

Interviewee: Pat Masiello
Interviewer: Charlene L. Martin
Date of Interview: February 24, 2011
Location: Assumption College



Abstract: Pat Masiello was born in 1937 in Worcester, Massachusetts where she grew up with her parents and siblings. She attended Dix Street School and Commerce High School and she describes playing in Institute Park, Elm Park, and the Worcester Art Museum. After high school she worked at Massachusetts Protective Association, later Paul Revere Insurance. She married at the age of 20 and when she was five and a half months pregnant with her first child she had to leave her employment. In this interview she talks about being bored at home with two small children, the pleasure she got from her part-time job with other young mothers, and her jobs at Auburn High School and Assumption College. She also describes caring for her mother who had Alzheimer's, her daughter's death from cervical cancer, and her sister's death from liver cancer. She cared for her daughter's two children throughout her illness and she has a strong bond with them and her other grandchildren.

CM: We are completing a citywide oral history of the lives of Worcester women aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences. Based on the goals of the 1850 National Woman's Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on the areas of women's education, health, work, and politics/community involvement. So do I have your permission to record your oral history today on February 24, 2011?

PM: You do.

CM: This is Pat Masiello. Pat, what is your full maiden name and married name?

PM: My full name is Patricia Ann McKeon, maiden name; Masiello, married name.

CM: And what year were you born?

PM: I was born in 1937.

CM: Were you born in Worcester?

PM: Yes, I was born and brought up in Worcester.

CM: And are you married?

PM: I am separated.

CM: And do you have children?

PM: I had two children – one deceased.

CM: OK, and how many grandchildren do you have?

PM: Five grandchildren.

CM: Five. And what are their names?

PM: Their names are Kristen and James, sister and brother; Allyssa, Isabella, and Benjamin.
[pause recorder]

CM: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents?

PM: My parents ... let's see....

CM: What was your father's name?

PM: My father was John Michael McKeon. My mother was Hilda Ella Simmler McKeon. And they had about – let's see my mother was born in [19]02 – there was eight years difference. My mother was older than my father. I don't know if it was the best marriage in the world but....
[laughs]

CM: What was their background? What nationality were they – they were both born here in this country....

PM: They were both born in this country. My father came from an Irish Catholic family and he was the oldest of eleven.

CM: Eleven!

PM: Eleven children of which – very intelligent family, but all the boys went to the – they were in the service and drinkers. All the girls were very religious. So the girls went one way and the boys went the other way [laughs]. And at that rate being the oldest of eleven, I used to play with cousins that were the same age of me. The youngest brother of my father was probably three years older than me.

CM: Then he would have actually been your uncle then?

PM: He was an uncle before he was born because my grandmother was still having children yet her oldest girl was married with children. So my father was the oldest.

CM: What was his occupation?

PM: Well, coming out of the service – you know I don't remember his – he was a heat treater at Norton Company.

CM: What was it called?

PM: They called it a heat treater. They were doing – well Norton Company at that time, it was wartime.

CM: World War II at that point or..?

PM: It was World War II. My father had been in the army, but between wars, so he – between World War I and World War II he was stationed in Hawaii. He loved it there. Loved it there.

CM: What year was he born?

PM: He was born in 1910.

CM: And your mother was born..?

PM: 1902.

CM: And what was her background?

PM: Her background was – again being wartime, I remember her working in Worcester woolen mills where most women either worked in plastic factories or woolen mills – she worked in, actually in Cherry Valley [Massachusetts] at Worcester Woolen. She was a – not a spinner, a spooler, they called it a spooler. She was a strong, German lady that lifted enormous spools. She would take us kids occasionally to the shop and I couldn't believe what she could lift. And she would work – take the bus – now this was to Cherry Valley in the old days so she would have to walk from the East Side downtown to get the bus, seven o'clock or six o'clock in the morning and get out at three and take the bus home.

CM: Wow. And how many siblings did you have? Who are your brothers and sisters?

PM: Basically there were three of us at home at the same time. I have a half-brother that was twelve years older and being twelve years older all I remember about him is joining the Marines. And he was in World War II, he was in combat. But as a kid of maybe seven, eight, nine years old we just loved the Marine uniform. And he got married right out of the service – while he was in the service – he married his high school sweetheart, had children, moved away. So he was never a big part of our family.

CM: What was his name?

PM: Don.

CM: How about your other..?

PM: My other brother, Ed, and I, we seemed to be the same age only being thirteen months apart.

CM: Who's older you or he?

PM: He's older, but he always seemed younger. And then came the younger sister who was five and a half years younger who was just a pain in the neck.

CM: [laughs] Her name...?

