Pamela Sussman-Paternoster Transcript

JULIE JOHNSON: This is an interview with Pamela Sussman-Paternoster, March 1st, 2005, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with interviewer Julie Johnson. So I'd like to start by talking a little bit about your childhood and your upbringing. And just first some basic questions about when and where you were born -- when and where and who, you know, if you have siblings... Who you grew up with, who was in your house. (Laughter)

PAMELA SUSSMAN-PATERNOSTER: Okay. I was born on March 5th, 1953, the day Joseph Stalin died, in Canton, Ohio, which was significant in my family because they were from Romania, and had some political leaning --

JJ: Your grandparents?

PSP: My grandparents. I have... this is hard to explain. My mother died when I was nine years old, and I have a sister with the same parents. My father got married again to my stepmother, and she had two children, the same ages as my sister and me, a son and a daughter. This was when I was --

JJ: She already had --

PSP: -- ten -- yes. And then my [parents] divorced. I was already married, and my father married again, and his wife had a daughter, and she's, I think, thirty. So we're a *blended*, blended family.

JJ: This was in Canton, Ohio?

PSP: Canton, Ohio.

JJ: In the '50s?

PSP: 1953, I was born.

JJ: And how would you describe your class status, economic status?

PSP: I'd have to say... (Laughter)

JJ: You don't. You don't have to.

PSP: -- (laughter) that... my father and my mother were from two very different backgrounds. My grandfather was a boxer and a salesman, and his family was -- he had ten brothers and sisters, and most of them were in the family business, which was petty gangster/shyster stuff, although one of my uncles was on the Ten Most Wanted list. And my mother's family was intellectual. My [paternal] grandfather, who's the smartest man I ever met, graduated from the eighth grade. This is my father's father.

JJ: Your father's father. Uh huh.

PSP: And my mother's family went to university in Europe. My grandmother graduated from Gymnasium, which was secular high school, which was kind of unheard of. My mother's family lived in the first Jewish agricultural settlement in Europe. It was funded -- I can't remember by who, I've got it somewhere.

JJ: They were -- who was Romanian?

PSP: My -- they lived in Bessarabia, my mother's family. My father's family sojourned in Ireland for a number of generations. My grandfather spoke with a brogue because most of his brothers and sisters were born in Ireland, and they settled in Youngstown, Ohio. So I would have to say that my background was -- I guess what they call it now is something like [upper middle class]. But my father had times of financial success -- he worked in his father's business, which was -- did you ever see *Tin Man*?

JJ: No.

PSP: Well, they were the tin men. And they had some financial success, and some not-so-successful times. But I never wanted. I never felt that I was denied, in terms of basic niceties, and -- you know, I had ballet classes and art classes and this and that, you know.

JJ: And your father's parents were --

PSP: My father's parents were both born in Ohio.

JJ: Oh, they were?

PSP: My grandmother was born in Cincinnati, and my grandfather was born in Youngstown. And her family moved to Youngstown when she was a girl.

JJ: Did you have any Jewish identity growing up?

PSP: Mm-hm. I did. It was very strong Jewish identity, and a small town, where housing was restricted until I was in high school, so most of the Jewish people lived in two neighborhoods. And, I went to religious school, I was confirmed in the Reform synagogue, I went to Jewish camp, I was the BBG sweetheart (laughter) --

JJ: What's the BBG?

PSP: [B'nai Brith Girls.] It's like the Jewish prom queen. (Laughter) Because those kinds of things weren't open to me in Canton, Ohio, in high school. I was not bat mitzvahed. I had a very small bat mitzvah/coming out when I was forty-five, I read a little bit from the Torah in a small minyan, and felt that was a very important milestone. My grandparents -- my mother's family always belonged to what they called the *Deutsche shul*, even in Europe, which was the Reform synagogue. And my father's family -- my great-grandfather started the Orthodox synagogue in Youngstown, Ohio. So they grew up (pause) different, Jewishly. But not... My grandmother kept a kosher home and she

was observant -- my mother's mother. My father's parents were not as observant, although I have to say, my mother's mother lived with us from the time my parents married. My father's parents lived across the street. Friday night was sacrosanct. We had Friday night either at my grandparents' or at my parents' house. Every Friday night that I can remember, all the way through childhood and through college, we invited friends over. And my mother Ruth, she was observant and very spiritual. When she got sick with cancer, she -- I don't know if this had changed or whether it was a new thing, but we went to synagogue every week, yes. And then when my father -- when my mother died, my father remarried, we moved from the Conservative synagogue to the Reform synagogue, which was on the same block.

