

Interviewee: Judith K. Hanlon (Pastor Judy)  
Interviewer: Selina Gallo Cruz & Milagros Montenegro  
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Transcriber: Milagros Montenegro



**Abstract:** This interview follows the story of Judith K. Hanlon better known in the Worcester community as Pastor Judy of Hadwen Park Congregational Church. Pastor Judy discusses her upbringing, particularly the importance the church had over her childhood and its impact on her professional path. Pastor Judy also details her personal journeys and explains that nothing can truly be planned, and one must learn from the highs and lows of life. The interview also focuses on the origins and mission of Pastor Judy's LGBTQ Task Force and her commitment to humanizing the struggles and trauma of LGBTQ asylum seekers in the United States.

**SGC:** We can show you the transcription if you like, but they are housed at the Schlesinger Library at Harvard which is good place for them to go because all kinds of women's studies histories are sent there, so anyone interested in women's history will generally come upon our collection.

**PJ:** And that is what the purpose of this is? To get that in there?

**SGC:** In December, they asked me to present to the community at the public library on the lives of women peace activists in Worcester, so I will present a snippet of your story. I was just telling Milagros several women like journalists, Catholic workers, if they have a memoir or newsletters or materials or things like that, I would like to make a display table so anything you want to give us today or later we can put that in the archive.

**PJ:** Well you keep on reminding me, I work 24/7 it feels like and I lose track of follow up, I'm much better in the moment, but not so good at follow up, but I can be reminded and the best way for me is email.

**SGC:** Okay, do you want to start?

**MM:** Sure, can we start a little with your background, where you grew up?

**PJ:** I was the second child of seven born to a Pentecostal minister in Indiana. So, we went to church all the time, morning and night. I loved church, I sat at the piano and played and I just loved it and somewhere along the line, my mom said she would find me in my dad's—he was very tall and he built a pulpit for the church where he pastored and it was right behind our house, and I would be found in the pulpit [laughs]. And the funny thing about that is there were no women ministers and still somehow I broke through the images and expectations. My dad thought I would be a nurse or a teacher, so it was something that seemed to be inside of me from birth. The other interesting thing that I've been thinking a lot about is somehow justice and the implication of what you do hit me very young. We would go after church to the Blue Top diner in Highland, Indiana, we would meet all of our cousins who were fundamentalists Christians and

I couldn't wait to get there to play my cousins. We would have church, I remember my mother would take the offering basket, put it in a hanky and wrap it up, and then pay for our food. That is all we got, my dad never got a salary. At first, I thought that was bad until she explained. So, we are at the Blue Top and there are cousins and everything, and I had a very good friend there a wait staff person who was named Margaret and I loved her. I loved her because she always laughed at my jokes. She paid attention to me, so I liked her. So, one day my father had preached about everybody who works on Sunday was going to go to hell, that was a much longer sermon, but we will just get to the point and I thought, "That's true." And we never played outside, we never did anything on Sunday, it didn't hurt us, it made me sit at the piano longer, read, or whatever. It's not that we liked it, it's that we had to. So, anyways I'm sitting there, and Margaret comes up and said, "What do you want?" And I said, "A cheeseburger and a root beer," oh a "grilled cheese and a root beer," because that's what I always said. And she walked back and she brought it. I began—I'm eight years old, about eight, I begin to sob, and my father said, "Eat your food! Eat your food!" And he is yelling at me. Oh god I remember just being so mixed up in my head and my dad said, "Eat your food! what's the problem?" And I go, "If I eat my food, Margaret will go to hell." I made that connection, that is was Sunday and nobody else at the table, all these wonderful Christians, my brothers and sisters, nobody was struggling with that and I was really struggling with it and so I, as I recall didn't eat it. So I remember being, struggling with such things, "it's not fair" "it's not just" "you can't say that, say this, and do this." So, the distance of hypocrisy is what you say and what you do, the hypocrisy is the distance between those two. So that somehow years later, looking back [I] said, "Who told me that? How did I get that?" So that is one little thing, but I did love church and I loved music and I loved singing and I loved running around. I loved the church to be mine, I would play in it and I would have plays and teach Sunday school with all the pews, it was great. And I grew up, I went to Central Bible College in Springfield, Missouri. It is a Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, it's really fundamentalists and I did that because that's what my dad did and, but I have to think going back and trying to analyze, why you do what you did. Was I trying to become a preacher? I think cognitively I believed I was going to marry a preacher. In my mind that is what everybody went to college [for], women went to seminary to find a husband that was going to be a pastor and that I would be the piano player and the Christian education director and the cook. None of which—I didn't like cooking. Anyway so I went there. I went there for two years. I happened to meet, it was in Springfield, Missouri, I happened to meet my now ex-husband, who was Wally Swett and he was born with no hands and I remember that girls would talk about it and I didn't think that mattered. No, it matters. You can't say that he is exactly like everybody else that doesn't make things right or righteous, it wasn't a deterrent to me to get to know him. Well, he happened to be very [politically] active. This was probably 1968-1969, and he was flying the flag at half-mast in Central Bible College against the war.

SGC: Oh wow.

P: And he was the only such person, because they were [the school] Americana, sing the National Anthem, all that kind of thing and that intrigued me. So long story short, I, we got married and we came to Massachusetts, there were seven kids, eighteen years apart, I also believe, when I go back and do some analysis, I was very intrigued by this person that thought

differently and challenged the authorities and I think I wanted out of the area. You know this is just looking back.

SGC: Sorry, to clarify, seven kids and eighteen years apart, you mean your home?

PJ: Yes, sorry about that yeah, sorry. And it was pretty chaotic, we didn't have a lot of money, you know? I just think I also wanted out and I could have married someone who was from Indiana. I'm not saying that I didn't love him, I'm just saying that there was so much more going on in your head when you make choices at that time and you're struggling. I started writing poetry about civil rights and that kind of thing and began to talk to Wally and his few friends but also what Wally brought to the table was the journey of a disabled person and I learned so much. So anyway, 1970, we get married and we live in Worcester, Massachusetts and we were going to a fundamentalist church.