PM: [laughs] Polly. She was the baby of the family. Ed and I were very close You know, just growing up together and doing everything together. The paper routes – we grew up in the North Ashland Street area, right near the Sole Proprietor. This was our neighborhood growing up and there was a lot in this area. We had Elm Park for skating, we had Institute Park for summer programs, we had the [Worcester] Art Museum to run around and play in.

CM: To go right into the art museum...?

PM: It was free. We had the library on Elm Street – Elm or Pearl I don't remember what street it was on. We had all the downtown theaters.

CM: And you just walked to those as kids?

PM: We had no automobile. Everything was walking or riding our bikes. But we had everything to go to and my mother loved movies so we just walked downtown to the movies on the weekends. It was just a good neighborhood. We didn't know that we were poor. We were just – had everything around and played outside.

CM: Were there a lot of children around?

PM: Lots of children. So you could hang on street corners until the streetlights came on and then you'd have to go in. But your parents could see where you were. You wouldn't be what you'd call a gang on a street corner, but you know these were only your neighborhood school kids. The only time we went away from the corner was up in the schoolyard to play basketball. There was a lot of recreation things around.

CM: What's one of your earliest memories?

PM: Of what?

CM: Of Worcester or events that happened in Worcester?

PM: Well the tragic event that I remember vividly was the Tornado of '53.

CM: How old were you at that point?

PM: I was 14 – if my math is correct [laughs] [Post interview correction: 15]

CM: And what do you remember about it?

PM: I remember I was riding home in a terrible thunderstorm from a fundraiser at [College of the] Holy Cross collecting for the Jimmy Fund and some lady was driving us home around Belmont Street. And when I got home, of course the thunderstorm had passed and the sun came out, but nobody knew what had happened. I don't remember the day of the week, but my father was home and had the radio on and we just didn't know – what is this, did a cyclone hit? Nobody knew that it was a tornado. So my brother and I -- living in this part of the city, in the East Side – we walked down to where the courthouse is – used to be – and we sat there and it was like a war zone.

CM: That near you, but you...?

PM: Because it had hit very close, Lincoln Street area. Everyone was trying to get to Belmont Hospital. And you saw people riding on the backs of cars and, you know, it was just a disaster. It looked like what you see in war movies that we used to watch and a lot of our movies were war movies at that time. It was just amazing. So Ed and I just sat there at the courthouse and watched all this action going on. Scary though to think that the sun is out now, does that mean that it could come again and, you know, hit everything. Then a couple of days later we tried walking up Lincoln Street and you could only get so far – and in this day because it's been that long, I don't know if you could really see the path, but by the trees we could tell just where it had been even twenty years later because all the old trees were gone. It was amazing.

CM: So that was when you were 14. What about the earlier event in Worcester? The hurricane?

PM: Well that one I really don't know, I feel like I remember the Hurricane of '38, but being only a year old it sounds kind of impossible.

CM: What do you remember?

PM: But I really, really feel – my father took us out of the house and being only a year old he was carrying me – naturally my younger sister wasn't there – and put me in a corner in a doorway on Hamilton Street. And I swear I can remember being in this doorway. I remember nothing about the hurricane.

CM: Were you with your brother and your mother?

PM: All I can remember is I was all alone. I don't know where they were [laughs] but I was all alone.

CM: Maybe he might have been caught in it while he was walking with you or something.

PM: I think he decided to do one at a time and not thinking -- now my brother's only two -- I can't handle two in this wind. I'll do one thing at a time. But I really wonder [laughs] if anybody knows who could tell me if that really happened.

CM: Now what happened with the hurricane? Was there any deaths involved?

PM: There were a lot of deaths. I mean that was a tragic hurricane, but to me in my memory of the tornado always took a toll in my life. Whenever you'd hear wind or rain it always scared me.

CM: When you see the sky getting dark...

PM: And in this day and age when they can forecast a possible tornado I really tend to panic. I have to talk to myself. So I think at that age and actually seeing what happened -- and knowing how many people were dismembered from it -- what a tornado can do. And very few people around Worcester, unless you were around at that time, fear a tornado. They think, "Oh it's only wind." But I prefer to be in the basement [laughs]. I don't go to the basement, but I think about it [laughs].

CM: Tell me about school -- where did you go to school?

PM: I vividly remember kindergarten through the eighth grade because those were very good memories for me. I can almost tell you every teacher I had.

CM: What school was that?

PM: Dix Street School.

CM: D-I-C-K?

PM: Nope, D-I-X.

CM: Oh, Dix.

