school, on the Vet school here in Grafton...just because animals and kids, ha, ya know the family are really important to me. So, but there, ya know, there are, there are so many wonderful things in Worcester that you can be involved in, and I, one of the things I really like is this network of women that exists in Worcester which I haven't necessarily found in other cities.

EC: I actually was [with]the Women's Initiative...

PE: Oh you were!?

EC: And I was able to see you, can you just tell us a little bit about your involvement with that?

PE: Yeah, um, my husband and I have both always been big supporters of the United Way. And as needs change and as ways that people give to different charities change, we've always felt like there's some need for an organization like that. So we've really, for twenty years, we've been involved with the United Way. I was happy to see there was a Women's Initiative here, when we moved here, cause we had been involved in one in Atlanta, when we lived there. The organization's great because they let you be involved in ways that fit your life, and right now I can't...ya know...I can't be at every

dollar diva thing, I can't necessarily even be on a committee, just because a lot of...because there are working women a lot of committees meet in the evening, which is harder to do. So they let me be involved in a way that I can be, which is to be a great cheerleader for the organization, to help, like other people, in the selection of the priorities. I am going on to, I guess an advisory committee that they have now, which, they, they're very creative, they ya know, the, the meetings are say once a month but sometimes, some months they're at 8:45 which is great after I drop my kids off at school, or they're at noon for people who can do stuff during the lunch hour. And, so, it, it fits. Like, you feel like you can make a difference, you can be involved. Great women are involved. I'm excited about the focus on adolescent girls, as my daughter is coming into that age. It's a challenge whether you're from an affluent situation or not. Ya know, but I...I think it's great how they've mobilized women in the community. I'm just really impressed!

EC: That's great; can you tell us a little bit about the type of work that your husband does?

PE: Yes, he is the chief executive officer of an insurance company, Hanover Insurance, here in Worcester. So it's pretty demanding, lot of... a reasonable amount of travel cause they've got, sort of, 60% of their businesses in New England, and then 40% is in Michigan, and ya know other areas. So it's, a major employer here in the Worcester area.

EC: Alright, we're gonna move on to politics and community involvement, and you already touched a little bit on that with the Women's Initiative. Do you consider yourself active politically?

PE: I was probably more active politically when I was younger. Now in terms of sort of traditional political roles, I think I now tend to be much more issue specific, and if there's something that's important to me, if it's a referendum or whatever, I will find a way to get involved in it, but I'm not... I'm not even affiliated with a party. I'm a registered independent. So...

EC: So you talked a little bit about your volunteer work and community work with United Way, but are there any other volunteer organizations that you're involved with?

PE: Here in Grafton, I'm part of the, it's called the community harvest project, which is, a farm here in-in, north Grafton that supplies the only fresh food that goes to Worcester County Food Bank. So that's something that's been really important to us. I'm also on the board of overseers at the Vet school, the Cummins School at Tufts here in Grafton. And I, I like Grafton things, cause I really like this community, and it's just easier for me, and-and, there are things that my kids can get involved in. Then I, I try to limit myself to, sort of, two boards, although I'm reaching out a little bit, but I've been on the board of the Ecotarium for a couple years, and I'll be in April, the new chair of that board...for a couple years, which is a big commitment, and then the, this is my third year on the board of the kid's school.

EC: That's great! Alright, can you talk a little bit about the organization's main goals? You can talk about whichever one you want

PE: Huh! Ya know probably the Ecotarium. I think right now I'm the most connected to and partially because I can bring my kids there. When we first moved here, I was never from Central Massachusetts, and we kinda plopped in, I kept seeing these signs all over the place. So that was the first place we went! Cause I didn't know what it was and it's, I think it's a really...the mission is to inspire passion for science and nature. And I think that's a really important thing for young people today, and when your in a city like Worcester, where if you are from the city, you don't...your not necessarily in a natural environment. Your not, ya know, you don't maybe have a lot of land around you. There are kids that come to the Ecotarium, that they'll a night, like a night journey project, and they've never really seen the, the stars...ya know...cause you're in the city lights and that kinda thing. And, were really involved in making people sort of, interact with what's happening. It's a real interactive kind of environment, and I...and I think that's important for kid's learning. So I, I love bringing my kids there, and ya know, right now with the focus on MCAS and just women in science, and girls in science. There's a program that's part of the Ecotarium called Women in Science, and it's focused on trying, ya know, trying to attract girls to the math and science, and I think that's important in today's environment.