SGC: Why? Why Worcester?

PJ: Because he was from there, thank you. He was born and raised in the Village.

SGC: Okay.

PJ: So, we came here, and we continued to go to the church denomination, the church here that was associated with that Bible college. He had gone to the Central Bible College because he felt he was called to be a minister, but he was so disillusioned by the judgement and the, you know, you are going to hell and all that kind of stuff and so we left the college. He did not graduate, I did not graduate, and we came here. And he finished at Assumption College and years later I finished at Assumption College, but that's a bit ahead. So, we're here and he continues to argue with the ministry of God and it was always a justice issue and it just opened my mind, even though I thought about life, I wasn't always that aware, but I sort of got the education piece that added to the thoughts and the feelings and I began to go with him to march and talk for disabled folks, you know, such as the telephones being lowered for wheel chairs, that was somewhere in our timeframe, I think.

He finished college and then he was hired as the director for North Central Alcoholism Commission Division and there I heard about people that are addicted because [before] they had always been people, they had always been people who couldn't follow Jesus. In my history they were alcoholics because they didn't listen to God. Addiction and that kind of thing was not a part of it and if you were poor it was because you weren't working. So that's my whole history and each time I met something new, I just opened my eyes. We had two children Amy and Carrie and within two or three years we left that church, the Assembly of God, and we went to Salem Covenant Church on Mountain Street East and I really enjoyed that the pastor there at the time was quite liberal he was involved in the—what is the name of the church organization that's everybody is involved in? I can't think of what the name is, I can probably find out and get back to you. In my denomination from the past you didn't get involved with any other church because they were all wrong.

SGC: Unitarian?

PJ: No, it's like Church World Services which is not—it's a—I can't think.

SGC: Like a coalition of churches?

PJ: Yeah, but its nationwide, worldwide, it's an organization that meets with...

SGC: Interfaith council?

PJ: No, because that's Jewish and Muslim and this was ecumenical for Christians.

SGC: Oh, oh I see.

PJ: And it was—because when I grew up, you didn't talk to the Presbyterians.

SGC: Yeah.

PJ: They believed in predestination and so they were evil. So, it was really simple and everything. So that opened me a lot to the social justice that I believe, you know, Jesus to—that's my belief and that all of His work was about that when you look at it. So, I really, this church opened my eyes to more things and I don't think so much about the political except that I know that my parents were and are Republican and his [Wally's] parents were Republican and we were raised that way. And I remember my mother praying that God gave her vision that John Kennedy would not be the President because the Pope would run the country. [laughs]

And I was like thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus, for this vision and then you know what happened. So, now lots of things just all my life I was running up against, [thinking] "That doesn't make sense!" So anyway, where am I? We are out at Salem Covenant Church and the kids are getting raised. And I was just telling them [ladies from her previous meeting] a story, I started hearing about peacemaking instead of peacekeeping. And Jesus was a peacemaker not a peacekeeper. He didn't not talk about it, you didn't, "Shhh, shhh, shhh," which is what "good Christians" do, but you grab this one and you grab that one and you come together and we make peace. And it's the hardest work you will ever do, but that's what Jesus did. So, I was just saying that I also got involved with some reading and that *Soul Force* I think it is and they were "How to nonviolently deescalate things." So, my daughter was in fourth grade and she came home to me and she says, "Mom,"—the school had just been integrated and I had been with Arthur Chase one of the politicians here, I had helped speak in favor of schools being integrated. Which meant black kids and brown kids were going to be bused not my kids, but I didn't think about that until later. But anyway my daughter's school had been integrated and I was all for it and I believed in it and so my daughter comes home and said this large black girl from Great Brook Valley who was two years behind, she was just tall, had locked her in a closet that day and I said to the ladies, "So what would you have done?" And I have all this stuff that I've been reading and thinking about in my brain and [they said], "Called the school, go see that girl, Tammio" and I didn't. I said to my daughter, "If I tell the school and she gets punished, she might

retaliate more. If I go yell at Tammio. Why do you think Tammio does this to you? What's this about?" [She said], "Well mom, she is in the lowest reading grade, she is always following me around and I have a lot of friends." It took a while to get to all of this,=. [I said], "Well what would happen is we invited Tammio over to play?" [She said], "Alright I'll do that." And she did. And the little girl ended up—I would go to Great Brook Valley and pick her up, drop my daughter off there, which was hard for me to do. But since I learned, you know, anyways, that's she was very, very, very, very safe there, and she joined the choir, Tammio did, and never was there any aggression again. They never became best friends, but they got to know each other and so you know it's something that I've tried to do, when you do it with your children, its scares the shit out of you. It really does but it worked out so well. So I continued to read, I went back to college at Assumption College. I was now working at the phone company because the health care was so much better at the phone company then it is in human services and my husband was working at North Central Alcoholism Commission in Leominster. But I'm learning about so many things that don't jive and I didn't even look at the political at this time. So eventually, I recall, and I'm trying to think when it was that I started to vote Democrat as opposed to Republican, I couldn't tell you who it was, but I know I did. And we began to have arguments with his father and mother, so fast forward 1993, my ex-husband leaves me. I can't believe it.

SGC: How old were your girls at the time?

PJ: I was forty-three, my girls were—one was in her first year at college at a Christian college and my baby was twelve.

SGC: Wow.

