

Interviewee: Jane Petrella  
Interviewers: Lauren Sutherland/Brittney Pond  
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**Abstract:** Jane Petrella was born on April 20, 1933 in Wheeling, West Virginia. Throughout this interview she speaks about her schooling through college and many of her experiences growing up with several brothers and sisters. Jane married Frank Petrella and they had six children together. Jane speaks about her children and the ways in which they inspired her to become an activist and a responsible member of the community. Jane and her family moved to Worcester in September of 1960 when her husband received a job at College of the Holy Cross where he would teach economics. Jane continues to be involved in her community and has been a respected activist in Worcester for many years.

**LS:** Okay, so just to start, can you just tell us where you were born and a little bit about your childhood

**JP:** Yes, I was born in Wheeling West Virginia. I call myself a child of the Depression—1933. So everybody was sort of poor at the time. Although my father did work, he always had a job. He was a cook and he was the head chef at the hotel so there was always work. There were many that had no work and it was very difficult. I remember now coming up onto Easter, you know we have these great baskets with all kinds of things but there was very little candy even around and I remember climbing up on this chair, putting it into this cooking jar so we had something in this basket. I was the youngest of ten, I had two half brothers. My father's first wife died and then he married my mother and she had eight children, my sister, six boys, and then me. So, it was fun. I was probably more acting like a boy coming after all of them. My sister was fifteen years older so more like a mother to me. Very kind, and the boys they were rednecks from West Virginia and I loved them all dearly. But then there was the war and they were off to war. One brother, my brother John the oldest, didn't have to be drafted. I guess he had flat feet, but I think they would have taken him otherwise. They thought with all of the children my mother should have somebody home so he didn't go in. But with all of the other boys there was John and next there was Bill and he went in. In fact, the remembrance of him, he was... he came home one weekend and when he went back they, he received a good, what do you call it? A good person award?

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**LS:** A good Samaritan or something like that?

**JP:** Yes, and they carried him off the stage because he had come home on his own that weekend and all of the other fellas covered for him so they thought it was such a big riot. He was AWOL [Absent Without Leave] and then goes back and he gets a good medal. And that was the type of person that our Bill was. There was Bill and then there was Joseph Archibald. They always called him Archer, or J Arch and he went into the Marines and we didn't see him for long periods, they delivered the supplies to the others that were actually doing the fighting and they were out on the sea most of the time. So, when he came back he would have quite a lot of money because they couldn't spend it when they were out. He was a friend to all, everybody loved him anyway. He was just that type of person. He had a car, my family had never had a car and we walked everywhere. To school, four times a day and we would go home for lunch and back and the bus was five cents, but that was a fortune, you know. You would rather walk so I think that's how we stayed healthy too. I've always encouraged that. I know our children first began school and they came home for lunch and that was great that they didn't have these school busses racing around.

**JP:** I could go home and see what they ate and if they tore their tights or something. Then, the little girls wore dresses and it was very sweet and the boys too. So then they could change whatever they needed to and take care of themselves and get back to school. I was on my brothers. Stopped at Arch, and then there was Edmund Francis. He was in the Army and overseas and he was in charge of some dispensary or something out there so he had all of these deals. They knew how to fit in and help others and themselves. Those were trying times and I would always write to them. One thing is that I knew I was loved and I loved them dearly. We used to polish their shoes and we ironed everything. Now, you know, forget it. My mother would iron for that crowd, in fact her arm was swollen because it was a six-pound iron and she just wore out her arm. Six boys—you would see the yard just filled with long sleeve shirts and she would iron them. From the time I could climb up on this little ladder I would iron their shorts and everything. I mean that was the fun of it all. My father had gotten one of these big hotel tables, one of these big round ones. I don't know if they were changing the decor or something. So all of us around that table. My father didn't bring home food because he liked my mother's cooking. She did a great job for everyone and we were all ten of us—well more than that around the table in the beginning. Then my two half brothers moved on, they were older, I was the youngest I didn't have as much time with them. I had Edmund, Edmund Francis was the last one and he was in the service. The youngest brother next to me was Robert. Just one name, my mother ran out of names for the boys. So, what I hear is that my sister named me.

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Eleanor Jane, my whole family called me Jane, my cousins and aunts and what have you. But when you went to school, you were Eleanor and that was it. The good nuns. Because all of the others were at school I just couldn't wait to get there. Our pastor permitted me to go early, we didn't have kindergarten in West Virginia. I don't know if it hadn't been discovered or what but you just had first grade. But Fr. Young asked the first grade teacher if she would take me, and she said, "Oh sure. If she doesn't do well I will just keep her another year." So, that is why I was always the youngest in the class throughout, until the time I graduated high school. And I barely turned seventeen in April and graduated in May and through college too. And at that time you didn't even think about going to college. How wonderful that you're doing it and that you choose to. You know, what a benefit it is to keep learning but the only reason I thought of it—and you wouldn't believe, I didn't spend one penny for college. And look at how outrageous it is now.

**LS:** I know, it is crazy how expensive it is. Look at us now.

**JP:** Our oldest two grandsons, they got excellent jobs and still owed \$25,000 each of them. It is just not fair because, you know, even though they get paid well, I would think—I never thought about money. I started working when I was twelve years old. I was probably fifth grade or—no, I was eight and my father died. I was in the fifth grade. So it was probably seventh grade. I got eight dollars every two weeks that I could buy clothes with. Most things were fifteen cents or a quarter and look what you pay now. So yeah, I still can't picture all of these monies they are talking about. These millions and billions. Teresa [me daughter] and I are driving ourselves crazy watching all of these political shows it is just so unbelievable what is happening. That is why you have to keep after and learn and speak out. You know, I don't like a lot of the things they are doing and saying no because I just never chose to speak in those areas. Even my husband says—you know even the times I have spoken out it, it is not shouting at someone or being disrespectful or wild. I mean they probably think I am a wild woman but you get the facts, and I have always tried to do that. Any of these groups that I have been with and you feel strongly about, and you know what you're talking about and move forward. It was when I was just, probably my senior year I met my husband. He came down to visit his uncle who was married to my sister, who lived right next door to our family house. He was in the Army already, and he was nineteen. And I was what seventeen? Sixteen and a half, whatever. And then the Korean War had broken out and he had signed up for two years. He had signed up for the Navy because they had an excellent education program, he wanted an education and again the families couldn't afford to educate anyone. He had a brother who didn't go to college at all but at least the Army, being a survivor, he was able to go to college on the G.I Bill. The biggest benefit was that he chose the school of a lifetime, Notre Dame [University]. I mean even in high school, and

