RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH PAMELA FESSLER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

BETHESDA, MARYLAND
DECEMBER 27, 2018

TRANSCRIPT BY

JESSE BRADDELL

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an oral history interview with Pamela Fessler on December 27, 2018, in Bethesda, Maryland, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you so much for having me here today.

Pamela Fessler: You're welcome.

SI: To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

PF: I was born on June 3, 1953 in Teaneck, New Jersey, which is up in Bergen County, and I was born at Holy Name Hospital in Teaneck. We lived in Hillsdale, New Jersey, which was a few miles away, but Holy Name was the closest hospital, I assume.

SI: What were your parents' names, for the record?

PF: So, my mother was Agnes Markey, and my father was Robert Koenig Fessler. They had lived in Hillsdale--I was born in '53--they had moved to that house in '50. Before that, I'm pretty sure they did live in Teaneck, someplace else in Bergen County. Then, they moved to Hillsdale, which was kind of an up-and-coming or newer bedroom community. Almost everybody worked in Manhattan, and this was when all the new housing developments were being built in Bergen County and Hillsdale was one of the newer ones.

SI: Was it one of those communities where all the houses looked the same?

PF: Pretty much. It wasn't like Levittown. [Editor's Note: Levittown is a term used to describe suburban areas that were established in the 1950s with similar mass-produced homes.]

SI: Yes.

PF: It wasn't one of those, but my neighborhood was all Cape Cods, little Cape Cods. They weren't even building split-level houses yet. They were just your basic Cape Cod house, a teeny little house with a door in the middle and a couple of bedrooms upstairs that everybody has added on to over the years.

SI: Starting with your mother's side of the family, do you know anything about your family history, if there are any immigration stories?

PF: Yes, both of her parents immigrated from Ireland. My grandmother, Elizabeth Bolger, came from Tullamore, and she came when she was about twenty years old. I think that was in 1904. She met my grandfather here in the United States, but he had also come from Ireland--a place called Cootehill. He had come around that same time. I actually don't know as much about him because he died fairly young. I think he died when my mother was about nine or ten, so he died probably in the late '20s, the 1920s. I don't really know much about him, but they were both immigrants from Ireland. They came to New York City, which I assume was where they met. My grandmother, I do know that she came and she moved in with her sister. I actually have it written--I have the Ellis Island thing right here, the boat ...

SI: Oh, the manifest?

PF: The manifest. She came and she lived with her sister in Manhattan. Then, she worked as a cleaning lady. They always said she worked as a cleaning lady for rich people on Fifth Avenue.

SI: Oh, wow. Did you happen to know that grandmother when you were growing up?

PF: She, I did know, yes. She lived until she was, I would say, around seventy-eight years old, and she used to come [visit]. My mother had a sister and a brother, and my grandmother lived with my mother's sister, my aunt, down in Florida, but she would come and stay with us for a couple months at a time. I did know her quite a bit growing up.

SI: Did she share any stories about what her life had been like before?

PF: The life in Ireland?

SI: Yes.

PF: I do know that in Tullamore, the family owned a hotel called the Bolger Hotel, which we actually went to see a few years ago. It was right in downtown Tullamore. I guess her father ran the hotel. It was right in the center of town, and everybody kind of knew what the Bolger Hotel was. They had numerous children--I don't know how many--but they also didn't have much money, which is, I assume, why she came to the United States. I don't know exactly what the reason was that she came to the United States when she was twenty, but I'm assuming it was to look for work. Her sister was already here, so she probably figured there was more opportunity for her in the United States.

My understanding is that the family had initially been in farming near Tullamore or outside Tullamore, and then the Protestants--this is the story of the family--came and took the property. So, the family had to move to the city, Tullamore, which isn't really a city, it was like a little town, and find other work. Initially, my great grandfather was a bootmaker, and then eventually they opened this hotel, which had been their house, and they turned it into a hotel.

I have no idea about the other side, Andrew Markey, who was my grandfather. I know he grew up in this town called Cootehill, which was in Ireland, but it was close to the Northern Ireland line. I don't really know anything about him. We just don't have that much history about him.

My grandparents got married. They had three children--my mother, her sister, who ended up living in Florida, and a brother. Then, my grandfather died fairly young. I believe, but I don't know, it was a heart attack. He was right in his forties. Eventually, my grandmother remarried a man named Dunn, D-U-N-N. He had two children, and they brought the two families together. I remember my mother talking about being very upset because she was a little girl, and my grandmother decided to take half of her toys and give them to the other children just to make them feel welcome and my mother was not very happy about that. I think she still resented that as an adult. [laughter] That marriage did not last, which was highly unusual in those days, which that was probably in the '30s or '40s, and then they separated. My guess is, I'm pretty sure, he

was an alcoholic, and she just left him. My grandmother raised these three children by herself for the most part. It was all in the New York-Northern New Jersey area. They actually lived mostly in Teaneck, New Jersey.