PJ: By now, had been promoted and promoted and promoted and I had a really good job, I was making like six figures in the marketing department and later I was, you know, this is probably not good for, but I began to feel like the feminist jarring with the male ego. That first of all my husband is disabled, he had stopped working because I made enough money to support the house and everything. And he began to feel valueless and I started to say, when we would talk about this a little, he would say he had a dream, a recurring dream that I was a soaring eagle and he was the wounded bird. I felt so bad about that I said, "I'm so sorry[ ? ]." Then one day I said to him, "Okay, what are my choices? I become the wounded bird or I carry you, which you would not like." The issue was it was his issue and that was I think the beginning of the divorce and it's just, it's just interesting how you can kind of do the right just thing for you, you can do the best thing for you and with the dichotomy of male and female issues and egos and all that kind of stuff it can break something. But this is probably—he is passed over, he recently passed over, but I know for my girls I don't always like them to hear some of this, it was the beginning for me, it was the beginning for me. Because even though I was in a very successful career, I hadn't really stopped to think about what I really wanted to do. And so he left in '93 and in '95 at the phone company I was offered early retirement. At 45 years old, they added six years, so I was 51 and they added six years to my 25 years which gave me 31 and somehow in the equation, I got to leave, and I was paying everything he was not giving me any child support. And I had to deal with the issues too of women, okay if I am the breadwinner, I don't really have the right to ask for child support, you know? Cause you know that whole thing if I have to, if I am going to be a

feminist and if I am going to believe we should have equal standing than I have to take the equal pain of not getting child support at all from him. In fact he didn't work until two weeks after the divorce and that I am sure his attorney told him to do. But anyway, I decided to take the early retirement which was going to be tough on me because I was making at that time \$150,000 and I just said, "If I was dead and put myself six feet under right now, is this who I want to be known as?" And I said, "No." In fact, I read Steven Covey's book *7 Habits of ...* [laughs]

SGC: ...*Of Highly Effective People* [laughs]

PJ: I read it in the corporate world and at the end he said, "Write your own funeral," so I actually did in this workbook kind of thing, I did. Who do you want to speak? And I didn't want all the people to, "Oh she was so wonderful!" I didn't want that bullshit, you know? And my epitaph was I would play at Carnegie Hall, I don't read a word of music, but it was the whole idea, I don't know something bigger than all of this and of course music connected bah, bah, bah. So when I retired, I went down about a third, I actually got a package which isn't bad at 45 years old, forty five thousand. So I had to rent my house out, I had to a lot of things, anyways, they gave three thousand dollars to all the people that retired to do what you want to do for your next career. So, I am sitting there thinking, "What do I want to do?" So, I have come to really love the social justice, liberation theology, womanist theology, all that stuff, I'd come to love it but just dribs and drabs. I love ethics, what's right, what's wrong, what's the core of all of this? And I still love the Bible and church, oh I'll take a class in seminary. I got hooked by the studies and it was in it was at Andover Newton Theological Seminary which is in consortium with Harvard and others and it wasn't where I went to Bible College at seventeen. And it was challenging and I had so many feminist—I had had a lot of eye opening at Assumption [College] which is where I graduated from eventually over years and years and years and the phone company paid for that and I just got it by all the translations and the interpretations of the Bible, got into the LGBT, and I could faithfully study and say, "Oh that's not what it meant." And in the middle of it, I also wrote music and the Philadelphia [ ?? ] Choirs asked me to come, because they had heard one of my songs. They wanted to rearrange it, it's called *My Peace I Leave With You*, it's about Jesus, and they wanted to the choirs to be all male, the voice of Jesus, saying, "I'm leaving you peace," and my struggle with peace and all of that so it really worked. So I was so excited, my girlfriend and I drove to Pennsylvania and met with them and talked a contract and blah blah, blah, blah, in the meantime I did need more money. I signed up for what you call the Pulpit Supply List for the whole state of Massachusetts and I said, "I just got to get \$150 bucks on a Sunday to preach somewhere, so that I could really make my bills, meet my bills." And I'm driving back, my girlfriend and I and I hit the—I had seventeen messages on my machine, I had an old fashion machine that if you, I don't know but it was very easy to delete them. So, I'm just deleting, deleting, deleting, and I get this message, "Hi, this is Ellen from Hadwen Park Church, we got your letter, from Hadwen Park. We've got your letter and would like to talk to you." When I worked for the phone company, Hadwen Park Market was where we got our cold cuts, I swear to God I said, "Are you kidding me, my song's going to be famous, I'm not going to be doing cold cuts." Arrogance total but for some reason I didn't delete it and I said, "Oh, I'm looking for money, what is this about?" I called them back and he said, "Oh yes, we received your resume at Hadwen Park Church and wanted to know if you wanted an interview on Monday or Thursday." I said, "I didn't send a resume." He said "Yes, you did." I said "No, I didn't." "Yes,

you did." "No, I didn't, Okay I'll take Thursday." Not a word of a lie, that's how I got here, I was not done with seminary, I was probably a third of the way through. But United Church of Christ churches can hire people, they can take the janitor and hire them, even though they push for education, learned clergy and all of that, they are autonomous. So, I said, "What the heck?" When I talked to him I said, "I'll take Thursday." I was on such a lark it was hysteria, whatever you guys want, you know, it was not a good interview by my way of thinking, but this is kind of a home spun church. So, they said, "Yeah we would like to hire you." [I said], "Alright" and I started June 2000. I did not graduate from seminary till 2008, so I was a full-time senior minister while still going to seminary for eight years. Now my kids had all gone, they had moved [to] Florida and California, had my eight-room colonial house that I rented out, so that's another long story. So, I took this job. Well I came to preach, you have to preach and everybody said, "We want you." And there had not been a full-time senior minister that was a woman here. And I found out later that many people left, I didn't even know they were here because they left. And, then I actually said, "Why am I living in an apartment, I now have full time job." It wasn't a lot but certainly with my other income I said, "I'm going back to my house." So I went back to my house. Still, living there alone and for three years, I kept thinking about all I'd learned and the direction I was going and I didn't do too much rabbel rousing here, learned how they did things, got to know them, found out about council and the government and the government of the church and after three years, maybe two, I stood up in the pulpit and I said, "What would Jesus ask us to do relating to gay and lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons?" And I said, "You know I was looking for a job when I got this one, it's interesting pastors, they pay you and you have to challenge them, it's very difficult but because of my situation, maybe if I was 22 and I had to worry about my money coming in I would [but] I said, "I don't care." A gentleman who is on the board of trustee called and said, "I would like to go to dinner with you." [I thought] "What is this about, I don't know?" And you know I felt a little bad, I was starting to like these people and everything so. We go to Applebee's and I can remember the booth we were sitting in and...pull out a picture of himself crossdressing began to weep said, "I've been a member of this church for 35 years, I have never heard my word from the pulpit, you've saved my life, I've been thinking about suicide."