it sounds, it probably is sacrilegious. On Friday, before Notre Dame played on Saturdays, the principal, a nun had us stand at our desks and over the loudspeaker we would say the rosary that Notre Dame would win. West Virginia was dedicated to Notre Dame and western Pennsylvania, Clarendon which is right outside Pittsburgh. I don't know if you have ever seen the movie Rudy?

**LS:** Yeah, of course!

**JP:** Well it's true, the whole town. Even in high school I had a picture of that backfield in my wallet that I carried. So, when he did get back I was in school then. I had never thought of going to school or that it would be possible for the women to even go then. You weren't encouraged. Our school would get several—what do you call them?

JP daughter: scholarships?

**JP:** Yes, scholarships. But no one used them and so when I graduated and I knew Frank wanted to be educated so when a parish priest mentioned it he got all excited and he got me a train ticket and in two weeks I was checking it out. He called the head of the school there and said, "I have a deserving girl," not that I was a brain or anything, and that is how I did get into, well now it's like our Worcester College which is now Worcester State University. It was Mount Saint Joseph on the Ohio and now it is Mount Saint Joseph University and comparable to Holy Cross. When I was there, there were about 300-400 girls and that was it. It was a beautiful campus. See the nuns were stockpiling money during the war, they didn't want to build less than the best of materials so they shockered it all and then out comes this huge campus. Something comparable to here. They have just about 2,500 just as Holy Cross does now. So it was a wonderful opportunity. When I went I didn't have all of the qualifications because I took straight commercial courses. I took extra sciences and math, and math was difficult in a way but it was my favorite subject. It was unbelievable and I really loved it. Naturally, when I thought about going, I knew Frank would want to go to school, and that was his goal so I looked over what they were offering and I took the most difficult course, medical technology, so it was four years and one extra year after to get the medical technology certificate and the qualifications. It was affiliated with Good Samaritan Hospital in Cincinnati. I didn't mention Mount Saint Joseph was Cincinnati on the Ohio. It was a big hill right on the beautiful river so I thought this is the most difficult thing that they are offering then this is what I should take. I was young and foolish, around seventeen. So I did make it through school but I had to take extra courses there, language and because I had taken Latin in high school, but that was not considered helpful for the English. I took math and I took chemistry and all of these extra subjects. It was great. They didn't really

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have the facilities that schools do now, but still you learn something and at the school they had all of the courses so I actually was a biology major, is what they called it for this. What would your major be? Nursing?

**LS:** Yes, at Holy Cross we don't have a nursing program so I am a sociology major on a pre-health track.

**BP:** I am a sociology and psychology major so hopefully I will go into the medical sociology field.

**JP:** Well that is excellent. After graduating it was about a year at the hospital. It was Good Samaritan Hospital which had 800 beds. If you think about Saint Vincent's here, it is about 200 or so and then after I left they built on a whole wing so it is 1,000 beds. Then, I had legs and I could move. Then, you just run through the floors there and take the stairs. You couldn't wait for an elevator with my tray. I was taking blood samples and I still can't believe I did that because on the first day we went into our student lab they perked your finger. When I saw the blood I was ready to faint. I had only been in the hospital to see my aunt Mary once, in Wheeling she was sick. I had never been in the hospital and so I was looking into the blood bank and I was just hanging there and then we had to visit the operating room, you know if you had to go in for an emergency to draw blood. The doctor looked up, and it was very simple, there wasn't a drop of blood he had already finished the operation. He had looked up and he had said, "Get her out of here." I guess i was whiter than my lab coat and so I don't know how I got used to being in the hospital there. I guess just gradually, but sometimes after drawing blood one thousand times and I would go in and see this poor, pitiful person I would go back and see somebody else. And you know the babies, I had to perk their heel, and I just couldn't get those few drops. I would bring it back to the lab and they said, "No, not enough, go back," but the only reason you pursue it is because if you didn't get a sample they would do a cut down. Then the child's leg, the baby's leg, would have to get cut for a test. So I would perk their heel and try again. I don't know how you get over it but you do.

**JP:** Usually if the children were hurt I would call Frank and have him come take care of them. Usually the children were healthy we didn't have too many accidents even with the sports. But we all survived. I did make it through the medical technology and anything we did over forty-hours, in the student lab or the hospital, we would get twenty-five cents an hour.

**LS:** A little extra? That's a good thing!

**JP:** So after working those forty hours I would do the lab work that I was more valuable typing the backlogs of, what are they? The autopsy reports, the final copy. I really could type well, I was just better with my commercial course. Actually when I finished high school before going to college I worked for the Turnings. A father and two sons and a daughter was the office worker, then me. That was a good experience and I didn't really contribute much to that but doing the typing and all, just until the school came through and going off, and I think then I made eighteen dollars a week. So that is why I have never thought of money.

**LS:** It is so different

**JP:** It was a very simple life. I did the books at the rectory and my job was answering the bells, the doorbell and the telephone. We had the bishop and six priests, it was a cathedral parish. It was busy. At dinner time I would take the coffee and then there was a table like this. When I was serving down the end of the table the young priests would be stabbing me with a fork making sure the bishop at the end of the table didn't see. They were all great though. That is where the eight dollars every two weeks, and then at Christmas time they would each give five, ten, fifteen dollars and that was a fortune that I could save and do things with. It is not the fortune that I was expecting to be making big money. It was a great time I had my own room there and they would call it Eleanor's room. I could see when each of them went down through the window and go over to the church. It was a great time, and usually you don't remember your high school graduation or who was there, but the Bishop gave out the diplomas and when I went up to the Bishop he said, "You must have been doing something more than answering bells," because I was an honors student. Looking back I think that is what helped, because what do you do hanging around a rectory other than your homework. Then, being at Notre Dame was like being at heaven.