SI: What about your father's side of the family?

PF: That side, my father, I told you, his name was Robert Koenig Fessler. I did know my grandparents. My grandfather, Rudolph Fessler, I don't know anything really about his family, when they came to the United States. On that side, they came from Germany, but it was not that generation. It was the previous generation or two, more in the 1860s, they came from Germany. He worked--this was my grandfather--he worked as what was considered a pharmacist at the time, but he didn't have any degree. You didn't need it at the time, but he worked in a drugstore and put together medication and that was his profession. I know, same thing, all in the New York--Northern New Jersey area, he grew up in. I know he had a sister, who we called Aunt Millie, and she played the piano in bars in the Bowery. That's all I knew about her. [laughter] I met her once. She was kind of a legend.

Then, on the other side, my grandmother, her name was Hilda Koenig. She came from a bigger family, and I'm afraid I don't know how many children there were. She grew up in Manhattan, and she always used to say she grew up in Harlem-on-the-Hudson, because it was this very elite area at the time. Her father was a wagon maker, and he had a big business in Manhattan, in Harlem, where he made wagons. We have old pictures, where it says, "William Koenig Wagons" on the side of some big building, which no longer exists in Manhattan. He actually was doing fairly well. They ultimately moved to New Rochelle and bought a nice house. They were a little bit more well established. Then, my grandmother married my grandfather, who was this alleged pharmacist.

SI: Yes. [laughter] Do you know how your parents met?

PF: Yes.

SI: Okay.

PF: I know exactly how they met. They were both very much involved in social things. This was in Bergen County, and my father, this was in the--let's see, just give me a second and I'll try and remember what year this was. My father was born in 1911, and my mother was born in 1916. When my father was around twenty-one years old, so what year would that have been? '32.

SI: 1932, yes.

PF: 1932. He was very involved in clubs and dances. They used to have a lot of [dances]. Young people would organize these sort of informal dances. They would hire a band, and they were just clubs [with] him and some of his friends. I think a lot of it was done through the church. They grew up--they were both Catholic, very Catholic families, and he had something called the Beau Ideal Club, B-E-A-U Ideal Club. They arranged dances. It was at one of these

dances that my mother came, but she came with somebody else. My father--we have diaries of my father--and he talks about how she came with somebody else. Then, the person my mother came with left and went with somebody else. My mother was there by herself, so my father asked her to dance and I think almost immediately fell in love. That's how they started dating and then he started to ask her out, but she was a lot younger. She was five years younger than him. So, he was--what did I say?

SI: Twenty-one, twenty-two, yes.

PF: He was twenty-one, and so she was only sixteen. They actually didn't get married for another five years because she was so young, but they did date almost that whole time, that five years. He graduated from high school in 1929, the first year of the Great Depression. He worked in Manhattan, but he first worked a lot of odd jobs, like in stores, as a clerk. He commuted by ferry. He lived with his parents in Bogota at the time, and he commuted by ferry in to Manhattan. So, he worked these odd jobs. He talks a lot in his diaries about going back and forth on the ferry into Manhattan. He also talks about how pretty all the girls--he talks a lot about all different [girls], this is even while he was dating my mother. [laughter] He was definitely looking for somebody, because he would write, "Oh, I just saw this beautiful blonde on the boat. She had a pretty red coat on." [laughter] All this time, he was going out with my mother. She was so young--he wanted to marry her almost immediately--but she was so young. She had a job after high school working in Montgomery Ward in New York. He worked, initially, in these stores in odd jobs, and then he ultimately went to work--there was a shipping company called Matson Shipping Lines. Have you ever heard of it? [Editor's Note: Matson Shipping, Inc. was founded in 1882 and is still in operation today.]

SI: Yes.

PF: So, he got his first real job at Matson working as basically a clerk. They were headquartered in California, but they had a Manhattan office, so that's where he worked until 1968. He worked almost--what is that forty?

SI: Yes. Thirty years?

PF: More than that.

SI: Thirty-five?