SGC: Oh my gosh.

PJ: "I've been thinking about not going up [??] but I've got to start this journey." Now it took ten years, this journey was, you know I would go with, go to different places where he heard about the science of gender and different things like that. Here I am learning another subject and very interesting but two years after that we had a stewardship campaign and he said, "I'm not [??]" but I don't ask people what they get. But he said, "When you get your needs met and you are literally saved not in the traditional way, money is nothing." And I really realized you have to speak truth to power and love, you've got to do it, you can't shut up and it will be okay. Very quick story that reminded me of that, when we had to move when they remodeled the church, and it just happened that the final decision to become welcoming to LGBT people happened when we were not in our church. We needed money, 1.2 million was how much it ended up costing and the vote was coming forward, got the signature and it came to the council and they said, "We need to delay the vote about welcoming LGBT people, we can't do this in the middle of our 1.2-million-dollar blah, blah." And I want to kiss the feet of the council [because] they go "Don't let the door

hit you in the ass, we are going to vote, it's been three years of storytelling, study, Bible verses interpreted blah." So, we voted, we voted to become welcoming and forty grand walked out the door in our pledges and I kept remembering the story of other times and in the end, and eighty thousand walked in the next year but to live in that time. You wake up saying, "I'm bringing the church down." I come here and I don't know maybe it was all the year, sick of injustice against for women and everybody that I was not gonna just going and eighty thousand walked in and I just I don't know, the people that left because it was a woman, the people that left because we were spending too much on a rebuilding project and the building project came about because of justice. We had an old bathroom in the basement and an older gentleman literally pooped his pants, trying to go outside and down in the middle of a service. So that is not just, these people spend their money to keep this church since 1911 and they shit their pants trying to go to the bathroom in church? We had to put a bathroom up here. So, the whole thing, oh yeah, and now we have an elevator, so we are accessible to handicap, all those things were coming together just as we needed some big remodeling. So, anyway what else? So, in 2008, oh I know so I'm single for eleven years in the middle of all of this and I coming home, and this was something at WPI in Worcester, Massachusetts and Aaron Pasen, the YouYou pastor was speaking and it was about, it was Plaintiffs for marriage, okay? I don't know, Plaintiffs? Whatever. And I'm like "What the heck, I'm going to go there." So, I went there, and it was like four people there and I thought, "Oh God, nobody really cares about this issue and Aaron Pasen got up and said, "If it wasn't for religion and religion abuse, religious abuse, we would not even argue this." And it struck me like a two by four in my face that's my arena, I got to do something. So, I started going with the Coalition for Religious, Religious Coalition for the Freedom to Marry, I got involved with them and began marching in Boston and long story short we got marriage. But during that time, I began to date my now husband and I got up in the pulpit and said, "Glenn and I are not going to get married until all of you can too." And you know, I said to him, afterwards he said, "I didn't know you were going to say that." [laughs] Oh well you know who I am, oh and he is funny, he is a Marine and he is athlete and all these, he could never march publicly, but I'll have the dinner ready when you get home so that's why it works so well. He is just not a confrontative person. So fast forward, was that 2004?

SGC: How'd you meet him?

PJ: Dance, at a singles dance. He was the only one taller than me... but I have some dancing shoes because I took some ballroom dancing professionally, no I paid money for them to try and teach me so when I stand in them, I'm probably 5'11 and so it was at a dance. I actually went up to ask him to dance cause he was truly, I looked out at, and said, "Oh there is a tall one." And I went over to ask him to dance, this is actually a kind of funny story, so he is so very kind and just a sweet man. I had been going to those dances cause I love to dance for a good eleven years probably, well maybe eight by the time I met him. And I always felt in a very Catholic state that when men, they would all, all the men would eventually say this, "Oh you're a minister, do *they* let you have sex?" Now that is not exactly how they say it, but I knew, and I would say, "Yes, but not with you." It was just something that I just got very accustomed to that everybody, that nobody could deal with a woman as a minister. Men could not, and I just figured I was going to be single forever cause I was not, my life was rich, it was full, I was learning, I was growing, you know I don't need somebody. So, two or three weeks later, he said, "Would you like to dance?" I

barely remembered him, and he said, "Oh yeah you're a minister at Hadwen Park Church Congregational Church, I go to the congregational church in West Boylston, my kids were confirmed, I used to serve at the [??]." And he remembered my kid's names and everything and the background being similar really helped even though I might fall madly in love with a Catholic or a Jewish man—I'm serious. [But] this really made a difference to me and so that's how I met him. And like I said he is a Marine, he is probably not intellectually a feminist, but he has absolutely no ego issues when I'm good, or in power, or a leader. He really loves it and that is so different and so it's just interesting that my ex-husband used to teach classes on feminism, he had two daughters, but it was very hard for him when he was not the Man, the provider, so I learned a lot about life through that. So, 2008 at that backdoor, I met Linford Cunningham and this is how. He is a gay man from Jamaica, who came to the United States to seek asylum because of the torture and abuse in Jamaica. When he came here he studies what asylum was and he went to see Lisa Weinberg, attorney Lisa Weinberg, who is Joe O'Brien's wife. He was the mayor here for a while and the O'Brien's are Holy Cross alumni and every other thing like that. Now I had been in the paper because of my activism for marriage, in fact when marriage was available in City Hall I had my robe on and we were blowing bubbles and singing, going to the chapel and on the other side of the barricade were these very unhappy people. It was so sad, come over here we are having a good party and they had all the verses up there and I just thought "how sad." They are not happy. Real quick story, so when I left [City Hall] I had to go get my car and one of these men started chasing me with the thing, "You evil women you take that stole off, you have no right!" I swear to God I turn around and say, "May the Lord bless you, may heaven's space shine upon you and give you peace." It's like somebody hit him in the head, turned around and left. I've found that that peace stuff works at times. [Back to Linford] So anyways, he is in there crying and crying and telling Lisa, his attorney, "I can't go on, I can't go on" and he was really suffering PTSD from the abuse. And she said "Look Linford, these cases are enormous, you can't do this, you have to talk to me, what is wrong?" [He said] "I don't have a place to live, I don't have anything to eat, and what if God does hate me?" His Pentecostal pastor had laid hands on him and prayed for him for like eight hours, he would have nightmares [of] suffocating him [and] people praying for him.