**BP:** Were all of your children born before coming to Worcester?

**JP:** Two were born here. Teresa was on the way when we came to Holy Cross. That is what brought us here. I had never heard of Worcester, Massachusetts or Holy Cross. We had a Wooster, Ohio but that was the closest. So we married after Frank got back from the Army after four years and I had just graduated college. Then I had more time to spend for the medical technology and so we were married and lived in Cincinnati for a while. One of the women who worked in the lab, she was mainly doing the chemistry testing. She lived a couple of blocks away from the hospital and she let us have her apartment and she took my room that was next to the hospital. So Frank was there a month or two, and then he started at Notre Dame and went back. So, we weren't together for that little bit. Like I say, Notre Dame was just the dream of a

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lifetime to be there and next to the stadium. We lived in converted prisoner of war barracks. We lived right on campus close to the football stadium and now in fact when we see the ball games and they show the library, our apartment was right where the garden is in front of the library there. That was just the greatest and students could go to the ball games we had tickets. They would bus in high school students to babysit for anyone who wanted to go. Our first one was a year old when—again, young and foolish—we had our Bonnie on Tommy’s birthday one year later. A friend of mine that I went to high school with and her family came to the ball game and so her mother stayed with the children, a one-year old and a baby. I didn’t miss a game. In fact I had been to the game when Bonnie was born, again to arrange for her to be born at Tommy’s birthday. I went home and took castor oil, the doctor says if you take it, it could happen or it is not going to hurt you. So, I am in the game, went home, showered and took the castor oil and Bonnie was born on Tommy’s birthday one year later.

**JP:** The apartments there were called Vet Ville. Frank got his graduate degree, a master's degree and a PhD and he had done some teaching there where we had a slight bit of income. We really had no money. Even the hospital, having been the medical technologist, they gave me a discount on having the children [laughs]. We were going for a dozen, we just love children and still, I would be taking them in now if I could. It was both of us that really wanted the children, but when Frank was here we finally decided that it was not only having them, but feeding, clothing and educating.

**LS:** Yeah, it gets expensive

**JP:** Yeah, when he started here at Holy Cross he was getting 5,000 dollars. He would remind me that he actually didn’t get 5,000 it was 3,000 until after he went back to Notre Dame to defend his thesis. Now you hear about these college professors and the money that they are getting. Well, he taught here for thirty-five years. He always had office hours and he would tell the kids, “Anything you need, come and we will discuss it.”

**BP:** While he was teaching what were you up to?

**JP:** I was taking care of the children and getting into all of this [points to a packet full of documented volunteer work]. The day we came to Worcester our oldest started kindergarten, Tommy started Kindergarten, and I felt Frank was busy and I had to get them through at least high school. I was at the grammar school and all of the meetings they had and was involved. I went to every school committee meeting that I could, even now I still watch them on TV and do comment. I am into the city council, and at that time I did go to the meetings and in fact I just

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heard the community center meeting that Lee Bartlett had graduated Holy Cross and he is the chairmen of our group now. He was talking about something about the schools and his father was the assistant superintendent at the time. He said, "Do you remember the meetings? My father said you drove him crazy?" [laughs]

**BP:** What were you speaking up about?

**JP:** Anything and everything about the schools. At the time, the kids were nearing high school and our South High was crumbling and falling apart and they were talking about a new high school which I knew wasn't going to happen. They talked about going back and forth from the old classic school and the school on 20 Irving Street. It just wouldn't have worked and so what are you going to do? Where will these children go? The Burncoat [High School] had just been built, this was probably the second year. I probably wasn't as eloquent and they had been talking and I just said, "Well, ours have to be bussed anyway, why not put them on the bus and drop them at Burncoat, the new school." That was Dr. John Davis he turned around and laughed and then the next week he called me and Gladys Peterson (who was from another grammar school who would have gone to South) and said when he examined it, it was something to pursue. He said, "But don't think more than two children would go there, maybe the one. But maybe they will have things worked out by then." But all six of them would graduate from Burncoat. But now that is the one that they are talking about the PCBs [polychlorinated biphenyl] that are causing cancer in teachers.

**BP:** What is this?

**JP:** They were in a lot of high schools. I have all the facts I just didn't bring anything. I think it was until 1979, the schools that were built before that, they used the calking mainly around the windows and doors and it gave people many sicknesses. Teachers dying of cancer and I don't know about the children if they had any ill effects. Ours were never sick when they were in school. For the last seven years there has been a controversy before the school committee and the EAW [Education Association of Worcester], the educational association because they will not let the teachers union test the schools in the way that they want to. But they have been working on it in all of the elementary schools, they have been changing the windows and this is millions of dollars. Even back then all of these renovations in the high schools, again I speak up about all of them. Quinsig [Quinsigamond Elementary School], when our kids went there were two buildings.



**LS:** Do you think your activism in Worcester was the first time you got involved in the school community and the larger community? Or were you also involved in Notre Dame or in Ohio?

**JP:** At Notre Dame like I said there were twenty of these units with three in the apartment so there was quite a group we had in Vet Ville and so we had a mayor and a chaplain. He was our first chaplain when we went there, I think he would have loved to stay there but he became the president of Notre Dame and did so many great things but he loved our Vet Ville. In fact, we went back once for a reunion and we were meeting him there, and he said, “Oh Jane, how are you doing?” and I said afterward that he couldn’t remember me and then I realized that I had a name tag but at the time I didn’t have a clue. He was just so wonderful and then we had another one who took over for the rest of the time, Father Moran. But the children, the four that were born there, they knew the campus better than I did. They knew the cafe, they called it the cafeteria and the lake, called St. Mary’s Lake. They really enjoyed it there. It was a wonderful time, and I remember bringing her [daughter Karen] home from the hospital and putting her on the couch and letting the children have at her.