PM: Dix. Dix Street was a happy time. I mean I loved school and by the time you got to the sixth grade in all the elementary schools in the city, they would pick a couple of people to go to the prep school -- that would be seventh and eighth grade. And I think I learned more in seventh and eighth than I had learned in four years of high school.

CM: You were one of the two that got picked from your sixth grade class?

PM: Me and my friend that lived on the next street, the two of us were picked to go to prep. And they would bring in other elementary schools -- Edward Street, Belmont Street, no Belmont Street had their own prep school.

CM: Was it held right at the Dix Street School?

PM: Yes, in a separate building. You were separate from the regular grades. In fact your class – I think our biggest class was probably eleven students. So it's very small.

CM: And then what happened after eighth grade? Where did you go to high school?

PM: I went to Commerce High School . I had the choice – you could either go to North High School or Commerce. North was geared more towards college and it wasn't an interest of mine [laughs]. It also did depend on population at the time because my brother and my sister chose to go to college and did go to Commerce, but as a freshman Ed had to go to North – Commerce had no space. So I did my four years, but was overwhelmed. It was way too big for me after coming out of a class of eleven and going into 30, 40 – I really lost interest in it.

CM: I can see how those big classes would change everything.

PM: It did.

CM: What did you do – what year did you graduate?

PM: I graduated in '55 and at that time in 1955 they had A and B classes because when we went to school you had half years. So you had 1955 A – you could start school at different times, we always had half year, so with A and B in elementary it was live 5-1 and 5-2 so you always had the half years. I don't know what year they finally did away with that.

CM: What did you do after high school?

PM: Even during high school I got a part-time job which I loved. It was at Ware Pratt. It was a men's, very exclusive clothing store downtown; Ware Pratt Company right across from Shack's. And I was sixteen at the time it was a bunch of girls and we worked facing Main Street which was so much fun and all we were doing were pasting swatches of material for advertising. We worked in the advertising office and you'd paste a swatch of material [laughs] on a piece of paper and you'd mail it.

CM: Interesting.

PM: So we did that, but we had a view – we were on the second floor – we had a view of Main Street which was very active in those years so it was a fun job to have.

CM: So you did that from 16 until..?

PM: 16 until 17 ½. when I graduated from high school. If you had a full-time job or could find a full-time job you could get out in May instead of June and I was hired at what at that time we called Massachusetts Protective Association which was the Paul Revere Life Insurance Company – we called it MPA.

CM: So it was called the Massachusetts Protective...?

PM: Association.

CM: And then it was called after that...?

PM: The Paul Revere Life Insurance Company.

CM: So you were right out of high school, 17 ½ almost 18.

PM: Yes, because I didn't turn 18 until August.

CM: Wow.

PM: And I started there full-time and worked my way up to supervisor of a department there. Got pregnant and at that time you had to leave at 5 ½ months pregnancy.

CM: Really.

PM: You could not work any longer than that.

CM: How old were you when you got married.

PM: I was just 20. I just turned 20 and I was 23 when I got pregnant.

CM: 23, so then you had to leave at 5 ½ months.

PM: And I found it very boring to stay home with a baby. No car. Whole new perspective of life, not knowing anything about bringing up children. I mean.....

CM: And your first child's name was ...?

PM: Donna.

CM: Donna. So what did you do? You had this little baby. You weren't going to go back to work for a while anyway, right?

PM: No, no I wasn't going to go back to work. There was only one car in the family anyway and there was nobody to –no such thing as childcare or even preschool. So I got very bored. Had my second baby two years later.

CM: And his name..?

PM: We called him TJ, Tony John.

CM: So now you have two little ones.

PM: Two little ones. And now we, we – I was really getting bored so I was looking around for a part-time job and at that time Paul Revere was putting in a computer system and needed keypunch operators. So, and it was an evening job so I didn't need any daycare, you know, my husband came home from work, I did the evening meal and got off to work – took the bus to work because I did not have a license until I was 25.

CM: Wow. So what were your hours then?

PM: Six to ten.

CM: Six to ten every night?

PM: Four nights a week. So you'd make it in there six to ten.

CM: And how many years did you do that?

PM: I worked nine years there until....

CM: Did you like it?

PM: It was very convenient because it was all mothers with children that didn't have daycare and we got to talk about the husbands a lot [laughs] and how they don't pitch in. We'd just gossip, you know, so it was a getaway. It was just a nice getaway and you weren't bored at home. You knew you were coming in to work and others were going through the same ritual you were going through with little babies at home. And the stories were great to hear what other young mothers had to go through –some husbands weren't so accommodating [laughs].

CM: I bet.

PM: One husband was a baker so she had two little boys and they would spend the night sleeping in their high chairs because he was sleeping on the couch. He had to get up at three in the morning [laughs].