SGC: Oh my God.

PJ: So, she remembered me from the paper as a daughter of perdition can you say hallelujah! I love it! And she, she didn't know me before and she says, "He needs a Christian pastor, you know I'm Jewish and he doesn't need human rights workers, he doesn't need, he doesn't need those things." If you think the God that created you hates you, where do you go from there? So she called me and I met him at the door back there and basically that's how the task force started, this little congregation kept putting money in our benevolence fund and we found a place to live and we got his some food and I began meeting with him and praying with him and I did all the lectures about the Clobber texts and I will just say from a religious point of view we were having the Lenten season. Do you all know what the Lenten season is? I mean I don't know your faith traditions, it's a time of change and growth and patience and trying to seek your own Easter, kind of, and one night we had a little kneeler to people to come to prayer if they wanted to. Linford came up, it was like primal screams, he was just still feeling ugly and nasty, this big white, straight deacon came up to pray for him and Linford fell in his arms. I am so sad I never

got the picture of that and the interesting thing Earlson said "Now I get it, you've been talking all this time about male privilege, white straight male privilege, I felt his brokenness and I kept thinking about all you preach about." He said "I get it now, its deeper." When your identity is attacked, he said, "I have a hard time in life, you know my dad is sick, but my white straight male identity is not constantly attacked." So, he had a conversion and it was the beginning of Linford really moving to a different place but Linford was very involved in JayFlag in Jamaica and after he came, he is a little bit flamboyant, so after he came, half of Jamaica came. It's true, you find you talk to people who are in trouble and they find. So, that's how we started and no longer could this little church pay so we became a community driven organization and the LGBT Task Force was birthed and we have helped a 150 people from 20 countries and we are growing sadly, growing. Because of the right to hate that has been unleashed in this world due to [President] Donald Trump and all the other haters. But so maybe eighteen months ago we had twelve people now we have twenty-seven. We have six on the waiting list, people sleeping on couches and I mean somebody came two days ago we had to put her on the couch. Its, it's just mind boggling, so we started a fundraiser which is way too corporate for me, I don't like fundraisers and corporate things, but what works? And did you come to our gala?

SGC: Gala? I haven't been yet, no.

PJ: Okay, you haven't but it wasn't, we had no politicians speaking, we had no dignitaries, I hate that word, the asylum seekers are the dignitaries, not the mayor, he was there and we had asylum seekers speak, they were the guest speakers and it brought, I mean everybody was in tears when they heard the stories of rape and torture and we said tell it. They are all adults there and if you can tell it, tell it. We raised \$50,000. Which supposedly for a first-time gala was excellent, this year October 27, were having another gala and Beechwood [Hotel] only hosts 250 and we sold out tickets in three months. So, we moved to the DCU Center where there is 700, but I say get your tickets fast and it's going to be the same thing. Yeah, we have all the silent auctions and the begs for money and all this kind of stuff, but the core of it is almost like testimony service in a Pentecostal church! People we have them assigned and who is going to speak and we try and be gender balanced and Trans and all that kind of thing. So, October 27, so probably seven years I ago I went to a Ogunquit and my husband and I stayed at the [??] Inn, I think it was, and I started blabbing to the Task Force to the gentlemen I thought was gay, and he was, and I said "You gotta help us" and it looks like he, I thought he might have some money and so I kept talking and talking and talking to him. Seven years later, he comes to church at one of our fundraisers and he says "I sold the inn, I have a whole bunch of money and I'm looking for an organization that has no administrative costs, everything goes right to the people and I went to your documents, I want to see your structure, I want to see it." So we sent it all and he would like to give us \$150,000, he'd like to match what we raised at the gala, so that's why I'm pushing the gala like crazy, so if we raise a 150 he will give us 150 and we will purchase a house, which will save us 40,000 a year from the day we get it even with all the taxes.

[Break in Recording]

PJ: So, yeah that's the gala, what else do you want to know about me?

MM: Sure, I guess I want to go back a little but, I wonder where you see a difference or similarities between what you learn in seminary school and what you actually practice every day, if there is any similarity?

PJ: Yes, I learned a lot, it started with Margaret and the cheese burger or the chilled cheese and root beer and it's a process and my only opinion on life is, you, I can't start it with a plan which I always said, "Have a plan and work your plan just be open to work comes to you." None of the stuff, the church, I could have gone out, and standing here, when I'm going, "Holy shit Jesus, that's what you wanted me to do!" I couldn't even think it, cause the image for women are this and you know my dad had said, "Women are not allowed in the pulpit." So seminary was one piece of the pie, United Church of Christ, is one of the most liberal Christian, maybe the most, [??], very liberal. But lot of times they are very political too, some of the churches are just political and not the spiritual aspect, other times. But I find human beings from my sociological study can change most from following somebody, so I just followed Jesus and study about Him more and that to me is very effective. I'm always about effectiveness, I don't want to talk about a lot of things, I don't like to committee meetings, I don't think people that sit and have these think tanks, I just want to get up and do something and I learn more, I think, in the doing. So, seminary was one piece and I will say, that based on the structure of a church, it's very hard to do what you're taught, I think that may work in anything that you learn, to go and actually do it is totally different than sitting and reading it from a book. So, I think that the United Church of Christ, I love the denomination, I don't know why it isn't growing more because it, Barack Obama, you know found it, and found everything he believed within this denomination, but you get paid by the people you are supposed to change. So, the minute you come up with something controversial, they walk out. And so, what I think a lot of seminary, seminarians learned when they get out and the rubber hits the road, they back off and I think because of my financial security, of sorts, I wasn't going to go hungry on \$45,000 a year. And I don't know quite why, I've got that stubbornness too, I've just had that since I was a little kid, tell me "No," I'm going to say, "oh yeah." And that can work against me, but I think that's what I took the stuff from seminary. The other thing is I was working here and going to seminary, I would recommend that for anybody. You got to learn about feminism and then you got to go to the pulpit and give it a try and then come back and tell them. Oh boy they got pissed about that and the language here is not Father God its Father, Mother, Creator, Wind, Fire, everything that just about split the church. The men were so pissed about that and oh really? That's misogyny fellas, if you can't hear the word mother let's talk about why you can't, not why I like it. And, so anyways, language was a big and I would learn it, in my, you know at seminary and I would come here and try it. So, if I had been distanced from the actual lesson before I got a chance to try it in the actual pulpit, I might have given up, so I liked that part of it. Seminary has closed, it isn't around anymore, because, well pastors, pastors in training, go to school as much as a doctor does, so we have, we get ninety credits hours, I think most masters are 45 or around in there, we have to have 90 credited hours, we have to work in a church for two years, which is like a residency and then we have to work, in a place where death is around you for another year, hospitals, clinics, drug places, so, I worked in a mental hospital, so you can have you're theology stand in the face of death, cause that's a big part of what you do. So, then you come out and get a part time job, at some little church for \$25,000 a year, so. Wasn't a very attractive profession just put it that way and some of the social justice people that I wish were in some of these places, you know, they