JJ: (laughter) Uh-huh.

PSP: And it was because [my new mother] was not comfortable in the Conservative synagogue, and evidently the *Deutsche shul* in Europe was similar to the Conservative synagogue in our town, which was where our family belonged. I'm all over the place here.

JJ: That's fine, no.

PSP: But my identity as a Jewish person was formed and informed by a lot of different things. First of all, having a European grandparent in the house who had survived pogroms, and having parents who were teenagers during the war and had experienced a lot of antisemitism, and I got mixed messages, like, "Don't tell people you're Jewish," "Don't be too Jewish." And a lot of what was my identity was framed by the Holocaust -- it was so new. You know, the war was over in '45, I was born in '53, and it was -- a big part of my identity was -- in fact, I can remember being very rebellious when it came time to write my confirmation speech, and what I said was what a teenager would say, but what I meant was something a little different, but my speech was about my Jewish identity – (JJ coughs) bless you! -- being more than (pause) being defined by the Holocaust. And the

Rabbi at our temple (laughter) got really angry, because I must have said it in a really, like, cavalier kind of way. But --

JJ: When was this? When did you make the speech? No, during -- you said --

PSP: Confirmation, so I was in the tenth grade. And it was also informed by -- and a lot of it, in retrospect -- antisemitism, and my parents putting restrictions on who our friends could be, and who we could date... in Canton, Ohio, that was really restrictive. (Laughter)

JJ: Yeah, I was going to say --

PSP: [The dating pool was limited.] I could date my brother, or my neighbors... (Laughter) But what it did do was it made us stick together in the neighborhood. We were all close friends. I sat with my sister Bonnie last summer, we were looking over our high school yearbook, and I was floored, because I hadn't looked at it since high school, to discover that there was a kid in the back of the book, a full page, dressed up like Hitler giving the Hitler salute, as, like, this was funny. And at the time, I don't remember feeling anything -- I do remember, in high school, feeling left out. I had black hair. There were restricted clubs in high school that were affiliated with the YM/YWCA -- no such thing as a Jewish cheerleader or a Jewish prom queen or anything like that. I never went to any of those things. And at the time, I never thought about it as being driven by antisemitism, but I know now that there was a little more to it than I was aware of.

JJ: This was at a public high school?

PSP: Mm-hm.

JJ: In Canton.

PSP: In Canton. And it resulted in a very different upbringing for our son.

JJ: So, you stayed in Canton for a while after you graduated?

PSP: Well, I graduated from high school and I went to undergraduate school at Ohio State University, which I (laughter) still see as the happiest time of my life. But my Jewish identity was not really... it was actually, it was a time of rejection for me --

JJ: College?

PSP: -- of rejection of Judaism. It wasn't that I embraced another religion, but I had so much self-hatred from not having a firm identity that was positive, that I let it go for a long time.

JJ: It's a lot of internalized antisemitism?

PSP: Yeah. A lot. And… Then after college, well, yeah, I went back to Canton for a little while, and then I moved to Cleveland.

JJ: And that's -- did you start teaching out of college, or --?

PSP: Yeah, I did -- not straight out of college, but if you're looking for how I got to doing what I'm doing, it starts earlier than that, actually.

JJ: OK. Yeah, I'd like to know. Yeah, so I'm curious how you got to do what you're doing, and I'm wondering, also -- and you can figure out when this comes in -- when were you inspired to be an activist? (Laughter) (Inaudible), and if you remember, you know -- or if it's values, you know?

PSP: That was a very interesting thing. I think I told you that my grandfather died and left my grandmother a widow with two children, and that he had had a friend named Bill, a Black man who was in the Merchant Marine, who came around --

JJ: Oh... on the phone.