EC: What would you consider the group's major accomplishment while you've been on it?

PE: Well, this is funny; I guess just as I came I would say the major accomplishment was survival. Cause, even though it was founded in 1825, the doors were about to close. It, just... it was a financial mess, sort of a bad situation. They had done a capital campaign years before and had taken on a lot of debt, and weren't earning enough money to pay, just really to pay to keep the place operating. So that, so what we've done is the last three years we've focused on redirecting the organization, creating a strategic plan, revisiting the mission, bringing some people on board who kind of understand where it is we want to get in terms of being a resource for Central Massachusetts, and allying with other organizations that are similar in the region um and beyond. And I think, just getting...ya know.. Putting a strategic plan in place that is both visionary and also founded on financial survival in this environment, I think it's a huge accomplishment.

EC: Alright, what role has religion played in your life?

PE: I...um...I'm Roman Catholic as is my husband, and I went to Catholic school from first through twelfth grade.

EC: Me too!

PE: [laughing] So, it's been pretty important, and I, ya know, we're very involved in our church, were happy even now that we can walk to our church...ya know, and have our kids...I think it's, it's a way for people to be grounded whatever your religion. I mean, I

grew in an environment, even though we all went to Catholic school...our...our world was very open and we were very tolerant, and we had friends of other religions, and now my friends are from every religion you could imagine, and many have no religion. Um, but to me, I think it's, I think it grounds you; I think it gives you a belief that there's something to work for that's bigger than you. Ya know and...and I think that's important.

EC: Alright, were gonna move onto the next topic, and that's health. How have health issues impacted your life?

PE: Fortunately, we have all ourselves been very healthy. So I've been, ya know, thankful that none of my kids have had any issues, ya know, when they were born or since. I think at this stage in our lives, I'm 46 and my husband's 49, were being more affected by the health of our parents. Ya know, were kind of in that generation where kids are healthy, we're good, but we're having to deal with...ya know...my husband's parents are in their 90's, Alzheimer's, his father's got Alzheimer's. His mother's had serious health issues. My dad's passed away, thankfully my mom at 83 is very healthy, but you know that that's something that's...that...you're facing. And, how do you resolve that? How do you make sure that they get the kind of care that they need? Ya know, longer term, what is the right solution? Do you move them closer? Do you, ya know, how do you, ya know, how do they get that care? My generation I think that's a big issue.

EC: Okay, what are your experiences in accessing quality, affordable healthcare?

PE: Thankfully, once again, I have always had access to quality healthcare, and it has been affordable, because we have health insurance. It's the folks that don't have insurance, I think, that either don't have access or, or it's not affordable.

EC: Definitely, and whose health are you responsible for?

PE: Well, the whole family, my...my husband has a PPO coverage, so just the two of us and our kids.

EC: Okay, Let's see...Is there anyone else you would suggest that we talk to about yourself?

PE: About me? Or to be interviewed for the project?

EC: Both.

PE: [laughing] That's funny, oh gosh. Ya know what I've got some good friends you could talk to, whether you wanna dig deeper...I mean, I...I don't even know if there are things that we haven't talked about that would be more helpful to you, or other things on your mind, or other I don't know, I've got such a short time in Worcester, if I've given you the right, uh, kind of perspective. I'm guessing you have some wonderful women

like, Kay Bassett, and ya know, I don't know, Mayor Lukes on your list to be interviewed.

EM: Okay! During your time in Worcester, have any major historical events occurred? And did they impact you if there were any? I know, like you said you haven't been here for a really long time, but if there's anything you can think of...

PE: No, ya know, I...I do have to say because I'm, I'm biased about this, but I'm really excited about the [Hanover] theater. And my husband was a big part of the capital campaign there to get it going, and ya know...it's, I don't know if it's a major historical thing, but it is in a sense, that we're bringing this theater back, that had such a history. And I love when we walk in there for events, or special events, where we've invited people to come see it, because everyone has a story. Ya know, they remember when it was a cinema, they remember when it was the grand theater that it was, so it's...ya know, if you...I don't know if you guys have had a chance to go there.

EM: I haven't.

PE: Well, we'll make sure you do! But on the founder's wall...you should -- it's amazing, there's this gorgeous display...I, it must be must be 50 feet tall, of old photographs, from Worcester's history. So it's amazing to see, ya know it's wonderful.