CM: Wow.

PM: It was a nice experience

CM: When you left why did you leave there after nine years?

PM: Well, the children were getting older so I decided – and we had to move. We moved from Worcester to Auburn [Massachusetts] and I tried working part-time days at Paul Revere. They offered me a job. The night job had disintegrated because they had got done what they sought out to do with the computers. And so I started working there days and decided that did not work

too good with two small children – well, they weren't that small now, they were in school. But it was difficult. So I thought, "Well, I'll apply to the school system in Auburn." So I applied at the school system and got a couple of job offers and started working there and that lasted another nine years.

CM: Nine years. What did you do there?

PM: I was secretary to Occ. Ed. [Occupational Education] , Athletics and Music. So the Arts -- I don't know how you want to lump them all together? But that was very interesting. Then I decided – my kids were grown up, my daughter got married in 1984, and I decided maybe I'd try the corporate world. Well, that lasted about a week [laughs]. Not that academia was much better [laughs]. I applied at Assumption College. Got offered a couple of jobs and I'm still here [laughs].

CM: Which one did you take?

PM: Well, I took the one that offered me the most money so I took the one in Continuing Education.

CM: And what year was that around...?

PM: I started there in 1984. Actually, I accepted the job in I think it was September or August and all of a sudden I had a physical and they told me I needed a hysterectomy and I thought, "Well, there goes that job." And I called Dr. Nickel at that time and said, "I'm sorry I've got to be out six weeks." "Oh that's fine we'll just have the temps." So I was very, very pleased with the way Assumption treated me. [Laughs] I didn't come back for six to eight weeks and they held the job for me. So that worked out great.

CM; So you've been here since 1984. What are you currently doing here at Assumption?

PM: Now I'm working with the WISE [Worcester Institute for Senior Education] program part time – 'cause I'm old [laughs] and I love the three days. So I work 8:30 to 2:30 three days a week and it works out fine. So when I had come to Assumption – just to back up for a minute – I decided I'd get an education now. So I -- after my first six months or whatever, when I was eligible, I started a course and then life changes [laughs].

CM: What was the course that you took?

PM: A computer course – I was overwhelmed.

CM: Did you take any other courses?

PM: Yes I did, I took a Psych course. I'm trying to think, I think I took another computer course. And then my marriage fell apart and then one thing after another. There wasn't time to do school again.

CM: You were busy. Well, you had a long career here. That's wonderful. Can you tell me a little more – well, your mother for example – I know one of the things when you said, life happens, your mother, your mother was getting older and your father was gone and you ended up taking care of her for quite a while. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

PM: There was a lot of running back and forth. She was at the Senior Housing at Webster Square. And she got to the point where you forget to eat. The decision had to be made to take her with me or put her in a nursing home.

CM: About how old was she at that point?

PM: She was – she was 85, maybe 80, 85.

CM: [mishears] So how old would she have been – 70s, 80s?

PM: Oh she was about that age. I'm trying to think now...19...I don't remember the exact year, maybe she was in her late 70s or early 80s when I took her with me. And at that time it was more convenient seeing I was now separated from my husband and my sister had a family and my brother was out in Michigan. So it was much more convenient for me to have her with me than my sister or brother.

CM: What were some of her health issues?

PM: Mainly just dementia – she was a pretty darn healthy lady.

CM: So physically she was pretty good?

PM: Physically, she was pretty good. She could get around well, she just – dementia had taken over so you forget when to eat, you forget if it's morning or night so I'd put her to bed and she'd be up fifteen minutes later watching TV not realizing it's one or two o'clock in the morning. But then fortunately I discovered that there was daycare and I was working full time and I took her to daycare for several years and that worked out wonderfully at the Jewish Center on my way to work.

CM: So every day you would get up...

PM: Get her dressed and out of the house. Until the time came when she wouldn't get up for me.

CM: Physically she started not feeling as well?

PM: No she just became very stubborn and decided what she didn't want to do.

CM: Then what did you do?

PM: Well, then the siblings stepped in and they said it's too much for me to handle and maybe we should think about a nursing home. Well that took a while, but then it came to that eventually.

CM: Where was that?

PM: She went to Keith Hill first and – I think that's in Mendon – she went to several. And during the middle of this, of course, was when my daughter got sick.

CM: How long was that timespan with your mother from when she moved in with you to when she did have to go to a nursing home?

PM: About six years.

CM: About six years. And how long was she in the nursing homes before she did eventually pass away.

PM: Well, I think she was 96 when she died and I think in the nursing home – maybe four or five years. She was a pretty healthy lady. She'd go through spills in the nursing home and come out of it fine.