PSP: -- yes. And he lived in back of the store -- my grandma lived upstairs with the kids, and he helped her. She bought a store with the insurance money. This was in Pennsylvania. And my mother never told me this. My grandma told me, long, long, long after, but when she told me it made a real impression, because we had in the ‘50s a Black cleaning lady named Geneva. And my mother... see, I got mixed messages. My grandmother on my father’s side referred to her -- cleaning lady -- in not so very nice terms. And my mother insisted that we have respect and that Geneva was a person of dignity, (pause) and at a certain point -- and I was very young -- Geneva left doing house cleaning and got a job in a department store. And I remember my mom taking my sister and me downtown to the department store. Geneva was the elevator operator. And it was a move up, and my mom was really happy for Geneva, and wanted us to see her working at her new job that she was so proud of. And that made an impression on me. It didn’t say, you know, at that age, “I want to be an activist.” It just made an impression. When I was in high school, [my step mother] took a job -- it actually might have been before that -- but she took a job working at the Stark County Welfare Department, and she worked in many different departments in the agency. She ended up doing probate court adoption, but she also did foster care and she did -- what is it called... I want to say DSS, but that’s not what it is. It was -- she did home visits and a lot of displaced and homeless children. And she always struck me -- because she was always dressed to the nines and she would drive her yellow Cadillac into the projects, and... She was tough, you know? She was a tough lady and I, at the time, I didn’t, again, didn’t think much of it. But she worked with a woman named Ella Green who, in a way, became a mentor of mine. Ella is an African-American woman who went to school at Spelman. She had never been South and couldn’t stand the treatment of African-Americans in the South, so she transferred back to Ohio. I’m not sure what college she graduated from, but she was a social worker. She and my mother retired together, they worked together side by side, desk by desk, for [thirty] years, at least. And Ella was a part of our extended family. My mother still has all her holidays with Ella, and Ella’s always been there pushing me, and

Ella's husband, John -- we called him Big John -- was the first Black shop steward, I think it was for [Republic] Steel, which was a big deal in Stark County. And he and Ella -- I don't know, I think I was a precocious big-mouthed kid, and I must have asked a lot of questions that were probably inappropriate. So John said it was time for me to take a leap; and he, having lots of connections, found me a job as a playground supervisor. I think this was the summer before I went to college. And I was the White girl from the suburbs, and it was like 1968, '69. And there was a lot going on in the country, and there I was on a playground that was basically somebody else's turf. And John told me, you know, "You stick to this, don't you give it up. You do this this summer." And there were older high school boys -- now I guess they would be called gang kids. And they harassed me, and the goal was to scare me off the playground. And I had made this promise to John and Ella, and I was terrified every day, because the kids would come by and throw bottles and swear at me, and then the little kids, you know, I was there to do arts and crafts and all that stuff. And the summer is kind of a blur to me, but John did not come by to rescue me until the summer was well on its way. And John was like the mayor of the neighborhood. And he came over to the playground, and I was certain that he was going to, you know, tell all the kids to behave. (Laughter) And he didn't! (Laughter) His presence there -- and he pulled me aside and was talking to me -- and all the kids in the neighborhood, all ages, knew John. I mean, [he was] a great big tall man, and the fact that I knew John... just his appearance there, it didn't make it any easier, but they -- it wasn't like I earned respect or anything, but I remember John telling me, "It is not your problem that they are harassing you." And I didn't know what that meant for the longest time. But what it turned out to mean to me was, "You have to figure out what you own and what belongs to somebody else, and take on what you own and let other people deal with their own issues" -- which is counterintuitive to the idea that the White people are going to move into the ghetto and make things better for the Black people, which was a lesson I learned really early. Nobody wanted me to help them. This was all about me learning to navigate in a world that was (pause) unknown to me. And if I was going to

navigate it, I was going to have to learn how to behave, what's appropriate for me, and to have a poker face, because at that time, and even now, kids like to inspire fear. All kids. But particularly kids who are underserved, and all of a sudden, you know, the Great White Hope shows up, and she's, you know, doesn't know what she's doing, just scared to death. I made a million mistakes that summer, figuring out who I could trust and who I couldn't, and what the local -- I mean, simple things. The local slang, the local standards for behavior in different situations...

JJ: So these were all African-American kids?

PSP: All. And I lived through the summer.

JJ: This was the summer before college?

PSP: And I cried a lot. I'd go home and I'd say, "My God. I'm so racist. I hate these kids. You know, I don't want to be doing this, I'd be just as happy to go swimming every day and work at the drugstore." And it was trial by fire, and it changed my life forever. (Pause) Sometimes I feel like Forrest Gump, because I feel like I seem to be at the right place at the right time. So I went to college and I majored in art, and got a teaching certificate in art. And I had a wonderful time in college, and I discovered that one of the things that had happened to me was that I wasn't afraid anymore. I mean, there was a lot of separatism on campus -- I went to school in 1971, I think -- and it wasn't as if I had opportunities to mix with different ethnicities, particularly since I was so excited to be going to college where there were lots of Jewish -- there was a Jewish dormitory, you know, it was real thrilling for me -- even though I talked about this self-hatred, it was another frontier. I graduated from college, and John and Ella said, "So what are you going to do now?" I said, "I don't know." My aunt -- oh, and there was all this dialogue, they were always asking me questions. I loved talking to them, I still love talking to Ella -- John has since died -- because I knew that it was safe to ask the dumb questions. It was safe to say the stupid things. And they challenged me, and I often wonder why it was