**JP:** I look back and I feel negligent. Our Bonnie, the oldest daughter—she has two boys—and I mean they learned to do their laundry and so then it was easier for me to run and do the—our Jimmy said, “Oh, the refrigerator is about empty,” and I said, “Oh, I have to go shopping and he said, “No there are no clothes in there,” because at the time you dampened your clothes, put them in a towel and put them in the fridge until you ironed them.

**LS:** Oh wow I had never heard of that!

**JP:** Yes, it was wrinkle-free and it was wonderful. Sometimes there are a lot of good things in the time changing. And then I had an enlightenment and I thought, “Oh I have to have these children doing something,” and so I asked John to go downstairs and get the potatoes for dinner. He didn’t jump to do it right away so I said, “If we don’t have potatoes for supper I will have to tell the children you didn’t get the potatoes,” so that was my big awakening for teaching the children a lesson. In the summer they were park kids, they would go to the park and because at home I would want them to do any cleaning or things like that and they would want to watch TV which wasn’t always profitable but they were excellent park kids. They had wonderful things for the parks. Teresa actually graduated high school number one academic student and number one athlete. She played four sports, she did so much. And Karen did tennis but she would come with us to watch Teresa’s games, softball while she was crocheting. Different talents for different ones, our Bonnie too was more that way. Teresa even in junior high, I guess a coach had asked to just write on paper and not reveal who you thought was the best baseball player and this one

[talking about Teresa] got it. She didn't even play, they didn't have the Title IX yet, women didn't play. I don't know how he saw your talents [talking to Teresa].

**JP:** I was on the Title IX committee too. I don't know if that is in there [speaking about a packet of groups and movements she has been involved in] and then there was one before that for women.

**LS:** Yes, there are so many different things that you have been involved with in here! [talking about the packet]

**JP:** I am still involved in the parks. In the early '80s I was on the Parks Commission. There was this young fellow and this older gentlemen. There was a city manager too, they supported me for Parks Commission. He actually called me at home and asked if I would be on (this is the city manager at the time) and I said, "Well, did you check with the parks commissioner, Tom Taylor," and he said, "Why would I check with him, I make the important decisions." Now that was excellent, and another thing I don't know if it is in here at all, we were going for the olympics, the two-week summer olympics. They have these trials and so we checked every venue, we were up to Holy Cross here and all of the colleges were very supportive. It was in the summer and it would have the participants sleep in the dorms, you know, and it really could have worked. Schools offered their facilities, and the only thing we didn't have to accommodate, we had all of the fields and tracks and swimming and what have you, but we didn't have the high dive. So we went to this woman from Colorado, she had a little walker and she was the one who would set this up for the summer and the parks commissioner was Tom Taylor and the city manager at the time as Tom Hoover. Tom Terrific is what they would refer to him as. So our theme was Worcester-ific, that would be the theme for the two week. Well they were going to have it in Boston this year, but I guess it would have just been a complete mess there with traffic and everything. This was just far enough that there weren't as many cars on the streets and all of the colleges were very accepting and supportive. We would have had the facilities plus the help with the housing. We went to Brown [University] and talked to Sheila Walker and Brown was within the distance that was permitted for having the olympics so it could have worked, that was the only thing that Worcester didn't have and I remember going to the Y, the women's Y. They have a swimming pool and a gym and we were in a limousine and we were getting out of this brown limousine and someone that I knew opened the window and yelled out, "Jane Petrella, what are you doing in a limousine?" You go from one extreme to the other, but that was the trip to Brown.

**JP:** I am trying to remember the man I was on Parks Commission with. We see him all of the time but I just can't come up with it. He lived where the old south was on Richmond St. I have been meaning to ask you for days [talking to her daughter Teresa], I think I will be able to come up with the name. Like the enterprise account, that is something I am working on now. When I was on Parks Commission in the early '80s we updated the golf course at Green Hill and they got an enterprise account. From the state they would support with money. I have never played golf in my life except for the backyard with my brothers. They would all hitchhike to the golf courses and caddy in the summer time to get a little extra change. I do think it is an asset to the city. Some of the counselors in the city are in favor of getting rid of it because of the costs. This year they are in a deficit of \$350,000.

**JP:** I remember being on the committee and I was at a church meeting. I was always on the church council and one of the fellow members was picking me up, we had to go to the golf course. I wasn't on the golf, they had a subcommittee, but the whole committee had to go to this meeting. Somebody had spotted dandelions growing so naturally when I tell the church groups that I have to leave to check out the dandelions they knew I was screwie. So that is how intense it was and then the Spruster Dobe (sp?) that was head of it, he would come to the meetings and almost be weeping about having everything perfect. It was always well run and as I said I have never played or done that but I see it as an asset. I need to call the city council, I was going to call a couple days ago but they are coming out for, the budget coming out, and how they, some want to turn over the golf course to a private company and you know, it just wouldn't be correct and so they said that during this time now others will take memberships. They were going to build a driving range that would bring in money and I suggested miniature golf also. So at least they would be serving another population and that would be income to take care of the deficit. So that is one thing that I am working on now. But once you learn these things and you see what is happening down the road that it wouldn't be beneficial. If they did more things to promote the golf course, like I said I have never golfed, if I did I might be off to Mar-a-lago with our president.

[Jane's daughter interjects to remind her about her involvement with the local landfill and the new visitors center in Worcester].

**JP:** That is something that is coming on, that is distressing too. In fact, we just had a meeting, in fact it is going to be wonderful for Holy Cross too. The Blackstone Middle River Park. It is going to be very extensive right across the road and right next to the visitors center. I have been to every meeting and they were doing a building that had closed and Teresa and I have been inside it even. It was spacious, they cleared it out.