CM: So that whole ten-year period was difficult for you as you first had to care at home and then go back and forth to the nursing home and work?

PM: It was very difficult at times. And work -- sometimes work is a salvation though because I don't think I would have wanted to stay home all day and deal with it unless you have a lot of money and could take a vacation with her and do lots of fun things. And Mum wanted to go everywhere I went. With Alzheimer's I think you have to start lying to them and not feel bad about it. And my sister had a lot of trouble with that. She battled trying to tell her and then two weeks later it doesn't work out. So you have to wind up fibbing. You're not hurting them and after a while you accept it too, but my sister, Polly, had a lot of trouble with that. I said, "Polly you're wasting your breath, you know. It's not going to happen." So she got the gist of it after a while and it is hard to fib to your parents, but it's for their benefit.

CM: And it – was it hard, like a whole role reversal – she was the parent caring for you and now it's the other way around. How did – that must have affected you in some way.

PM: It was very frustrating. Sometimes you want to pound the wall [laughs]. Especially when older people with dementia do not want to bathe. It's like a little kid that comes in from the outside and, "You want to bathe?" "No." So you have to find ways to con them into doing it. The same way with eating. I think you resort back to – what we forget is they do resort back to being little kids and I mean little, like one and two. So you don't give them a big meal you start with little things. Really and truly I think you have to go back treating them like they're babies, toddlers. And it makes it easier for you – you give them a plate of food, you're throwing it in the garbage because they're look at it and it's just overwhelming.

CM: It sounds to me like you had a little bit easier time understanding and getting it and having to deal with it then your sister is that fair to say?

PM: I think I did, but I was with it all the time. It took learning for me too of wasting food. And then you start to think, "What is really happening here?" So I spent a lot more time with her than Polly did and my brother. I think both of them suffered guilt of not having her and I tried to reassure them and I sit in a different seat than you do and it's OK. But they still felt very guilty. Guilty enough to the point where they wanted to take her from me and I wasn't quite ready to let her go.

CM: And then you mention, as this was all going on your daughter got ill.

PM: Yeah, that was a shocker. She had two little kids. And she happened to call me one day and said, "I seem to be having some kind of hemorrhage here." Anyway, you go to your gynecologist and they tend to pooh-pooh, you know, our female problems – "Oh, just go home and we'll see how this goes." Well, it didn't go well.

CM: How old was she at this time?

PM: She was 34.

CM: And how old were her children?

PM: Her children were six and nine, just six and nine.

CM: So she kept trying to ...

PM: Yeah, you keep going back to your obstetrician and hopefully they've got some ideas. They didn't seem to be too compassionate towards female problems at all. Just keep pooh-poohing, giving her a pill here, let's wait until next month, and on and on. And all the time this ends up being a serious problem. She had cervical cancer.

CM: How long was that timeline there, not finding out what it was.

PM: Well the ironic thing is, I think the hemorrhaging started in late March – April 1st, April's Fool's Day was the day we found out she had cervical cancer. And of course, the rest of that year was spent between operations and thinking they're very successful and giving her a complete hysterectomy and you know, trying everything possible at that time. This is in 1993. No it was 1994. I'm sorry; my son got married in '93. So it started in '94, April of '94. And through many operations, chemo, and radiation and all that, it just wasn't working. And at that time, I was taking the kids 'cause her husband has to work. So the two little ones were staying at my house – well they weren't that little. They were in school so I would take them to school on my way to work. They would sleep mostly at my house.

CM: Would you be able to visit her every day? How did you do that and handle...?

PM: I tried to visit every single day, sometimes twice a day because after a while, after the operations and -- she wound up being at a nursing home. And at that time nursing homes were just changing over to rehab and taking younger people. And by the fall of that year -- she had a pretty good summer.

CM: In the nursing home?

PM: No, at home.

CM: So she was in there for how long?

PM: In the nursing home? She went in around Thanksgiving and never came out. February -- she died on February 2nd.

CM: So the good time in summer was before..?

PM: After an operation and before more hospitalization. I have pictures of a pretty good summer. Treatments being done. She did well through that.

CM: The kids were back home with her at that point?

PM: Yeah, for several months they were back home.

CM: And during this whole time was your mother still with....?

PM: With me [laughs] [Post interview clarification: Mom was in nursing home just prior to daughter's illness]

CM: Now tell me why did, how, was there a difference in how you felt treating your mother and dealing with your mother, caring for her, and how you felt about your daughter?

PM: It was very different.

CM: Can you tell me how you felt through that?