EM: That does sound cool!

PE: Yea!

EM: There's a few questions, jumping back I guess, when you were in school....we have a couple questions on what was considered fashionable when you were a young woman. Kind of just some odds and ends questions I guess.

PE: That's so funny! In terms of clothing styles and such? That's hilarious! Well it's funny cause I can remember in middle school, anyway, ya know, you had the bell bottoms and the elephant bell bottoms, were even more popular! Ya know, going to Catholic school I was in uniform for twelve years that was probably a good decision on my parents' part. But I do remember, it's funny, I have this one photo of me somewhere, when I was in graduate school, but it was, it was in the 80's, and it was in the time when the women would wear the power ties, ya know. [laughing] Which is so funny, have you ever seen them? You'd have like a regular collar, and then every blouse that you wore would have like, would have like a bow that you would tie or whatever, which looked so funny, looking back on it, but it's, it's what you wore. It was so the uniform.

EM: Mhmm, so I guess along with that, in school how were girls treated? I know you said you went to a Catholic school for twelve years.

PE: I think everyone was treated pretty strictly in Catholic school. (laughing) But I, ya know what, I didn't notice any difference. Female or male, and all of my educational experiences have been coed.

EM: You named some extracurricular things that you were very involved throughout college and high school, was it pretty much that you were involved throughout your whole education? Or is there any that stick out?

PE: Yea, well you're funny. Cause I have always, I guess I would always put myself in a category that I've been a leader in whatever situation that I've been in. And so when I was in high school I was one of the national officers of junior achievement...if you know, the structure of junior achievement was different then, it wasn't delivered in the classroom. You actually went after school to different programs, and I had won a couple national awards through that, and was elected to a national position, there were four, out in a conference at Indiana University-5000 people. Which was kind of a, kind of a big deal, because ya know it was a big election and ya know you sort of had to appeal to both the guys and the girls in that. I was the international head of Kyatt Service Organization, I don't even know if that still exists, the keys and Kyatt's. Things, used to, they used to be more split, ya know there were always girls and guys equivalents back then which now I guess legally you can't do, so that was sort of a big responsibility. When I was... [pauses to listen to answering machine and message from Mr. Eppinger] when I was in college I was very involved in my college, and I was on the honor council, I was a president's aid to the president of our college, what else did I do...I was an RA, resident assistant, and I guess my sophomore and junior years maybe just women, and then my senior year coed. Graduate school I mentioned I was on the honor council my first year in grad school. And then I was student board president my second year.

EM: Wow! Impressive!

EC: Can you tell us a little bit about what your parents' education consisted of?

PE: Yea, my, my dad was one of those people who grew up, ya know during war time, so he passed away when he was 83, about three years ago, and so he ya know went to high school, and then he went to WWII and the Korean War, so he basically did college on the GI Bill. Ya know, got credit for his service and went to, was working full time and went to college, after, ya know, after work and that kinda thing. And he was a physics major, which is not my strong suit! [laughing] And went to Rensselaer Polytechnical Institute, so that was his background, and he worked for the same company for 50 years. He worked for AT&T, never worked anywhere else. And then my mother was also of that generation just coming out of depression, they were born in the '20's, where she went to high school, never got to go to college. Went to Hunter College High School, which was a very well known prep high school, but then, ya know, because everyone went to work to help support their families, she never went back to college. So, ya, I'll always say it was sort of my parents' dreams to see us all do that, and my situation was funny being the only daughter, I'm the third of four-I have three brothers, but my husband always jokes I was the son my father never had. [laughing] Because I was always successful at things

that my dad really appreciated, and so he was glad to see me go, ya know, I sort of did the best in school, did great in college, went on to a graduate school, that he had said “oh you should,” ya know I had gotten into some other schools, and he said “oh you should really look at Dartmouth,” and wound up there. So it’s, ya know it’s kinda funny, but that was sort of their dream. [“lovely” talking to daughter about artwork]

EM: When you’re not at home you’re probably most involved in the Ecotarium; I guess other than that where do you usually find yourself?