me, not one of my other siblings. I'll never know, never, never, never know. Anyhow, my aunt and uncle -- my mother's brother -- lived in Cleveland, and my aunt was the director of publications for the Cleveland public schools. And, she said that there was a job opening that I could probably do, but that it involved working in a -- at the time, an odd situation. (Laughter) So I went to Cleveland, I interviewed for the job, and the job was working for the library department, teaching what is called visual literacy. And basically it was working with kids in the libraries on things like reading the newspaper, reading advertisements -- understanding media. And it was a grant-funded program, and it was something that was under one of the titles, so the students were all minority students. And that year that I started, 1976 I think it was, was the [first] year of the Desegregation Act, and Cleveland was like Boston. In fact, Cleveland modeled their process after Boston. (Laughter) And I was placed in -- but I worked there for I think five years, and I worked in like eight different schools, but my placement was -- the first year, I was the only Caucasian person in the schools that I was working. Everybody from the lunch ladies to the principal to the teachers, and all of the students, were African-American, and the neighborhoods were dangerous. And I somehow felt that I could do this, if I thought of myself as a *guest* -- that I was not going in there to change the school, I was going in there to be a guest and to learn from the people in the school, which turned out... I could cry thinking about it. People in the neighborhood -- what I did was I went walking in the neighborhood with the principal. People at the school were so warm and gentle and inviting and good to me -- I found myself in the churches, and I found myself in people's homes, and I found myself, when children had recitals, going to their recitals. And I think it was because I was a good guest. I behaved myself, and I felt honored, and the principal took me out for a walk and introduced me to all of the shopkeepers, and I was told to take the same route every day. There would be people looking out for me. She even showed me where you could go under the bridge and buy opossum, and -- not just opossum, oh gosh, what are the other ones -- meat, you know, game from West Virginia, you know, soul food, and the healers and the religious people. And I could drive into the

neighborhood, put the windows down, and wave, and people would scream, “Hey teacher!” Which was... I can only attribute it to my miserable summer on the playground, that I did learn to be not afraid, and that if I was going to teach: “children are children are children are children.” I didn’t know it for sure (laughter), but that’s what I told myself. And it’s true. Children are children, and as a White teacher, I was tested. The kids assumed a lot, I assumed a lot. The kids had never had a White teacher. I was as interesting to them as they were to me -- they wanted to touch my hair and look at my hands, and I wanted to know (pause) what their lives were like, and I learned that even the poorest of the poor people in the world have dignity, which I never knew. You know, you don’t. You may say it, we may give lip service to it, but until you’re in somebody’s home and you see that they have taken out all the stops to make you a lovely dinner and then take you to their church for their concert, that they’re really -- they took care of *me*. They knew I was a first-year teacher, naïve, White, full of energy, save the world... and they were there to show me that I don’t have to save the world, that there’s dignity in just teaching, and acknowledging that, “Yes, I’m White... ” Which was important, because *whiteness* is not something that people think about. People think they know what blackness is, but they have no clue what whiteness is and what whiteness means in this culture. There are things as simple as being able to go to any drugstore and get your hair products. To go to any grocery store -- of course, unless you live here and you keep kosher -- and find your food. To have access to the institutions like schools and school board, and have what’s called “school discourse” from the time you’re in kindergarten, knowing the expectations. And the school system’s not understanding the importance of the oral tradition in African-American culture, which will lead to the Algebra Project. So I did that for five years, in eight different schools, and --

JJ: Why eight different schools?

PSP: Because the program rotated from neighborhood to neighborhood. (Baby sounds in background)

JJ: The art program?

PSP: The visual literacy -- yeah, it was in each school for, I think, two years, and then they rotated it, and I was in a number of schools each year, like two to three. So I was a rotating teacher -- I was one of those teachers with the cart.

JJ: (laughter) Yeah. And you would say you were a visual literacy teacher, is that what you called it?