PF: Probably thirty-five to forty years. One of the things he did, they had a lot of tariffs that they would have to impose on all the shipping products, and so that was his job basically to figure out what the tariffs were that they had to impose on the shippers. So, that's where he worked in Manhattan, and she worked at Montgomery Ward. Then, ultimately, after five years, they decided to get married. We found my father's diaries after he died, and I still remember going through them, just like, "This is amazing," because he wrote all about this time period. He talked about my parents being in a park in Bergen County and they were on a swing talking about their lives together, and he said, "I'm so happy." He said, "Agnes agreed that she'd love to have four children," and I'm the fourth child.

SI: Wow.

PF: So, here I am, reading this in--I don't know what year it was--like 2010, about my parents talking back in 1935 about what they wanted to do, and they're talking about having four children. As I say, I'm the fourth child. It's like, "Wow, good decision." [laughter]

SI: Yes, that is incredible. That is an incredible resource you have.

PF: Oh, the diary, yes, it's amazing.

SI: Yes.

PF: It's amazing.

SI: Wow.

PF: The other interesting thing I found was even though it was the depression, they just had a lot of fun. They had a lot of these dances. They were just very informal in these little groups. They had parties in people's houses, where they would have music and dance, and they also went to the movies all the time, like three, four times a week, it seemed like, not just my father. He went with his parents or he went with my mother or he went with other friends or he just went by himself, and he kept a list of all the movies that he saw in the back of his diary. But they did it a lot, I guess because it was relatively inexpensive. Then, listening to the radio, he talks a lot about. So, this was all in the '30s, but they seemed to stay out late partying. I think that was just the New York life for young people at the time.

SI: Well, it seems like they had a typical experience of people who got married in the Great Depression, where they put off, for at least a little while, having children. I think your oldest sibling was born in 1940.

PF: Right. So, they got married in 1937, yes, so, they did put it off.

SI: Relatively speaking. Today, we would not necessarily say that is putting it off, but for the 1930s, that is probably putting it off.

PF: Yes. The other thing was when they were in New York, everything was getting built up. Matson Shipping Line eventually located in Rockefeller Center in 30 Rock, made famous by the show. [Editor's Note: NBC's headquarters is located in 30 Rockefeller Center in Manhattan. From 2006 to 2013, NBC aired a television series entitled *30 Rock*.]

SI: Yes. [laughter]

PF: My father does talk a lot about that, too, the city just getting built up. It was definitely, for people in Bergen County and Northern New Jersey, everything was focused on Manhattan. Everybody did everything in Manhattan, it seems like.

SI: I am curious, in the diaries, did he talk about them going to big bands, like Benny Goodman and that sort of thing?

PF: No, he did not talk too much about that, but they had bands that they hired for their dances. He didn't talk about the composition of the bands, but I assume some of them were big bands. He stopped the diaries before they got married, but I remember my mother talking about how they used to go to some clubs in Bergen County. Up in Alpine [on Route] 9W, there was a club--I forget what the name of it was--they would go, and they heard Frank Sinatra singing. They heard Ozzie and Harriet Nelson. [Editor's Note: Ozzie Nelson graduated from Rutgers College in 1927 and Rutgers-Newark School of Law in 1930. With a background during his college days of being a musician and band leader, Ozzie Nelson turned to a career in entertainment. He hired Harriet Hilliard as a singer in his band, and they got married in 1934. They starred in the radio show *Ozzie and Harriet Show* and later the television series *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*.]

SI: Oh, yes.

PF: Ozzie Nelson was a band leader, and then she was the singer.

SI: Wow.

PF: So, there were some that they did, and those actually seemed to be more [in] New Jersey. Northern New Jersey seemed to have a lot of music at the time as well.

SI: I would imagine his job at Matson kept him out of the war, along with having kids.

PF: Very good, yes. That's exactly [it], and it was definitely the job, yes, definitely the job. So, what happened was--I don't know if he ever was actually drafted, or he got the--I don't even know what you had at the time.

SI: A deferment?

PF: If he had a deferment.

SI: Essential work.

PF: I know that Matson told the military, "We need this person here," because Matson ships, as you might know, became troopships. They convoyed the troops, especially in the Pacific. Generally, the ships were in the Pacific, but they did come to the Atlantic sometimes. I think they might have brought some troops over to Europe as well, but I think they were also used in the Pacific. So, they needed my father for that, but also he said one of the big things that he did was help with shipping products, like wool. He talked about getting wool from Australia to make the uniforms for the soldiers. So, it was things like that, making sure that they got the bales of wool to the right place. It wasn't just troop deployments; it was for products, too, that they needed for the war effort. So, he did not enlist at all. It's interesting, later on, at one point

in my career, I was doing some reporting on defense stuff, and at the Pentagon, I could see in one of the long hallways, they had a poster for Matson Shipping Lines helping in the war effort. I was like, "Oh, that's my father's." [laughter] [Editor's Note: According to Matson, during World War II, four Matson passenger ships and thirty-five freight ships were called into service by the American government.]