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[Jane's daughter interjects and explains that it was one of the old factories on Middle River Road. This building was an old mill site and use it for a visitors center which is now in downtown Worcester on Elm St. The building burned down one night which Jane explains she felt "distressed about."]

**JP:** I saw Bill Wallace [Director of Worcester Historical Museum] in a meeting just recently about the Middle River Park and he was so good. He had been all over the country and he knew every inch of what he was going to do in that building and bring the museum there. I said, "I am still so disappointed," and he said "Jane, get over it. I am over it." It is going to be done by 2018. Maybe I will see it. But I still am on these committees and attend every meeting.

**LS:** Well, that is just amazing.

[Jane's daughter makes a comment about how letting go is not one of Jane's strengths]

**JP:** Well this is going to be a great community center. They are bringing a portion of park office to be in the building so that it is not just stopping by and moving on, or nobody there and then having a lot of projects. In fact, I saw this person on TV with Konnie Lukes, our counselor still. She does interviews on "Coffee With Konnie" and this fellow seemed very interesting. It sounded like what he wanted to do was have programs and help children. They are going to have a little park there. I called Konnie and got his number and gave him a call. He is not ready for it yet, he is studying to be a pastor or something. He has all of these things going and so when we were having this meeting on the park I called and I got his number and had spoken with him. I thought he would be interested in seeing the park and how it connects with the visitors center. So, where was he? I called and left a message and he called back the next day from New York. He wouldn't have been able to go anyway. Another one that I called about the meeting because I was very disappointed that they weren't sending out enough [?] I mean I would have had notices everywhere. The other one, Bill Miley (sp?), he called the next day, no he answered the phone and he was on the beach in Florida. And another one that I called was Steve Catron (sp?) who worked on the transit container. They were coming and "what are you going to do?" and "how?" and they actually built a road \$250,000 to their property so that they would stay off Greenwood St., the main street.

[Jane's daughter explains that this is where they go on the railroad, where they keep large containers. By making deals with Jane, the container company put up a fence around their property]

**JP:** It is a wall on Greenwood Street. They had built their own road which is an access road. And now I am working on Rand Whitney. Teresa and I drove around their property. There must be at least two hundred of these huge container trucks. What I am concerned about are the emissions. I have already spoken with the person in the city that is head of energy and he said, "Oh yeah, it will be good," and months later there was nothing. And now there is another company coming in. A distributor. That is almost finished and ready to go and that is going to be more container trucks and again, watching city council meetings. All of the counsellors talking about these trucks like CSX bringing in so many. And you see the whole city, and are the emissions a concern from anyone except for me? It is just that I have been recuperating from this operation a year ago and I sit in the recliner on the front window and I cannot believe these trucks go by, sometimes one after the other. So I have three names over there and I am calling to see if I (unintelligible). I was so nervous the other day that we were supposed to have a meeting at the planning board and one later on at the zoning board and they cancelled the meeting but no one could have known.

**LS:** This is right in your neighborhood?

**JP:** Yes, right next door. So you have to get involved. We just had that snowstorm and I am going to run up and down the street with my rolex and contact people.

**BP:** What about that landfill that we were talking about? What is that about?

**JP:** Well we have a meeting coming up on the twenty-third. We haven't met for about a year. I should have brought those papers. I had written something up more than a year ago, a suggestion. Nobody even talked about any of it. I keep passing them out but they, it was 1,000 housing feet or something? Now they are doing solar panels, that was my first suggestion over a year ago. There are a lot of circumstances and I understand because our former commissioner retired and the new one has been with DPW, the Department of Public Works, the whole time for thirty-something years, but not at this job. It just goes on and on, but they are having a meeting and bringing in a person who is going to do-over the fire station in our village. It is right across from the school. What was it just yesterday that I called the principal? The principal is on administrative paid leave and so they have the old principal back that had left three and a half years ago. She is filling in, thank God for her. She is called the "turnaround coach" it is criminal, it is absolutely criminal. We have eight hundred children there now and so many that need extra language help and food. They have a food pantry that they have to give out to kids every week, I can't believe it.

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[Jane's daughter, Teresa comments on the fact that they are on the site committee but often times they are the only ones there].

**JP:** Yes, Teresa and I are the only ones there. I always wrote papers the whole time I'm in a meeting. It might seem rude but I can't remember anything. I always put at the heading "dump committee" and the commissioner was saying "Jane, we have no dump. There has never been a dump. It is a landfill." And I said, "Well by other name it is the city dump" that's what it was. They did get it covered properly and we have had a lot of benefits from the funds that came in from buying the soil and it was a good operation. They had really knowledgeable people working except we had some grasshopper sparrows which the state thinks might be an endangered species here. Well, a little northwest there are hundreds of thousands of them and I am not against the birds, in fact the way I find it, they stopped at Grafton covering up the landfill because they had some grasshopper sparrows and I said just be very respectful and get a little cage. Just two, two sparrows.

**LS:** No way!

**JP:** Just put them in the cage and take them to Grafton. They were two males, in fact the DPW called them Felix and Oscar.

**LS:** They named them?

**JP:** Yes, they named them. But they would have to have fifty acres of special grass. There is an agency in Boston that would come and check in at some point there were five and they said, "We think we hear five birds," and you know, we love birds, nothing against birds. We used to feed them all of the time and they are exciting, but two birds? That it gone down two birds? Two males. And then they would go off for a couple of months in March and usually come back. Well, they didn't come back this year and thank God. And they kept saying, "Jane, stop talking about those birds"

**JP:** Now that they have, which is a good thing, is solar panels. That was my first suggestion when they stopped getting income from the soil and I said do other things that would bring in money and benefit the revitalization of the village. That was supposed to be a dual committee, but we did get a lot of things for the school and again I know following closely that we wouldn't be getting it through the city budget so they put in play equipment in the back and that was about \$250,000 from the landfill. They did they have it from the last couple years and they have

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computers for the whole school right now they have 800 children there and I have a daughter in law that is assistant superintendent at Worcester Technical School or assistant principal and she said that's far too many for grammar school especially all of these special needs children but they are gorgeous little children. And then many other things again I knew you wouldn't get through that and so I keep asking this other principal that came if they have other needs that I could bring it to the committee and she didn't need anything and now they don't even have paper at the school it just blows your mind. She is the one on administrative leave.