PM: I think I had my mother so long with me, you know, it was kind of a system I got into, a rhythm. With Donna, well this is very different. You do get -- in looking back now I think I took it one day at a time because you had her children, work, and her. And then my mother, but with my mother I was in such a routine that -- maybe she took a big backseat or maybe my sister helped me out somewhat. But Donna was my main concern and the children. So I think you kind of take one thing at a time. And the children were in activities and things for Kristen to go to. There were activities at school -- rather busy.

CM: You tried to step in a little bit and fill in when she couldn't be at some of those activities?

PM: Even when she worked part-time I would go to the kids' events because Assumption was always very good to me. I could take the time. Not everybody could take time off from work. So I think the hard times were in the nursing home, getting there before I go to work, getting there on my lunch hour, and getting there after work. There were a lot of visits. I mean you never know how much time you have.

CM: In the nursing home did she ever go back home?

PM: No She probably could have, but chose not to and maybe – I don't know why. Nowadays people do go home. Maybe it was the children seeing her in that element and her husband – it was their choice. We had Christmas in the nursing home and it worked OK. Thank goodness for Girls Inc. because that was a salvation for the kids. They wound up taking James as a boy also – he was only six. So I would drop them there after school or somebody would and I would pick them up. So Girls Inc. was a godsend. And Kristen now says some of her best memories are of Girls Inc. and that was eight, nine, ten years old.

CM: So was that while Donna was in the nursing home?

PM: It was and while she was sick even. The kids spent a lot of time there and even after she passed away.

CM: And when did that happen.

PM: That happened on February 2, Groundhog Day.

CM: What year was that, was it '85?

PM: That was '95. Kristen was born in '85.

CM: Sorry, that's right, I lost ten years. By that time of course she must have been terribly sick, but it had to have still been a shock -- she was so young.

PM: Yeah, it is and what you do – I think the husband gets totally lost. Everybody handles it in their own way. And what I didn't realize until a few years ago is everybody is different. I didn't realize how it affected my son because you become very selfish. You think of yourself and the kids, the little kids. You don't think of anybody else really. I mean, her husband, Jim, certainly must have had a different feeling, my son, my daughter-in-law, and an ex-daughter-in-law – I never realized how she felt.

CM: Your primary – obviously your own feelings of your daughter -- which is horrible especially at that young age, but probably your main concern then became the grandchildren. Is that what happened? Did you kind of ..?

PM: That's what happened because you knew something... yet the father kind of swept them away very quickly. They disappeared from my house. He needed them. And he said that, "I need them." Again he didn't give thought to me like I didn't give thought to him, but I'd had them, you know. It was really a hole that was left after he grabbed them. Naturally there was a lot of times I had to do things for them.

CM: So it wasn't like you didn't get to see them anymore?

PM: Oh no.

CM: But it was a shift after caring for them during that -- what a yearlong period?

PM: Well at least six months they slept at my house. Getting them dressed for school, taking them to school, pick them up after school. It was like having two kids taken away from you.

CM: What -- eventually after the immediate passing of Donna -- what role eventually did you play as a grandmother in their lives? After that immediate that he took them?

PM: Still going to their events because their father couldn't always do this so I was always at their events. Or making sure Kristen continued her dancing lessons and James continued his basketball, whatever. So there was always an underground push in maybe kind of a sneaky way to make sure they did these things because Dad was preoccupied. He went through a lot and he was kind of occupied with feeling sorry for himself too. But -- and not being a cook and the housecleaner [laughs] and things like that, I tried to spend time. But you find out that's not the most important thing in the world, a clean house, it was just making sure they had clean clothes. And you know I would spend once a week every week going to their house in Auburn and try to do catch-up without being too obvious about it. Just try to be there for mealtime.

CM: So you were still there for them and you did things for them. And holidays?

PM: Still there and we would always get together.

CM: As they were growing up and getting older and going into high school so they could kind of take care of themselves a little more, did you still see them as much?

PM: Well, what people don't realize even growing up you know others would say to you, "Well you shouldn't have to do this or that." And I always wondered why they thought this way because otherwise kids wouldn't have parents at 14, 15, and 16 if they didn't need them. Why don't they all go live on their own then? They still need you. They need somebody.

CM: So they would go to you for some of those needs?

PM: I don't think they knew what they needed. At that point they didn't always know what they needed. They just went about things. You try to foresee what they might need. Yes, they all need to eat, but kids will eat whenever they want to eat. So let's try to have a meal [together]

and their father wasn't always interested in meals. [laughs] Maybe he had other reasons, I don't know. So that's why their great-grandmother would take a night and I would take a night and we tried to steer them in the direction of having some mealtime.