SI: Yes, they are all over the records. I think all of their ships were impressed into service.

PF: Right.

SI: All of Matson's ships became something in the war effort.

PF: Right.

SI: That is incredible. Did your mother continue to work after the family got started?

PF: No. Once they got married, she did not work at all. Then, when they got married, they lived in Manhattan, up near the GW [George Washington] Bridge, up near Riverside Drive. She had my sister, as I say, in 1940, and then my brother came along in 1943. My other brother was not born until '48. By then, they had moved to Jersey, to Northern Jersey, and I think it was Teaneck where they lived, but it could've been Bogota. It was one of those towns. Then, they moved to Hillsdale, where I was born.

SI: Well, picking up there, what are some of your earliest memories of Hillsdale? Can you describe physically the neighborhood, but also what was it like in terms of the people there?

PF: As I said before, it was mostly pretty modest Cape Cod houses. It was one of the newer bedroom communities. Although Hillsdale and Westwood had been around for probably a good hundred years as towns, there was a lot of new construction. When my parents moved there, it was a brand new house in 1950. As far as I can remember, almost everybody's father worked in New York. Maybe there were some other places, but it seemed most people commuted into New York City from there. The little downtown, it was a relatively small town. I think the population was generally around seven thousand, eight thousand, my recollection when I was growing up. I would describe it as somewhere between upper blue collar, lower white collar. It's not like many people were executives in companies. They worked lower-level, white-collar jobs, for the most part. Then, there were blue collar, like one of my friends' parents, he was a truck driver. Some worked in factories. My father worked for Matson. I'm trying to think where other people's fathers [worked]. Mothers did not work. I honestly did not know anybody whose mother worked. This was all in the '50s. I would say most people were one or two generation, second-generation Americans. Almost everybody's grandparents came from Europe, a lot of Irish, German, Italian, Polish. I'd say those were the main ones. German and Irish--were the main ones. The town was probably fifty percent Catholic. There was a Catholic school, elementary school. There were two public elementary schools and, as I say, the Catholic elementary school. As you know, and it's pretty much the case in all of New Jersey, it's kind of strange, that the county, Bergen County, had seventy towns and seventy …

SI: Schools, yes.

PF: Governments, seventy discreet governments. They had seventy town councils, seventy mayors, seventy school systems, seventy fire departments, seventy police forces, seventh library systems. In a way, it was actually kind of nice, because everybody knew everybody. One of my parents' friends in the parish was the mayor for a while. The town doctor was the school doctor, who lived down the street from the school.

It was actually a quiet, nice place to grow up and very safe. As a little kid, there were just kids everywhere. I would go out in the morning after breakfast, and I might come back for lunch. Then, I'd go out again, and I'd come back before dinner. My mother, really, I don't think they really knew exactly where we were. We were just out playing, and they didn't really worry about it. I think part of it was I was the fourth child. There were other older kids around, but we just played all the time and just were kind of out on our own.

It was very racially un-diverse. I think there were no African American families when I was growing up in Hillsdale. I went to the Catholic schools. We were very involved in the Catholic Church. Our whole life revolved around the parish. But I remember at one point--I can't tell you what years this was, maybe early '60s--a black family bought a house in Hillsdale, and some people in town started a petition to block them from moving there. I remember my mother being furious, and she said there were some people in the parish who had signed the petition and she couldn't believe it. Honestly, growing up, that was my only recollection of any black families moving into Hillsdale. When I think about it, it's just sort of amazing. I mean, I think growing up, I sometimes think about this, I did not even know or talk to a black person, except one of my mother's friends had a woman who came to clean her house who was black and lived in Westwood, the next town over, and she's the only person I ever talked to.

SI: Wow.

PF: Yes, isn't it amazing?

SI: Yes.

PF: It just astounds me when I think about it. Of course, when I also look back at it, there was a small black community in Westwood, which was the next town, and all those houses were together and they were on a road called Sand Road. The reason it was called Sand Road was because it was a sand road; it was not paved. It was one of the only roads that was not paved in the area.

SI: Wow.

PF: It's where the African American families lived. It's just astounding. I'd be interested to go back and see if that's still the case.

SI: No, I think it is diversified, fortunately.

PF: A little bit more, yes.