don't get paid much for what they do either and teachers don't get paid enough, anyway. Did I answer your question.

MM: Yeah, in a way.

SGC: I have a question, so how did your relationship with your family, you haven't talk about how much you've kept in touch with siblings, and where they've gone in their religious faith and so forth. But can you talk about how that relationship is?

PJ: Don't talk about it and then you'll make it. Been really divisive at times and I—my mother died last year at ninety-four, and I just had to, which I hate doing, I have to put it aside, how they are all on the other side of the barricade, all of them and they all voted for Trump. And actually, when Hillary [Clinton] didn't win, we had planned on going out there for Christmas and I literally could not, shame on me, but I could not. Every time I thought about going out to [Vice President Mike] Pence Land, I got literally sick to my stomach. I was so devastated by her loss. Over the years, I mean I changed, slowly and I live out here, God! At nineteen, when I got married, how did I know, this is where I was supposed to go? But you see there was some light pulling me and I couldn't see, I always say, "God gives you enough light for the next step." That's it, don't be asking all these questions because you won't go and that is really, really—I look back, and I could never been in this situation, had I stayed in Indiana. And I couldn't be in this situation if I hadn't gotten divorced, so just take the next step. It's tough, I also have a belief about the end of life. So my brother was hit by a car at 57 and was put in a coma and I believe he died at the site of the accident. My brothers and sisters got all of the churches in the world praying for his healing and I believe there are two things curing and healing. Healing can be leave this world and go to the next. I strongly believe that [but] they wouldn't let him go. I felt so helpless for my brother, he was being suctioned and bed sores up and down. They kept him alive for six months. That's not even a political issue I suppose, but I found out if you believe in God let him go! He is going to see Jesus in a little while and those bed sores aren't going to hurt anymore, let him go! And you know they kept me from talking to the doctors, they kept me out. So that was really hard, that was probably our biggest conflict even though our conversations about politics are terrible. They see my website, my father actually reads our newsletter from our church which has got an LGBT story in it every month. So, don't know quite how, we do it, but it just a lot of swallowing because I'm certainly the minority, even the nephews and nieces that that have grown up, I can't believe them, they are young and they go to college and they still think this way.

SGC: So, are you the only one that went into ministry of your siblings?

PJ: Yes.

SGC: And that does not give you some kind of extra authority, like your father?

PJ: They have never yet asked me to pray at a Thanksgiving dinner or family gathering.

SGC: You don't have the sense that your parents were kind of like reservedly proud of the fact that ...

PJ: My mom was.

SGC: Okay.

PJ: I asked my dad finally one day and I said, "Dad, so I get what you taught me, but I'm a minister, how do you really feel about that dad?" [He said], "Well if the men of God won't answer the call, what are you to do?" It's the best he could do. I had just been pastor here for about a year and my parents came out here for a family wedding in Pennsylvania and surprised me and appeared Saturday night and I said, "Mom, dad it's so good to see you, I can't wait, you are going to go to church tomorrow at ten o'clock!" So, I get up and they are packed and ready to go [and say], "We can't do that, Sissy." So my dad would stop the train for me and couldn't at that time come to church and hear me preach.

SGC: Wow, because they don't believe women should preach?

PJ: Right and they do not believe what we believe, you know.

SGC: Okay.

PJ: So, when I got married, I got married on a Friday night and they all came out and I go, "You're only coming to my wedding if you are coming to church on Sunday." I can be manipulative, and stubborn and they came and I set it up. My mom and I used to travel and sing. Mom and I sang, I had my dad say a prayer and my mother wanted it, she, she, she loves to be the center of the pit, you know center of attention? Singing, you know, and she was proud of me once, I mean often about this. Even though she hates gay people, she hates black people. She fell one time and was in the hospital and they are asking questions to know if she's alive, "Do you know where you are? Do you know what country? Do you know what ...?" And she's just laying there, [they asked] "Do you know who the president is?" [She said] "Ugh Barack Obama."

SGC: Oh my god [laughs]

PJ: My sisters told me about that. So anyway they came, and they heard me preach and my sisters and brothers were here but I never got feedback or anything ever. They can't [bear] me being here as much as I can't bear them voting for Trump. So, when I realized that's how they feel, I let it go but when they did not, when my parents did not come to church that morning, I cried and cried and cried. And Saturday I had brought my dad to see the church structure [too show him] when it was built, when did this go in? You know he is just that kind of a person but never, ever say anything about what it's like to be a pastor of a church and he was one. That just tells you the divide that we are all up against—abortion, you know there is no, there is no other way to see it. And I've said to my dad, I said, "Well dad in the Bible it said 'God breathed life, by the breath of God, that child became and living soul,' there are people whose theology says life comes at breath, would you let them have their theology and have an abortion?" [He said] "No,

they are wrong." So, it's, it's a very difficult place and yet you know I work really hard at seeing what's good about my sisters and how they keep a beautiful home and have lovely teas and you know cause those are nice but it's really hard to go out there.