PSP: Yeah, that's what they called me. And I worked in small groups, and I took the kids out in the neighborhood, and we did photography, and we did -- the kids made -- I've got a certificate here, they made a really amazing radio show that won national airing on NPR. They interviewed the youngest mayor in the United States, Dennis Kucinich.

JJ: Oh yeah? (Laughter)

PSP: -- who ran for president, and they shocked him, because they came in prepared. But at any rate, that was my experience in Cleveland, and it happened during five years that I was there, during the desegregation process. And what happened was, the first year, any new hires -- and I was the only new hire -- were put in all Black schools. The second year, they desegregated the teaching staff, so teachers who had been teaching a hundred years, everybody was moved, so that there would be parity -- racial balance. And that was a huge stink. Teachers were losing their minds... morale... the courts took over the school systems, and the judge was in charge of everything... and then the third year, they desegregated the schools with bussing. And things were done that were so outrageous -- they would desegregate, they'd schlep kids all the way to the other side of town and then put all the Black kids on one floor and all the White kids on another. I mean, this was not always the case, but those kinds of things happened, and there were parents fighting and screaming, and you know... and here we had these terrified little children, African-American children being schlepped all over the place -- nobody thinking,

you know, “These babies are getting on a bus, they’re riding” -- because Cleveland is split this way by a river – “they’re riding *hours*...” And it was very scary for them. And, you know, I also had some funny experiences. I taught in a Puerto Rican neighborhood, and everybody assumed I was Puerto Rican because of my looks, and I was out in the streets, and everybody talked to me, but they all thought I was an idiot because I couldn’t speak Spanish. So, assumptions -- everything was assumptions. I made assumptions, the neighbors made assumptions, teacher made assumptions. But the best part was, I learned, being in a completely segregated school, the old-style Black teacher who tells the kids -- knows the kids from the neighborhood, tells them like it is, not exactly your ed reform kind of doing it, but, you know. There was that. There was the (pause) -- oh, gosh, I lost my train... there was a lot gained and a lot lost. There was a lot of safety in a segregated school, because the neighborhood, the teachers in the neighborhood, the teachers knowing the kids, that sort of thing. And that kind of thing is hard to replicate when you’ve got kids schlepping all over the place. But the fact of the matter was that desegregating the schools was good for both the Black kids and the White kids and the Brown kids, because it forced people to be in proximity and to talk to one another and fight with one another, and -- you know, I’m not sure how I would feel today about it, because I know that there’s a lot of talk about same-sex schools, you know... And in the public schools in the United States, the fact of the matter is, in the urban areas, the vast majority of students are students of color. In Mississippi it’s ninety to ninety-nine percent. (An aside) If she’s bothering you, you can -- Sally, get lost! You can kind of push her off. I’m allergic to her. (Sally was a cat.)

JJ: Oh, you are? (Laughter)

PSP: Yeah. But she’s like eighteen years old, I can’t get rid of her. Sally! Come here. And she weighs four hundred pounds. That should do it. No! If you put a pillow down... What was I going to say?

JJ: So -- can I interrupt you?

PSP: Yeah.

JJ: I'm wondering how values that you learned, Jewish values -- if they did at all -- affected your work as a teacher.

PSP: They did. I was young, but I was completely taken by Abraham Joshua Heschel holding hands with Dr. King going over the bridge. And my older cousins were involved in Birmingham, in the movement. And I had cousins in New Orleans. I was just this much too young... but I realize in retrospect, I was doing it in the Cleveland public schools, and (pause) what I learned that I was able to transfer was dignity in being White -- it's okay, it's okay to be White, it's okay to be Jewish, it's okay to be middle-class, it's okay not to feel that it's your responsibility to save the Black community, but there are ways for me to work within different communities in a very proactive way, and the most significant is as a White ally. And the opportunity to speak at the Women Who Dared dinner is not an opportunity for me to talk about "I did this, I did that" -- it's an opportunity for me to talk to an audience that doesn't know a lot of what I have experienced. For instance, I don't have quantitative data, but I do know from my experience that many White teachers are afraid of Black students, and that that's one of the reasons that Black students don't perform as well as White students. And that I am not African-American, I'm White and I'm Jewish. And in fact, what I haven't said yet, which surprises me, because I usually make this clear... at a certain point in my life, I realized that what makes me different, even though as a Jew, I'm not Anglo and I'm not... it's not that I don't consider myself to be White -- I am White. Because I can walk down the street and pass. I *feel* 'other,' because of the times that I grew up in, the women's movement had a strong antisemitic streak, the Civil Rights Movement had a wonderful partnership with he Jewish community and agencies, but the Jewish communities could not give up the power, and that's what all of the antisemitism is about right now. And it's a really hard nut