SI: But that is not an unusual story for that area.

PF: Oh, yes, and the times. It was not until, even my high, well, we can get …

SI: You can jump ahead, yes.

PF: I can jump ahead to high school, so I ended up going to Immaculate Heart Academy, which is the girls' Catholic school in Woodcliff Lake, so it was for the whole county. It was one of a couple, I think there were three all-girls Catholic high schools in Bergen County. That was one of them. [There were] still no African Americans in that school. It wasn't until I went to Douglass that I was in classes and lived and had friends who were black. It's really quite astonishing. Now, in Immaculate Heart Academy, we did have a few Latino families, but they were mostly Cuban refugees.

SI: I was just going to ask about that.

PF: Yes.

SI: Because I have done some interviews in Teaneck, where it became an issue. They were helping people resettle who were refugees after Fidel Castro took over in 1959.

PF: Yes.

SI: It became apparent that they were trying to settle them all in one place, segregating them like they had the African Americans here.

PF: Oh, really?

SI: But I was just curious if there was a noticeable influx of Cubans or more generally Latino folks.

PF: No, I wouldn't say an influx. There were just a few families.

SI: Okay.

PF: I didn't get any sense that--and I'm trying to remember if any of those families lived in Hillsdale or if I just knew them from high school, which, as I say, drew students from all around the county. I think I actually did. Well, there might have been one or two who lived in Hillsdale.

SI: Do you remember seeing any at your church?

PF: I'm trying to remember.

SI: Usually, a church was involved in resettling folks.

PF: No, I don't think our church was really that involved in that. We were a little bit more up-county, so I think a lot of the Cuban families settled a little bit more around West New York when they first came, that area, a little bit more Jersey City. You probably know that better than I do. As I say, I know in high school, I had a couple of friends who were from Cuba, that the families were from Cuba.

Just one other thing that reminds me of growing up, and I was saying how none of the mothers worked, I do remember so clearly that there was one girl in my elementary school who was being raised by a single mother. I don't know what happened to the father, whether he died or they were divorced, but it was so highly unusual. She was the only [one], and we, as children, can be very mean sometimes, especially girls. We just talked about it all the time, about how horrible it was that she just had a [single mother]. I do remember she didn't have a telephone, and none of us could believe that you could live in a house without a telephone. The poor mother was probably struggling financially, trying to raise this family by herself. I remember it being highly unusual, because everybody I knew had your typical nuclear family, mom, dad, the kids. Dad worked; mom stayed at home. Mom worked in the school or in the church volunteering. It was those times when, I wouldn't call them secrets, but nobody ever talked about it. It seemed like nothing was out of the ordinary in any family arrangement. I'm sure there was plenty of stuff going on, but we didn't know about it.

SI: Everyone wants to present a certain image.

PF: Perfect nuclear families.

SI: Wow. It sounds like the church played a role in your life growing up.

PF: Oh, very big. I went to, as did my brother Mark, who is five years older than me, we both went to the Catholic elementary school in Hillsdale, St. John the Baptist Elementary School. He then went to St. Joseph's, which was the all-boys Catholic high school in the county, and I went to Immaculate Heart Academy, the all-girls. Now, my older sister and brother, they went to the public schools, but I think it's because the Catholic school hadn't been built yet.

My father was an usher at mass at the church, and every Sunday, that was his job. He was the head usher. He helped with the mass a lot. My mother was involved in the Rosary Altar Society. All their friends were from the church, I mean, everybody; their whole social life revolved around people that they knew from the church and from the school. They had this bridge group. They played bridge with their friends every week. Everything they did revolved around people who were in the Catholic Church. My mother, growing up, I told you, that her mother essentially had to raise these three children by herself. They lived right next door, in Teaneck, to a church and a convent. My mother talked about how the nuns helped raise her, because when her mother was busy, the nuns would help. My mother was just very religious.

SI: What about your education at the Catholic schools? What did you think of the early education you got? Are there any memories stand out?

PF: I thought it was good at the time, but I didn't know any better. [laughter] We were separated. In the elementary school, they split us, so that the girls had the nuns and the boys had brothers. There was this dividing line. It was all one building, but we couldn't cross the line to the boys' side. Even at recess, we weren't allowed to intermingle. [laughter] I think it was okay. In looking back, I don't think we got very good education in science and math. I think reading, we got a lot of good education. Geography, history, it was probably as good as most places. The nuns were kind of overwhelmed. Some of our classes were huge, because, as you know, in the '50s, there was a baby boom.

SI: Yes, the baby boom.