**LS:** Just going off at school I think we have a pretty good background and oral history so just to change gears a little bit to talk about your experience as a woman within your activism and how being a mother change your activism in early experiences?

**BP:** It is a big topic to tackle. Even in your college experience it sounds like it was only around 200 or 300 woman. What was that like?

**JP:** It was excellent really. The first year there I was in a dorm just room for a desk and this much between the bed and the desk and they were cubicles and the cover or a drape. I think that first year there was 16 in that room in a cubicle. I don't know if they didn't have much of the gym it was low and so they had special baskets for basketball that you pushed and you didn't really have a true game. We played volleyball and things like that. In the courses that I took I didn't have much time for anything else. It worked we did well. In my junior year I had a little extra time. We didn't have as many lab courses. I didn't play on the baseball team. I was a manager and I was the one that catches the ball that gave the pitchers practice. In my arms the blood vessels are all broken and Frank played softball in the army and he said that couldn't be that a girl could throw that hard. There were really some great players. The only thing that I had to do with being at the school and to have the education was to work about an hour a day in the front office, the Bursar's Office, typing. I would take exams for other classes or whatever they had to do. I typed a book that a nun wrote and that way I kept up with my typing. I did the job for them and I would run off the exams and there wasn't much to do. This nun was the bursar and she was very particular and the bus driver that came in said, "I couldn't believe she lets you do things and be near the money here and all." and then when I went off that last year to the hospital she was really upset, but we were right across from the president of the school right at the entrance of the college and you know it was very visible. I had Mr. Felthager (sp?), Dr. Felthager who was a chemistry teacher. The poor guy was late one class and we gave him twenty minutes and we nearly ran him down running out of the room.

[Jane's daughter interjects and asked okay did you have this feeling that it was the woman School it was all woman and her the woman in charge of at that time in history with a woman in charge of the programs at the school I think that is what her question is getting at or was it more okay here is the priest and whatever the male figures]

**JP:** It was mostly nuns teaching all of the classes like the math. There is one in my junior year that I remember I could take some extra classes so I took her history class and I knew right on that she was a doctor, very qualified, and she asked a question and you answered it and she just would make you look stupid. So I never volunteered because she could put you down so I didn't give her the opportunity. I took the class and saved it for the testing and creamed it that way. I always did well but I but I didn't participate in class. It seemed every student she would just give you a put down instead of instruct. I don't know if you've ever had anybody like that.

[Jane's daughter asks how is the relationship with the men within these committees?]

**JP:** I just didn't think about it, I had six brothers so I did make things more than female things growing up they would always ask, "Why does she have to come?" It never bothered me because I was never part of the male situation and I could speak freely with them. I never thought about money and they offered, but I only took half a salary and had an assistant. Money I didn't think about as much. It would have helped the family more probably, but I think Frank was more than \$5,000 by then. I think the most my salary was \$17,000, but as she mentioned Gordon and Ron Sherett (sp?) make big money now, you know, I should check on that. I just copied some papers that I had written twenty or thirty years ago about how I had obtained the community center. We had gone in the building which was a church that was converted to a appliance furniture store, this Buster Keys (sp?) had that store and then he took off for Florida and didn't pay the back taxes. And so I got the money and I don't know how for the \$75,000 to buy a building and then went to Boston with another woman. She was the librarian and she had been a sergeant in the army and you didn't mess much with her. We went to Boston we got a waiver to not have to have an elevator in the building so things like that you could do and we didn't have big contributors but there were some. I did mostly fundraising. I had spaghetti suppers all the time and I had the dancing for the kids. I mean the kids are wonderful we had a group from one of the high schools, Doherty High, and they are great but then the three that were the main ones, this little girl did the singing and the boys played the music and we would have a hundred or two hundred kids come to these. I was with kids all the time. There were never any problems, they were great, but these folks, the three that went on, she was did collage and was involved in some artwork and the other fellow sold boats, yachts or a million or two and did very well and the other one was very profitable. They had advanced as they should have.

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[Jane's daughter explains the dances: just to give you a scenario of what this looked like, I went to some I was even younger but I still can't believe she got away with doing it because today you would have to spend for all of these policemen but one of her neighbors was a policeman but you even did it sometimes.]

**JP:** Then it did get expensive because we did have to pay a policeman to come and we just charged a dollar or two to get in in. This old gentleman would sit at the door and take the money. I mean everybody was volunteer. Our neighbor across the street was a plumber, a plumber that works for the school department, and his wife answered the bells and all of that at the community center and got a dollar an hour and that's how we survived. There was a stipend from the state. This woman had to run a program until we paid these volunteers about a dollar an hour. And then it came out that she was, I don't know how it was just in the paper the other day a nurse stealing the medication and selling it. How could you do that? I just don't understand. Anyway, this woman ended up giving \$2,000 to her daughter and there went the grant money so they stopped the grant. This dollar an hour that these people were happy to have, it's things like that that you have to speak out against too. The inequities it's just criminal but then like I said the dances were wonderful. In the beginning we had the kids bring records and we had a record player and lighting and we had some of that flashy lighting and we had the dances downstairs and it was great. The one song I remember, "Come On Baby Light My Fire."