SGC: Could you talk more about Worcester and what you have seen change in the community both in your personal life where you lived and been connected but then also in your work life and maybe community connections and so forth?

PJ: It's funny because my father didn't actually believe—he believed in the separation of church and state growing up and so I have not always been as active as I could have been. When we were integrating the schools, I worked with Arthur Chase and got a little bit politically involved and I started understanding a little bit more of the work that needed to be done in Worcester. Again I am one of these people, I don't want to go to a community and talk about it, I want to go down to Great Brook Valley and drop my kid off and talk to the mom there and get to know people and so as far as I've always liked Worcester, I think it's a small town, smaller town than the big, big, big, cities. While it is urban it still has a hometown feeling to it. I can remember five or six years ago saying, "This is home, now. Indiana isn't home now." I'm very grateful for the liberal ideas that are in the state and I just find the art, the museums, the culture, Mechanics Hall, I just think it's a wonderful city with many, many colleges and I remember going to hear Judy Shepard speak at Holy Cross, years ago and being grateful that that subject was being, being brought up. So I guess I may not be, I don't have a lot to say, maybe ask me a question about Worcester because you know as a progression, I don't know if I could name it.

MM: Can I actually ask you a question about that? I guess in relation to Worcester, how have you seen the Task Force, that you run, the LGBTQ community and like and the community or any tensions that are sometimes felt within Worcester and the people within the LGBTQ community, has it gotten better, worse?

PJ: Well, I can, except that my trans asylum seeker was stoned the other day in Worcester.

SGC: What? When was this?

PJ: Like last Friday, Lucy.

SGC: And where?

PJ: Getting off the bus by Memorial Hospital.

SGC: What do you mean stoned? Thrown a stone? Is she okay?

PJ: Yeah.

SGC: Okay.

PJ: This size [shows size with hands] baseballs, mini but two. He thinks it's young Hispanic people that live right on the corner. So we got the police involved, we got the mayor involved, we've done everything we can but you know the closer you get to it the more problems you see. You know when I wasn't that aware—okay let me tell you a story, Salem Covenant Church that was where we went, which was such a breakaway from the Assemblies of God and somewhere along the lines, I was asked by the pastor to do twenty hours of work in the community, which is not Great Brook Valley [which] is up here but [instead] Mountain Village. And so I had programs for cooking, for hygiene, for basketball, for everything and the kids could come over all summer and I ran those programs. Didn't have to have anyone with me. Didn't have to have anything signed at that time but I got to know a little bit about some of the issues that they were in poverty and that kind of thing—not as bad as many. And so I started fighting for rights, you know, and different things for some of the people that I got involved with and I actually and I actually ran basketball on Monday nights for fifteen years and kids from Great Brook Valley would come and I never had a problem. Kids wanted to play basketball. You mouthed off to me, you're out, you don't get to play basketball and it seemed to be pretty simple. Maybe I was in harm's way, you know, so I got to know people, more than anything, I got to know people. But in the church, that where I've experienced most of the issues. So, Daniel came from across the street and he was such a flamer, you know he had all of his, you know, and he was very, very tall, "Pastor Judy Pastor Judy!" And so, we became close and yet I never said it, I never said the word gay. I just really, really, liked him and laughed with him and hung out with him but in the church you had, you [had a] way of talking about that because its wasn't open and affirming Salem Covenant Church. So, Daniel used to follow me, [I would tell him] "Daniel go play basketball, go do this." [He would say], "I don't like it, I don't think it!" "Go listen to music!" "I don't like their music!" "Daniel what do you like?" "I'd love to play the piano." So I took him into this closet, huge closet with a grand piano in it and I said [sings] "Jesus loves me this I know. This is the key of C, leave me alone." And by the end of the day he was playing like a child prodigy, I kid you not, and he took all the hymns books that summer and just learned every single song, it was just awesome. So Daniel leaves; we sent him to Bible college, we did all these "wonderful things," we white privileged people did. He sang, sang in the choir, did all these kinds of things but we never talked about him being gay. And he left because secrecy about your identity is about as painful as a slug in the head sometimes. He left, he went to Mass School of Fine Arts or something, he was a prodigy in so many ways, but he got into drugs to cover the pain and he became HIV positive and he died. But before he died he called me. He said, "I want to come back to that church where I felt loved and I want to tell them my story," so all of a sudden the council, not so chubby dubby about that and I said, "You know what he is a kid of this church let's just go ahead and let him speak," and I finally convinced them and he got up and talked about being gay and he talked about you know having HIV, talked about how this church saved him by loving him and that began to be a change in that church and he died. My best friend that sang in my signing group was now partnered with Kevin and I said here is the time to bring Salem Covenant Church to the next level. So, long and short of it, they didn't, they wouldn't, and they fired me as the community minister. For bringing the gay issue - "issue!" that's like I have an "issue." And I had no job and it was painful, it was horrible and it's all about peacemaking or peacekeeping, just don't talk about it, and they had loved a sick man unpartnered, but they couldn't accept vibrant young men. So I did their holy union and it was not at that church. It was painful and that's why when I spoke here and I said "LGBT" I'm not

shutting up about it, again, so get over it or fire me. And now one of the young, the pastor's son at the church left, went to seminary, his son is gay, he stayed in touch with me all these years and he came back to Salem Covenant Church now and [Salem Covenant is now] open and affirming. So, there is a huge change, but it doesn't just come and it doesn't come from policy, it comes from just busting your ass and getting up there and talking about justice in the name of Jesus. So, I have obviously when I went to hear about marriage, I got close to the YouYou church, churches can get very blind eyed, you know, what do you call that? Blinders on, it's my church, it's my thing, it's my thing, not because, you don't want to know other people, cause your busy and this being, having the Task Force has made me open to other churches that are open and see that there is growth in the religious system. We started the Task Force because of religious abuse. Lisa would have never called me, if Linford was just hungry and homeless, there are agencies that do that but we started here because of religious abuse, I didn't even know all the abuse, until he walked in and told us that story, so it's like you can't even see the progression when you don't know it exists. I saw it at Salem Covenant Church, I know that they have changed.