PF: I remember, I think it was my second-grade class, there were seventy kids in that class.

SI: Wow.

PF: One nun with seventy second graders.

SI: Wow.

PF: Can you imagine?

SI: Wow. I have heard fifty. I have not heard seventy.

PF: Just her having to keep order, although we were all, quite frankly, probably pretty well behaved, because we didn't know we couldn't be. [laughter] I've been blessed to be fairly smart. My family read a lot, and I just read a lot. So, I feel like a lot of it, I got myself. I kind of educated myself. What education I got in the elementary school was probably more social, learning how to be with people.

SI: You went to Immaculate Academy.

PF: Immaculate Heart Academy.

SI: Immaculate Heart Academy.

PF: Yes.

SI: You entered there in '67, right?

PF: Yes, '67 to '71.

SI: Yes.

PF: I graduated in '71. There, I must admit, I got an excellent education. You had to apply to get in, so it was somewhat selective. They could always take the top five or ten girls from each

class--the students mostly came from Catholic elementary schools in the country--so I went with maybe about eight other girls from my elementary school, but they picked the ones who were the best academically. Already you were starting with a good student body, people who were interested in learning. I think the teachers were also better. I had some really excellent teachers there. They were pretty good in the sciences and humanities. Because of the time, this was '67 to '71, there was so much social turmoil going on. Even though it was a Catholic school mostly run by nuns, these nuns were very progressive. We talked a lot about social issues and the Vietnam War. Some of the girls in our school were very active in protesting the war, and some of them linked up with the Berrigan Brothers. [Editor's Note: Philip and Daniel Berrigan, who were brothers, Roman Catholic priests and peace activists, gained notoriety for anti-Vietnam War protests during the 1960s.]

SI: Wow.

PF: It was a very progressive Catholic community.

SI: Yes, that is something I definitely want to talk about because sometimes in interviewing folks who went to religious schools, it was almost like you were in a bubble.

PF: Right.

SI: But it sounds like they were at least discussing these things. Looking at that period, from when you are in elementary school up through high school, you kind of start with President John F. Kennedy, and for Catholics in this area, in Northern Jersey ...

PF: Right, right.

SI: … That was particularly important. Do you remember that? Do you have any memories of the Kennedy campaign or those years?

PF: I remember my parents being very excited that a Catholic was going to be President of the United States and were big supporters of his, so I remember that. Then, of course, I remember his assassination very clearly. I don't know if you want to hear about that. [Editor's Note: President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963 in Dallas, Texas.]

SI: Sure.

PF: I was in the fifth grade, and I just remember the teacher--that was just when they started having TVs in classrooms because we watched the local public television station to learn French. All of a sudden, a teacher came in and said that Kennedy had been assassinated. We turned on the television to watch it. I just remember all of us being shocked, but one girl started crying hysterically. I remember thinking, "Why is she crying so much?" We were younger, so the import of a presidential assassination didn't sink in as much to us, but it clearly did to her. She was a little more mature than the rest of us. Then, of course, I remember coming home and my mother being so upset, and then we just watched TV non-stop. I feel like I watched TV from then until like 1968 or '70. [laughter] I think I got a lot of education. So much happened in those

years right there on television. Then, you had Lee Harvey Oswald, you watched him be arrested, and I remember sitting there watching TV and seeing Jack Ruby shoot him, while we were watching, and just like, "Oh, my God, what's happening to our world?" It was my mother and I; we just watched television all the time, as I say, it seems like from then on, because there just was so much going on and you're just seeing this world outside of my sort of perfect little town, where everything was so nice and orderly, start to unravel.

SI: Stepping back a little bit, do you have any memories of the period of the Cuban Missile Crisis?

PF: No, I actually don't really remember that very well; I guess sort of in the back, a little bit, of my mind. I don't remember, whereas my husband, Matt--we're almost identical ages--has a much clearer memory of realizing what a serious thing was going on. I don't remember that at all. I do remember having all of our drills, the bomb, having to practice going down into the basement of the school and hiding under the desks, which I think we did mostly in first and second grades. Quite frankly, at the time, I kind of thought it was more fun than scary. I do remember that we were in the flight path of planes coming into the New York area airports. It probably would've been Kennedy more than LaGuardia, but some of them could have been Newark, too. I remember, as a little kid, lying in bed, and every time I would hear a plane come over my house, I would hold my breath until it passed, because I thought it was a plane coming to bomb us, that it might be a plane coming to drop a bomb, a nuclear bomb.

SI: Wow.