PE: Umm... often at my kid’s school, I do a lot of volunteer work there, teaching a lot of little programs. They have these Friday afternoon programs called SWAPs- school wide activity programs, so I do those a lot cause you teach kids, it might be a little thing on history, or it might be a thing on cooking, or whatever. I do a lot of, ya know Ecotarium keeps me busy because I do a lot of committees, I do development program nominating governance, and all, so pretty much each week I can find myself at an Ecotarium meeting. I’m excited about the United Way work with Women’s Initiative, and gosh, just shuttling kids I think. Oh, and horse shows, ya that takes up, well those are most, those are mostly on the weekends, but sometimes because my daughter competes all over the country we find ourselves going to different places with the pony. So yes, I do find myself at a barn a lot. Which is fun, and then these guys, some day maybe you’ll know this, but it is amazing how many activities kids get into. So it’s like five days a week, ya know she’s got dance, gymnastics, she does speech therapy. Andrew’s got sports, Katie rides three times a week usually, and ya know basketball or whatever and so that’s, my day kinda gets started at 3 o’clock when they come home. So I try to, ya know people are respectful in these organizations, ya know, I try, certainly there are things that you have to do in the evenings and after school but for the most part, because people are respectful of time and how they can use you, and my background tends to be strategic planning, which is something that’s valuable to not-for-profits. They tend to be able to work around time constraints. And I always say to people I can be there from 8:30-2:30 and then, ya know, after hours if need...and ya know certainly I mean because of my husband’s work were usually out somewhere three times a week anyway, and I try not to make it five times a week.

EC: Do you have hobbies or do any leisure activities that take you outside of the home?

PE: Ya know what; I play a lot of tennis which I love. We’ve got a court in the back. I used to be a big runner, I used to run two half marathons a year since I’ve had the kids I don’t have the time to do that much, but I’m trying to get back into it. We walk a lot, we do walk a lot. Do the horses a lot, what else do I do? [to daughter]. I travel, I knit.

EC: Awesome, how do you get through tough times? What kinds of things or thoughts keep you going?

PE: Aww, you’re so good. Well I have two, my two best girlfriends in the world I think. I know, one lives, she was living in Cleveland and she now lives in Charlotte NC, and the other’s in Boulder Colorado. And these are people that have just been, ya know, part of

my life for 25 years and ya know, were godparents of each other's kids, we've watched the kids grow up together, their kids are older, their, each of them has a college freshman, and then younger kids. But ya know, you sort of need a bit of a network, and I've got a dear friend here in Grafton, who I also, we have a summer house on Cape Cod, she has a summer house in the same town, and so were kind of the local network for each other. But these two women, I think ya know, you asked about religion it certainly helps and I was telling, I had lunch with my friend who is from Grafton and Cape Cod, we go to the same church and were involved in the church together, and I had commented because I was at this other church in another town just because my daughter was riding and I couldn't get to my own church, and Mass was over but I said ya know, I'm just gonna go in and ya know, sit and have some quiet time, whatever, the church was locked! Which our church is never locked and I was like "I can't believe they do this!" ya know? But sometimes you just need that, like you need some quiet time, you need a little grounding, but if anything, any time in the world, any time night and day I know I can call these two women and I think that's really important.

EC: That's great.. ya, I agree.

PE: So they'll both be in town next week which I'm excited about.

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

PE: Yea, it definitely has changed. Ya know what, when you, when you come out of a business program, graduate business school, you think it's whoever has the most money, ya know? It's like, you got the best job, you got the most blah blah blah. Ya know they write in the Alumni magazine "so and so's doing this and that," and all the kind of stuff. I most, I now most admire the people who have gone off to do what they really want to do, ya know? And for me, I think success in my life is, is the balance, is spending enough time with my kids so that they feel like ya know, they see their mom, and they see their parents. It's contributing to the community, whether it's our church, their school, the Women's Initiative, the Ecotarium. And it's having some meaningful work. I, I do a lot of writing and particularly when I was younger, I used to write a lot of business in business journals, and that's the kind of thing I can do anytime. And so, I feel like if I have my hand in it, I was just doing some training for two professors up at Dartmouth who were taking over a course that I did and I was on the phone with them a lot. So, I, I feel like if you can, ya know and it's not, it's not the old, ya know, they used to say "you can have it all," women and the glass ceiling and all that kind of stuff. I think women can do whatever they want to do, I do. But I also think, like anyone else in their own lives, you have to make tradeoffs. And you know, I say, my husband would probably, I know, he'd love to be spending more time with the kids, he'd love to be a basketball coach. [Laughing]. But right now, this is what he's doing and it's the right thing for our family. For me, ya know, a little more mom time would be good. (Laughing). Ya know? But, I like that I can, whether it's writing or teaching, I can sort of do something in that arena. I keep my brain active by doing the, ya know, not-for-profit kind of work. I'm excited to spend time with them. [Looks at daughter]. And I'm, ya know, I'm hoping to, when,