PM: So you were trying to try to provide some of the structure that maybe a Mom would have, whereas the Dad might have had the traditional work...

PM: That a parent would.

CM: But he was playing the traditional father role – he went out and did his occupation, he worked..

PM: Well, he also needed a social life he felt.

CM: ...and the Mom, who unfortunately wasn't there for the kids anymore, would have been the one who maybe gave them the structure. So you felt you could step in and help with that?

PM: Yes. Dad did give them certain structure, but like any parent he would give them rules and leave. I think sometimes they need you to watch. Kids at that age are smart, they know, "You give me the rule, I don't have to do it." [laughs]

CM: How old are Kristen and ..

PM: Kristen is 25 now and expecting her own child.

CM: Oh, how nice.

PM: And James is 22 still finding himself. And I've always felt that he -- as much as everybody worried about Kristen losing her mother, she was nine years old and probably at nine you do feel it a lot more and she never talks about her mother. James on the other hand was very much babied by his mother. He was only six and I think he has missed having a mother. He's a very laid-back kid; he's very different from his sister. She's very high strung. Lots of fun, but very up and down. James is kind of level all the time so you don't really know where he's coming from and I'm really worried about him. He's only 22 and doesn't show a good path. He's chosen not to live with his father since he was 18 which a lot of kids do, but I don't know if this has been helpful. Kristen on the other hand has – did come live with me for about three years and found herself and became an RN [registered nurse] and has done okay. But I don't know what's going to happen with James. We're at that crossroads.

PM: Well, as a grandmother you probably feel that you definitely had to pitch in a little more than the typical experience, but how do you feel?

PM: It's been a good experience. Naturally it's not one we would choose, but I'm glad that I've been in the same state and available to them. Not sure how they feel about it. [laughs]

CM: Well, I was going to ask, what do you think, what do you think if I asked them, do you think in this point in their lives if they could look back and feel they were happy you were in their lives?

PM: I think it would probably take them – I think they would feel that way, but being so young I don't think they've realized it all yet.

CM: Even now?

PM: I think it takes a family and -- I think Kristen is beginning to since she's pregnant and starting a family. I think they're still young and they know no other way. So a lot of divorced parents, friends have grown up without mothers.....

Tape ends – Side 2

CM: Tell me what happened with your sister, your younger sister?

PM: Well, all of a sudden after her retirement from the Mass Academy [Massachusetts Academy for Science and Math], she found out she had liver cancer. And again, like Donna's, nine months later she was gone from us.

CM: You were very close with Polly even though she was younger.

PM: Very close. As youngsters, as I said, she was my pain in the neck as younger sisters are. Once you've grown up and have families and children we were very close. There's nothing like a sister. Brothers are okay, but it's just not the same. [laughs]

CM: And how old – she retired, but how old was she?

PM: She was 63, 63.

CM: And she had a couple of children?

PM: She had four. She had twins, and another boy, and a Down's Syndrome girl who now calls me a lot [laughs], Jennifer. My sister was remarkable with Jen. Jen is on her own in the community living with her boyfriend and they have been together about six years. And they are the best thing that ever happened to each other. They take good care of each other at work, recreation. My sister did a marvelous job with her. Jen is now – she was born in '72.

CM: 39?

PM: She's only 39? She was born in '72.

CM: So when Polly got sick what role did you play?

PM: Well, her kids were very supportive. Actually, one of them was here, but they made trips – she has one in Minnesota and one in New Orleans. But I'd stop and have lunch with her every lunch hour – this is again when Assumption comes in very handy. In the corporate world it wouldn't have been the same. So I'd have lunch or take her to appointments. We did have a lot of help from other family members and friends. It was just – it's hard to lose – it's hard to reminisce with anybody else about your childhood once you lose a sibling. Your parents are gone. I did have my brother, Ed. He's in Michigan and Arizona. But there are things you have no one else to talk to about once your siblings are gone. And then best friends also. I've lost a couple of best friends. So it's hard even if you make new friends, there's no history there.

CM: You lose a little bit of your history.

PM: You lose a lot of your history when you lose your family members.

CM: Never thought of it in that way. It's a little different when you lose your siblings. Your parents you have the expectation that they will go at some point...

PM: “Do you remember Dad doing that? Do you remember Mom doing that?” There is no one to ask that anymore.

CM: And your children don't remember you as a young person – they don't think you ever were.