PF: For years, a plane would come, and I would hear it, "Rrrrr." You know how the sound changes once it's past you, and then I'd be like, "Okay."

SI: Wow. It sounds like a stressful way to grow up. [laughter]

PF: Yes, you know how it is when you're a little kid. This is just the way things are. I do remember that I kind of held my breath every time a plane went over, because I thought, "Oh, maybe this is the one that's going to drop a bomb."

SI: You kind of described the high school education. At that point, what were you thinking about in terms of going on to college, what you might do for a career? What were your aspirations at that point?

PF: Well, actually, we have to go back way before high school.

SI: Okay.

PF: I always thought I would go to college. My sister went to a two-year college, but she was a little older and then she got married. Both my brothers went to college, and I took it for granted that I was going to go to college. I don't remember ever specifically talking about it with my parents, but I always felt like my parents wanted me to go to college. Neither of my parents went to college, and I always felt that they wanted us to go to college to be able to do something

that they were not able to do. As I say, I don't remember actually talking about it, but it was just inside me that I knew.

Now, when I was younger, in elementary school, television was such a big part of my life and reading, and I would find characters that I found really exciting because I thought my life was basically pretty boring. I was really interested in--I read *Nancy Drew* books--I was interested in Superman and things like detectives and FBI agents and Lois Lane and journalism. There was a cartoon at the time called Brenda Starr, and she was a journalist. I thought, "Oh, I want to be one of those because that seems so much more exciting. I want to be a detective like Nancy Drew or I want to be a reporter like Lois Lane or Jimmy Olsen." I always wanted to do that.

I started doing newspapers when I was in third grade. My friends and I, we started a neighborhood newspaper, and I had little columns. We had crossword puzzles, and we tried to sell it around the neighborhood. My father, when he had all these clubs, like the Beau Ideal Club, he always had a little newspaper that he put out. He used to love to write, and I think that's where I got it from. In third grade, I started a newspaper. Then, I had a family newspaper when my brothers went off to college. I forget what the name of it was, but I had it. I would print all the family news. I just always wanted to write and be a newspaper reporter. When I was in eighth grade, I was the editor of the school newspaper. Then, when I went to Immaculate Heart Academy, the first thing I did was join the school newspaper.

I really wanted to be a reporter, but I thought that was just kind of a fantasy. When I went to high school, at first I thought that everybody became a teacher. That's what girls became, teachers or nurses. That's all you did. You worked as a teacher, or you were a nurse. I remember sometime around sophomore or junior year, it dawned on me that I didn't have to be either of those; I could be a journalist. It must have been '68-'69 and things were changing. All of a sudden, I could see that there were women journalists out there, not many, but there were, like Barbara Walters. At the time, I'm trying to think of who was even out there. I remember, thinking, all of a sudden, "Wow, I could actually do that if I wanted to." Basically, from then on, that's what I wanted to do is be a journalist. I always wanted to be it, but I didn't really think I could until the late '60s. [Editor's Note: Journalist Barbara Walters (born 1929) started working for NBC in 1961 as a researcher and writer and in 1964 became a co-host on the *Today* show, though NBC did not give Walters the title host until 1974.]

I think about that, just how important it is to have role models. I was, in many ways, very fortunate, because I was just becoming an adult at the time when they were hiring women and looking for women to become journalists or work in a lot of these careers. I also wanted to be an FBI agent for a while, but I was told women couldn't be FBI agents.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: We were talking about how you developed your interest in journalism, that you were there at that key period where women were not just being funneled in these three professions of nurse, teacher or some kind of secretarial position.

PF: Although they were still, yes ...

SI: Yes.

PF: … For the most part. It was the first time that there was a little sense that there was an opportunity to do something besides that. The thing that attracted me to journalism, there were a couple things, one is I just always loved to write and also I was very curious about things. I also was, this may seem contradictory, but I was extremely shy. I felt like being a reporter gave me an opportunity to ask people questions under the guise of being a [journalist], that I'm doing it because it's my job, and so that gave me the confidence to do it. I wouldn't naturally go up to a stranger and start asking them all about their lives and what they did and what they thought. For me, I was kind of almost hiding behind the pen and the pencil, taking notes.

SI: Wow.

PF: It also seemed like this would be an exciting thing to do and I would get to see and talk to people that I might never have a chance to see and talk to, otherwise. That's the thing that attracted me to it. Even as a little kid, I just really liked telling stories, and, as I say, talking to people and listening, sort of what you're doing right now. [laughter]

SI: Absolutely. I am curious, you said the nuns were very progressive in terms of what they would discuss, but were they part of that structure that was kind of shuttling women into certain professions?