to crack, because as Jewish people being 'other,' we still have an obligation to realize that every time a Black person wakes up and goes out on the street, they're Black. So I made a conscious decision that I am a Jewish woman. Not a woman who's Jewish -- a Jewish woman, and I assert myself and my Jewishness, whatever that is, as soon as I make contact with people. And in anti-racism work, there's such a thing as affinity groups, and when people are split into those groups to go and talk privately, you'll find all the African-American people get up and go without a question. White people struggle. First of all --

JJ: Jewish people?

PSP: Well, White people struggle first, and then Jewish people tend to go with other Jewish people because we feel that we are not part of the culture at large, and it used to be a big argument in anti-racism training, that "You should go where you're recognized on the street." So what I tend to do is, I go both. I'll spend part of the time here with the White group, because on the street, that's who I am, and I'm not kidding anybody. But I do know that I'm not White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, I'm not central European, you know, this sort of -- it's different. Anyway. I'm getting a little distracted. So I went to graduate school in Cleveland and I studied --

JJ: This was after teaching?

PSP: This was after teaching -- yes, I got riffed.

JJ: Oh, okay.

PSP: It was, you know -- they laid off all the new teachers so they could pay the raises for the older ones -- which was in and of itself an education, because we were on strike for eleven weeks. And the AFL-CIO, which represented the Cleveland teachers, came in and made it clear we were going to march the line, we were going to -- they put Superglue, there was going to be no crossing the line -- I mean, it was tough. But

anyway, that was another piece of my education, which was in and of itself an education.

JJ: Yeah. Okay, so after the five years you went back to graduate school.

PSP: I went to graduate school for a year at Cleveland State, and I worked in their Media Lab. It was the first year of the personal computers. And the Apples came in, and I played for a year, and I also had the great opportunity to teach in the center. My degree was in Curriculum and Foundations, and --

JJ: In graduate school, you had a --?

PSP: I had a teaching fellowship. And the best thing that happened was, Cleveland has what's called the Aviation High School, and they train kids in high school to pilot and (pause) do the mechanical work on planes, under great supervision. And a whole slew of retired Air Force people (laughter) decided they were going to go back to school and get their certification so they could teach at Aviation High School, because there was a real dearth of people who were qualified to teach this sort of thing. And these guys were the greatest. I taught Media, because in order to get certified you had to have a Media course, and these guys put together slide -- this was, you know, pre-high-tech -- they put together slide and tape presentations: going up in airplanes and doing educational things for kids, like they would go up in the airplane, and you saw them with the scarf and the hat -- you know, the World War II -- and they would point out the window at all of the different cloud formations that you would have to fly through. And the best had Rosemary Clooney singing "Stormy Weather" over the... So that was another thing that I learned, was in being a person who had preconceived notions about the military, for whatever reason. These guys taught me a lot, I mean you know, they were tough and they were interesting. And then, Paul and I decided to come here. Paul --

JJ: Who's Paul?

PSP: Paul is my husband. He was an industrial designer, decided to apply to MIT to the Media Lab.

JJ: You met him at Ohio State graduate school?

PSP: I met him in Cleveland. It was so boring, we were introduced by a mutual friend... you know, it was like (laughter), nothing, you know, the no-story. And he was a doctor, you know... (Laughter) Paul was in school at the Cleveland Institute of Art, and I was teaching in Cleveland, and so when he was graduating, I had just been offered another job in the schools, and he wanted me to come with him wherever he went, and I said, "I'm not going anywhere unless I'm married." And it was really funny, because I had such a high need to be conventional, when in fact, you know, I must have known how to trust my heart, 'cause yeah, I got married. And we decided to come here, and I applied to Harvard to graduate school, Paul went to MIT, and while at Harvard, I took a job at the school at the end of the street, which was, at the time, the King Open School -- it was a school started by parents. It was an alternative school, and it was multi-graded, and --

JJ: What year is this?

PSP: [1982]. I started working as an assistant teacher while in graduate school at Harvard. And the school thrived on parent and community involvement, teachers being dedicated to social justice. At the time, the school was represented by fifty-six linguistic groups. The only school that had more representation was the United Nations school in New York.

JJ: Wow.

[END OF INTERVIEW]