**LS:** Ha ha!

**JP:** They played it so often. I mean really they enjoyed it. The kids were great we had a pool table. The high school kids came in and played pool. Every holiday we had parties and gifts. I just loved all that. Now Easter would be coming up and the one person that worked at the community center, her mother and sister made up candy baskets for all of them or bags of candy. I mean it was really great and on Halloween we would have a policeman in and he would tell the kids about safety on the street. You know, for the different ages and that's what I was interested in. And then there were some that were high school age that had gotten into trouble. I was sitting almost weeping with this one kid that he had decided that he was going to get help for his, well I don't know what they were taking then, maybe an opioid. I wouldn't go anywhere near it, but he couldn't find any assistance. These were the heartbreaking things, but then others would see a little kid on the street that couldn't get in the house or didn't know where the parents were and they would bring them to the community center and I would be able to track down what to do with them and all. Then we have the spud program from here to they still have it?

**LS:** Yes

**JP:** And they would come down at least one day a week and do programs with the kids and that was great. The break dancers were twin boys at the community center we have these competitions and these little kids could just twist every which way and it was great. Teresa just met up with one of the fellows recently.

[Jane's daughter talks about how boys that she knew in childhood still remembered her mother years later]

**JP:** You know, it's like teachers, your favorite teacher. You remember them a long time later. I was never a phony with any of them, you can't be a phony. I did love all of those kids, each and every one of them and always try to help in some way, but we really didn't have problems there. There was a group from the village called Black Diamond and we really had a full house when they came, but again it was great, and this one—what was his name? George Scoby? (sp?) He came down to pick me up so that I could go down and unlock the door to let them in to put their equipment in. He said, "Oh I don't know if I'll make it my tires are bald." He was just sort of on air or whatever and then a couple months later and he still had the bald tires. He ended up being a school committee member in Auburn, so these were all good kids. If you were decent with them, they were good. Well once, one person jumped off the stage, and I said don't jump off the stage we don't have a blotter to pick you up that's a large enough. This one little kid wore pants real low and he was walking around with the microphone singing, they were falling down, and this woman who was helping me—you just couldn't help but laugh. He didn't want to pull the pants up or get rid of the microphone. No, they were great experiences. At one time there was this carload or two that pulled up in the parking lot and they were kids from St. John's [High School] and so I go running right out and said, "Do you want to come in?" and they just wanted to make trouble but they took right off. Our village kids didn't want any trouble. I don't know what more I should be speaking on.

**LS:** Oh no, don't worry.

**BP:** Don't worry we only have a couple more. Do you want to ask that one that you have?

**LS:** So we have obviously heard a lot about what you have done, but what movements or event have you felt most passionate about or proud of? Where you have seen a lot of change or put a lot of your effort into?

**JP:** Probably the school because even after the children all left there, knowing the school committee had the procedures I still kept going. We were going for a new school. It was definitely needed and I know Teresa tried to call me sometimes. We had a group and across the street from the school from Boston. They were officials or political people. So I set up a demonstration right across from where they have to go in and out about our school. And we had signs and I still have some at home—some old blinds window blinds that we wrote our messages on. Then I went to a dinner they were having or a luncheon. I said I was just going to sit and stare at this person and Teresa says, "No mom, you can't do that."

[Teresa explains that she thinks it was an environmental impact study that was going to hold up the project]

**JP:** And then we had a demonstration where our state representative—we live on one corner and they were on the other corner and we had Lucot Chemical (sp?) right down the street so we had demonstrations there because they had state agencies come in and this plume went right from their apartment up to...

[Teresa explains that Jane was imperative in getting the chemical company to move and that now there is a linen company that is stationed in that location.]

**BP:** Oscar Martinez, AmeriPride it's called. They do linens and cable clothes, he's trying to get more involved with the community. He's a really nice person. He has had meetings down there and geoenvironmental it's really quite close to the dump, the landfill I'm sorry [laughs]. We have had a lot of benefits from the funds that have come through and that will continue.

**BP:** We also did a food program at the Emmanuel Lutheran Church. The food was provided by an agency, but you had to go somewhere to pick it up, quite a distance so there would be four or five men that would drive to this place and bring the food back once a month. We would distribute it at this church. It was the easiest to bring it in and get rid of it. It was on a Saturday once a month and that was expanding. We probably had around a hundred people to come and get this food. It was very good, there was enough for meals. So I called the company American Linens, and the guy answers the phone and says, "Jane what do you want" and I says, "well how are you feeling after your operation and he says "Jane what do you want?" and I said, "A truck," and he says, "Well you can have the truck, but you have to take a driver, you can't just have the truck out." How great, I mean what a blessing, the truck and the guy to drive it. So, after that the truck came and picked up some of these men that went and got the food and brought it back and so there was a lot of cooperation and help that way. Like those people at Transit Container,

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those people were so good and still are. I'm going to call Steve, at least tomorrow morning to invite him, we are having this meeting at the landfill on the 23rd. April 26th actually, it is usually a Wednesday and they meet at the DPW [Department of Public Works] office on East Worcester Street. The fire station is closed and it has just been rotting away and there has been trees growing out the windows, windows broken, and it has been vandalized and it is right across from the school. So this woman next door at the flower shop bought the fire station when it was up for \$25,000 and was going to sell it, but it has been many years. I should have checked on that. Finally, somebody a few years back offered to buy it and put one million dollars into upgrading and having three or four businesses there. Teresa and I have gone to an open house that he had and he showed us what he was going to do and everything and it was great. He was going to make a loan for this million, but couldn't get the loan so that fell through. Finally, this person who is going to buy it as a builder and to restore it so he is going to do it properly. There was an article in the paper about a week or so ago, but he was going to redo each part of it. I mean I'll believe it when I see it. It is so decrepit now—almost matching my decrepitness. It sounded so great and now this one is going to give a presentation at our task force meeting. They called us everything, but now the landfill committee is called the task force committee and he is going to give a presentation about the fire station so that will be great. I called the school and invited our former principal our "turnaround coach." At the meeting before I had gone and a woman came in and I hadn't seen her before and she was a coach and I said, "What sports do you coach?" and she said, "Turnaround teacher coach." So we have to investigate more on that. I did not feel that it was proper to go around questioning teachers when this change came, but I probably should have and who knows maybe it wouldn't have gone so far. Anyway, our old principal is back. I guess she'd gone to Hawaii because her daughter was there and doing fine and now she's back and she is happy doing things. It is worse than I even thought. We found out at the last meeting that at the end of the year if you hadn't spent all of the money that you are allocated that you could get that money now for any needs, but now that the budget is coming up in deficit they are not giving the money back. I ask if at these meetings is there anything more that I can ask the community task force—I'm not sure what to call it—and still I will check again before this next meeting just to see if they need anything. We still have about \$300,000 left. We had given a million, well I thought it was a million, but I guess it was six hundred thousand to this park they are doing the Blackstone National Park.