PM: They're not interested. And my two best girlfriends that I grew up with –especially Mary Lou -- I lost her and we were friends at Dix Street from the time we were 10 years old. So we had a lot to reminisce about. A lot. And so when you lose your very best friend of which few of us have more than one or two of those, it – the realization that life is getting shorter [laughs]. So write your memories down. [laughs]

CM: And that's what we're doing today partly [both laugh] in a short, abbreviated form. And I think we've talked a lot about some of the illnesses that happened in your family which I know happens in every family eventually, but obviously it's a little different when you lose a child at such a young age. And then caring for a parent – a lot of people have to do it, but a lot of these things hit you at once. And you were still working ...

PM: One after the other.

CM: One after the other, yet I know you a little bit and you seem to be very resilient. Were you resilient? Do you feel like you were resilient or was that what I saw because you were putting on a?

PM: No, I think you are and I think that our paths are cut somewhere. You know everyone says, “Is there a reason that this happened?” And I never really asked that reason. I do believe there was a reason that Donna died and that I had my mother living with me. I'm still working on my

sister [laughs]. But I think as you get older you can almost see that somebody had a journey for you and this is it.

CM: So if someone would look from the outside world and say that you had a pretty bad journey with everything that got thrown at you, is that how you look at it?

PM: No, no, not as a bad journey. I think I've always been a little superstitious in that nobody has it all. So bad things may happen, but there's some good that comes out of it.

CM: Would you say, what would you say – I think I have an opinion on it, but what would you say the good that came out of your daughter passing away – and I know what you mean by “good.”

PM: Yeah, I don't know if good is the right word.

CM: A positive that came out of it?

PM: [omit]

CM: Do you think you would have had as close of a role with those two particular grandchildren if you didn't step in and help after Donna died? You'd have a good relationship maybe as a grandchild like with your other ones, but would you have a special one?

PM: I think a daughter and a mother always have a special relationship – hopefully they do – and Donna and I did. And I had a very close relationship with her children before she got sick. So maybe that laid the groundwork because if we had not maybe it wouldn't have worked the same way. Her children slept over my house frequently; I frequently did things with them. So nothing really changed except they were with me a little bit more. So I already had that relationship. So that's what I mean about laying the path for things. Maybe that happened because not all mothers or mothers-in-law have as close a relationship. You know you might not live in the same state; you might not get along with them. Life is strange. If it works out that way, it works out that way. Maybe we could have gone a different path. And with my mother it worked out fine. I had just been separated from my husband. It was a convenient time for me to take her. And she wasn't all that bad, not really.

CM: In a way was it nice to have the time with her as much of a struggle as it was and a different role reversal?

PM: It was because she was a different kind of a mother to me. She wasn't – I think I was closer to my mother-in-law in a lot of ways than I was to my mother. Two totally different people. My mother was a little childlike. But happy – she always had fun for herself. She was fairly easy to take care of. Didn't run away. Except when she was totally losing it and then you worry about her falling and the guilt. But that – I have no regrets and I don't know, I guess everybody's life is shaped by what happens to them. And I suppose I could have gone a different path. My brother moved away, went to Michigan.

CM: Would you say -- sometimes people say those kinds of things make a person stronger. Do you think you were a strong person to begin with or do you think these things as they accumulated made you a stronger person?

PM: Stronger. I don't know about that. I was always -- I have a little bit of Irish in me [laughs] -- I think I was always pretty strong.[laughs].....

CM: You were always tough!

PM: I was always -- yeah, I don't know if you become stronger by these things.

CM: Well, would you agree some people might collapse under the cumulative effect of some....?

PM: Well, I also believe you're not given a lot that you collapse under. Although I have seen -- not too many, when you think back how many people -- it was always said, because my sister had a Down's child that, "Oh, we could never have handled that. They gave it to the right person" And my sister resented people saying that. "How can you say that? I'm no different from anybody else." Well, I think she was. She was because I would not have brought Jenny up the same way my sister did.

CM: And tagging on that, I think I would say that not everybody would have handled everything you went through with your family's health issues and caring the way other people might.

PM: There's someone for everyone [laughs]

CM: I think I'm pushing you to give yourself some credit [laughs] because I see you as a strong person.

PM: My sister couldn't have handled my mother -- she admitted to me.

CM: And some grandmothers wouldn't have been able to handle teenage kids that were going through difficult times.

PM: That was very challenging. [laughs]

CM: And you did it.

PM: Yeah, I think that's why you have to live in the day.

CM: So it gets back to that is something you live by?

PM: Oh yeah, because there was always a new day. You go to bed thinking, "Oh God, I can't go through this again." And then a day or two later -- maybe it's not always the next day -- but you're given a different day. If you've got patience and you can wait, you are given a new day.

CM: Pat, I want to thank you for sharing so much of your story with me and with the Worcester Women's Oral History Project.

PM: My pleasure.

CM: Thank you very much.