[Break in interview]

PJ: I live in the church world and I see it coming forwards and going backwards. And just to know that Lucy got stoned, she said that a rock the size of a baseball was coming to her head, when she turn around and if he would have not dodged, she would have gotten it right in the face.

MM: Can I ask another question? I know that you go to different schools, at least you came to Holy Cross, and you actually spoke to two of my different classes, with [Professor] Gallo Cruz and Professor Crist, so I heard you speak twice and I obviously meet the people that you brought both those times. So, I guess my question is how important do you think it is to get the Task Force out into the community rather than being you know in the church in the environment?

PJ: We do it because of money. I will be very honest. Everything after us not paying their rents and giving them food to eat would make me be in a mental institution, I will fight like a dog for money, not for me but for them, so we do that, we now almost say if we can't get a stipend or we can't pass the plate, we just can't talk to you. But what happens is education and that is hugely important and so you know if we have two options, somebody will pay us, and somebody won't, we will go where they are going to pay us. We are all, sometimes we go out, three or four times on a Sunday, we have teams that go out and the only reason we [primarily] stay in [churches is because ] you have to let us pass the hat, churches are awesome because they just have this ritual, when the offer basket comes by they put money in and you when we go to a school it's a little bit more difficult we have to see if we can get a stipend or something and if we are not doing anything else we will go but it's a lot of work. But it's the education piece so we have spoken in Chicago, San Diego, Dallas Texas, Philadelphia, somewhere in Miami, DC. We don't only speak around here; this is not a Worcester organization. This is an international organization and to our understanding we are the only one that offers housing and food, so we have pledges and money coming from all over the world. Everywhere we go, we take everybody's name, that's

another huge one to get the database so when we send our pledge asks out, we now have about 1,400 on our database, it started out as you can imagine with very few and its grown.

SGC: I don't know, if it was passed on to you and now I can't recall... the Highland's Lesbian Resort said that they have a database of 8,000 women and if you needed to promote something that they cannot give you those names, but they would put it on their newsletter so.

PJ: Can you just send me that information?

SGC: Yeah.

PJ: Because that's all we need to do is get the word out.

SGC: Yeah, that would be good.

PJ: We also have two congresspersons that are very much in our pocket, that's a bad way of saying that.

SGC: On your team.

PJ: Right. On our team. [U.S. Representative] Jim McGovern and [U.S. Senator]

Elizabeth Warren.

SGC: That's great.

PJ: Yeah, they know us personally and have talked to us and all that kind of stuff. I don't have to change them, I know where they are at and so what we want to do is change more people. You know, I don't follow politics very well, so I don't know who, how you get a bill, in legislature and all that kind of stuff, I don't know that, but when marriage was on the table we worked with an organization and they, we had seven congresspeople from Mass Congress, not United States, come to this church. [We explained] to them, why they should vote in favor of marriage [equality], the organization, can't think of its name but [they] said, "Don't do it in a church, we want to keep it separate from church and state." I said, "Wou know what? That's where the argument is," based on what Eric Pasten told me. I said, "Look, let us do this" and he said "I don't want things in the church," and I go "I know," and he said, "You know most gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered people can't walk in church?" I go, "I know." I actually had to have a healing service, sage for a couple of people that wanted to come. [Back to the Representatives] So long story short they would mail to their constituency in our area, the constituency for the person we were inviting, am I making any sense? So, seven different legislatures, came here and I stood in my robe and I stood up there and I go, "If you don't agree that's fine, if the Catholics don't want to that's fine, [but] don't stop us here from being able to celebrate marriages." Because I think most of them were men, most of them were Catholic. Most of them actually honor a holy place but they heard in their holy places different things so I wanted it here. And we had, we talked for three hours we wouldn't let them go, people just stood up and sat right here

and said, "This is my story, my wife and I have been together for fifteen years, we have two cats." And I was like, "What's the problem here?" And then we asked the person to change their vote, none of them said they would but five out of the seven voted in favor, we don't know if it was us. But we also had idiots that were making people cry and I can't think of what his name was, John something. And so I am a strong believer in bringing things into the church, you know, bringing it into whenever people have any sense of holiness and I know many people don't but let them say it in front of God, "These two people are an abomination," go ahead say it. It's hard it sticks in their throat, and so that's one of the reasons why I stay in the religious circles because I think that's where a lot of damage has been done. So I didn't even think of talk about gay things in a church and let Daniel be broken hearted. When he was dying he said to me, "You can't keep us a secret anymore. Please." And I promised him I won't because secrets are horribly painful. I don't know I'm going all over the place.

MM: No, that answered the question.

PJ: Okay.

SGC: I think we exhausted out questions, unless we didn't ask something important that you want to add.

PJ: I could go on forever. I actually want to write a book about my life someday, but I kind of want my dad to be dead because I don't want to tell the truth, I don't want him to read it. A corrective ganged-raped lesbian from Uganda and I were sitting, and she was talking to her therapist and just telling everything and it was about a month after my mom died, I had this warm feeling and I literally turned around and said, "You get it now don't you mom?" It was just my gut reaction and I have a feeling that's why I want my dad [passed on to write the memoir], when he dies, he'll get it, that's just my theology, he'll figure it out, now he will know. None of this mattered dad and so, I do want to write.

[Break in interview]

PJ: So anyway, what we were we talking about?

SGC: Your memoir.

PJ: Yeah! My husband keeps wanting me [to write it], because he knows my family. There are so many more stories along the way that I feel you sort of have to open to the light and first of all you have to convince the children in this church to be open to it. Know where the light is, anything that attacks your identity, or you know that's not the light, follow the light and you don't, you can't, know in advance what the possibilities are. Just keep going towards the good and the whole and the light. So I don't know how I got here, I am so glad I did. Oh my God, I can't think if I had stayed in Indiana, could I have, without community, could I have changed? I don't think people change alone, it's too hard, that why gay people that are in Uganda stay in horrible marriages, they stay with their families and they just die inside.