when the twins were born I, I started taking up knitting, just because I wanted to get out of the house. There was a, like a local program through the Rec Center or something. And I'm like "okay, it's something I've always wanted to do one night a week." And then I joked, I should have told my husband it was five nights a week. [Laughing]. Ya, know and just gone out every night. But it was great because I was with a group of people I never would have met otherwise. So I think, to me, success is like, at the end of the day and, and as you get older and as you hear from older people, not my age, I'm not that old, but ya know it's like looking back, will you have regrets on how you spent your time? Because this is how much time you have, ya know? And so, I don't want a day to go by when I haven't said, like "what did I accomplish today, ya know, did something good happen?" Because the days you do the field trip or you do the dollar divas or whatever, you remember those days and you don't remember all the other days. Ya know, they just sort of chip away and all of a sudden, ya know, well God. Ya know, I remembered when I was 19 and I'm 46. Like how did that happen? Ya know? So I think keeping to, to me success now is keeping a balance and it is giving back and I, I like to see ya know, younger women mentored by older women. I mean I, I like, and it doesn't even have to be women, I mean if you connect with somebody that ya know, that works um, that's great. But I think, I think keeping a perspective, I think um, ya know not losing sight of your family; both your kids and parents, ya know I find myself saying "I need to spend more time in Virginia," ya know, having lost my dad, now my mom, so, so to me that's it. I mean it's, it's definitely morphed, it's no longer the dollar thing. I mean, yeah, being comfortable financially is a good goal for people, you don't have to be Bill Gates. Ya know?

EC: Based on your life experience, what advice would you give to women today and in future generations?

PE: What I would, I, I think in my own life I made too many decisions based on what people thought I should be doing. Because I was good at something, that was what I should be doing. Versus what I really wanted to do. And a, a simple little example, my three brothers were all really good at art, well I was good at art too, but I couldn't take art class because I had to take the calculus class, cause that was just the way, I mean it's weird, but that was the way my parents were with me especially because I had that kind of brain. So I found myself sort of, I was happy about going to William and Mary, but ya know, I was an economics major. I mean if I were to go back there now, I'd do something totally different, I mean maybe it'd be Women's Studies, maybe it'd be History because of where I was or whatever, but it was just, I was good at it, so I fell into it. And all my life I've kind of, I mean there's a good side of falling into stuff because you never really know everything that's out there. And so sometimes things present themselves that are good, but I would say, to the extent that you can, figure out really what you really enjoy, and ya know, maybe ya know, I don't know what it is but there's some opportunity out there for you. And so, don't ya know, you can certainly get advice from people who have had that experience, but like I wouldn't make my decision based on the financial aspect any longer, I wouldn't. I would ya know, you only have a certain amount of time and it's much better to spend it doing something you really enjoy or that you feel is gonna make and impact. So I would, ya know, that would be my advice. But

it's, it's hard to do that when you're 20, 21 years old ya know, and you're looking for a job or whatever. Right?

EC: And the last question, do you feel you have a legacy?

PE: My kids. Ya know, I hope particularly the girls, although my, I've got a sweet boy who's, ya know, the influence of having two sisters I think he's a real sweetheart as well. But ya know, as, as your kids grow, you just hope that some of the thing that you learned along the way can be imparted to them, and if my ya know, daughter wants to go and be a horse trainer and that's really what's gonna make her happy then ya know, so what that she has a good math brain? Ya know, if, if she can survive doing it. So yeah, but definitely my kids. I mean I think they're awesome and I think they have had some amazing experiences that maybe people in my generation haven't. And they'll continue to have those. So, I think it's, it's wonderful.

EC & EM: Thank you very much!

PE: Sure! Thank you! Hopefully I didn't just babble!

EC&EM: It was a great interview!

EM: My name is Elizabeth McCarthy and I'm here with Patty Eppinger... in Grafton and it is the 11th of November 2008. We are completing a citywide oral history of the lives of Worcester women, aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences. Based on the goals of the 1850 National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on the areas of women's health, education, work, and politics and community involvement. We want to focus today on your experiences with your work. Thank you for your help in this important project.