**BP:** We have heard about it on campus too which is sad because we will both be graduated, but we will come back.

**JP:** It has been talked about in fact they quoted me in the paper, "Jane Petrella, longtime activist, said, 'It's been 30 years and we are right on target.'" [laughs] But it is true, it has been over 30

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years and I have been on each committee for The Visitor Center and so I have had these papers copied but I haven't sent them out to the ones that I wanted to, to let them know that I put out in a journal every month in the community center and it was right there that Route 20 and Route 146 we're improved and have been completed and now we are going to do this park and the date on the journal was in 1988. That had gone on, but I typed up the journal and we had some money left over from our grant from the Bog Grant and so I asked permission to get a copy machine which was about \$2,000 and they okayed it. So, then we were doing this journal and I called the company where we bought it from and I asked if we could come down to run off our Journal. They had this \$10,000 copy machine, like 100 copies a second or whatever so I would get my packs of paper and run down and run it through. I mean they agreed, but if you have these connections and you just ask about it, like the poor guy when he says, "Jane what do you want?" why did he think I was calling for something, for that truck?

**BP:** I only have one last question it is like a 2 part question so, the first part in all of your experiences what has been your biggest challenge? And in the second part what has inspired you the most throughout all of your work? Like specific relationships or maybe books or something it sounds like your family has often inspired you to do a lot of this but I was just curious for those little two parts and then we can conclude after that!

**JP:** I think Quinsigamond Village. It really takes a village and really everybody cooperated and whatever skill it was. I should get you those papers if you have a mailing address I could send it to you. I don't know how now I got the money to buy the building, it must have been another grant but it was before Bog Grant. Bog Grant started 43 years this is the forty-third year and now everybody is horrified at the president is going to cut these out. Like I say I just get week watching it, Karen called from Germany and said, "Mom turn off the TV stop watching it".

[Jane's daughters jokingly tell their mother to stay on track and remind her that she is being asked about challenges and inspirations throughout her work. Her daughter Karen offers an idea that politicians who are constantly changing office could possibly be a challenge to her activism.]

**JP:** What is shocking is the same is happening in our city. Such controversy and the committee members challenging one another and attacking each other.

**LS:** Within the committee?

**JP:** It is disheartening to see this type of action that I didn't see two years ago.

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**LS:** Especially most recently within the last two years?

**JP:** But usually they have been. They let people come in and speak their mind. And it is a couple of these folks that are sincere I am sure, but are far out and every week they have to say something which is alright. But they have been having these big groups and last week in the saving of Notre Dame Church, that was disheartening for me too because when they did City Square they were changing the roadways downtown, and actually took down the mall and everything and they were supposed to also build elderly housing. And I thought good week can go down there to live. We should have gotten out of our home years ago, but couldn't make that decision but we would be down there and everything would be available and Notre Dame Church I could go to mass every day, I mean I did at the time, but now I just watched three of them in the morning on the TV. I try to be good and then the church closed and I thought Frank could hang out and read in the library, or we could hang out on the common and feed the pigeons or something and I could still haunt City Hall. It seemed great, but they are just now starting to talk again about the apartments for the elderly. It takes so long it is discouraging.

[Jane's daughters ask if this timing is challenging]

**JP:** As I said, 30 years on this park. I am making a joke, but it was true and that's why I have this journal that Teresa finally made copies of. The journal was a little yellow, but the copies came out alright. It says right there that the roads were approved and I was on both committees, Rt. 20 and 146, in the park committee and they are going to proceed with the park because the roads were finished and approved. I have a couple more to extend to.

[Jane's daughter acknowledges that these seem like challenges to her and then move on to ask her what she felt was her inspiration]

**JP:** Well, the school. My children had been finished with grammar school for a long time, but I kept pursuing knowing that they needed a new school there. I mean the play yard was all broken in front of the school, the cement or whatever it was made of. So, I kept pursuing that and we did get a new school. They put in the new school and they put in the library, which we didn't have, and then they dedicated the library to Jane Petrella. If you want to go down, my picture is there. Again, it was a neighborhood event. We had a true artist in the village who painted my portrait. The "mothers' club" engaged his doing it. I guess it is the "parents' group" that they call it now. People come up to me and say, "Thank you for the school." But see I never really take on but yet I was there every step to speak up. These are some of the things you think

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couldn't have or didn't happen but they actually did. I went to Boston. It was set up by John Huston, our senator at the time, to meet with the education board in Boston. I went with the superintendent, assistant superintendent, the head of the school plant and I can't even remember their names. Now isn't that awful, but we all hopped in this car and it was always this older fellow and I did remember him. Tom Friend, he was the one, he was excellent. I actually, a nobody, went with them and I asked for funds for schools and they actually were giving them. A ninety million dollar reimbursement.

[Jane's daughter explains it was 90% of the cost, in Worcester because they were qualified.]

**JP:** It wasn't that much of an allocation for the new school so they upped it. I think I just saw that they were allocated \$85,000 or \$80,000, but at that time we were getting much greater reimbursement or money to be able to build the schools. It was 1999 and it was after PCB so we don't have that problem. It was the children. To see that school and 800 children there now, and now there is so many extras that they need, these children that don't speak English and have health problems and the parents—there's a lot that I didn't bring up at all.

**BP:** I know, we could talk for such a long time I feel bad that we can't talk about everything.