PF: No. Well, in the elementary school, they were pretty conservative, but in the high school, no. We didn't have all nuns. It was some nuns and also a lot of lay teachers. They were among those who were encouraging us, and because it was an all-girls Catholic school that was pretty high up academically, these were just the kind of young women that were being encouraged to seek different kinds of work opportunities. We were all encouraged to apply to college. I think ninety-nine percent of my graduating class went to college. We were very much, as I say, encouraged to explore things, and because it was an all-girls school, girls ran the newspaper. Girls ran the student government. We had a basketball team. We had a hockey team. We had a tennis team. It was actually very progressive, at the time. A lot of the nuns actually, while I was there, left the sisterhood, and half of them married priests who had left. There were a lot of people, at the time, religious people, who were leaving the sisterhood or the priesthood, because there was so much revolution going on and people just kind of rethinking their role in the world. People participated in protests, anti-war protests. No, I definitely felt like there was a lot of encouragement to seek out what kind of opportunities were out there.

SI: Did you ever go to any kind of protest or engage in any kind of activism?

PF: In high school, I did not. I actually did not. My brother, at the time, was down here in Washington. He was a student at Catholic University, and of course there were so many protests down in Washington that he participated in. I kind of felt that he was participating in them for the family in some bizarre way, because that's where all the protests were. Of course, there were all the riots. There was just so much going on at the time. There was so much turmoil and just kind of rethinking what's going on in the country. I grew up in this town where besides the

woman who worked for my mother's friend cleaning her house, I don't think I ever talked to a black person in my life. Then, we had all this upheaval in all these cities, these urban centers around the country, Newark burning, Paterson burning, just in my immediate area. It just made me think, "What's going on? Why is this happening?" I think I grew up in a family that was very empathetic, that believed this was not right, that there was something wrong that people should be living in such poverty.

I do remember, if we can go back another little bit, I do remember my aunt lived in Florida, I told you, and we would drive. That was one of the few vacations we would ever take. We would get in the car, and we would drive all the way down from Northern New Jersey to Jacksonville. I remember clearly stopping in, it was probably South Carolina or Georgia, and going to the bathroom, and it was the very first time I saw that there were two water fountains. There was a nice clean one, and then there was a dirty old rusty one that said, "For Coloreds" over it, and I could just not believe it. That was probably early '60s or maybe around 1960. I remember it was such a shock to me, that, "Why was this? Why did this even exist?" In many ways, I lived in a little bit of a bubble. Obviously, all the riots in the '60s and then the assassination of Martin Luther King, I think we just all became much more conscious and aware that there were some very serious divides in this country that were wrong. That was definitely the attitude of my family and my school and the Catholic church that I grew up in was that this was wrong. This was all bad. Even as segregated as we were, that this was not a good thing, that this was something that needed to change, which I'm very glad about. [Editor's Note: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee by James Earl Ray.]

SI: How did you decide to go to Douglass College?

PF: At my high school, even though we were all encouraged to go seek out other things, not just be channeled into being teachers and nurses, there was kind of a bias towards going to the State University. Most people didn't have much money. Douglass was considered a really good school. We had very little money. It just seemed like a good deal. The tuition at the time, this will probably shock you, I think it was 135 dollars a semester for your entire tuition, for all your classes, 135 dollars.

SI: Wow.

PF: Is that amazing?

SI: Yes.

PF: Maybe 235. It was unbelievable. It was such a good education. I knew people's older sisters had gone there and liked it. So, I applied to a couple of other schools. I think I applied to the University of Connecticut. Douglass was just considered a good deal, and also Rutgers at the time had a journalism [program]. When I was applying, I was looking for journalism majors. They had one, although right before I arrived, they changed it to a communications department, which was not what I wanted. I ended up being an American Studies major. Then, of course,

when I got to Douglass, the first thing I did was join the newspaper, because that was the thing that I was most interested in--journalism.

SI: Well, before we get into Douglass, were there any more activities you were involved in besides newspaper and journalism-type activities?

PF: I was on the student council, like a class president. I did not do any sports. At that time, girls in sports [were] very limited. As I say, we had a basketball team. There was a girls basketball team with girl cheerleaders. There was a field hockey team and then tennis, but I just was not very athletic. I get the alumni magazine now, and it's just filled with sports. They win all these state championships; the hallways are filled with trophies. I took piano lessons. I played the piano. I didn't really do much. I was pretty shy, again, so I wasn't in a lot of activities.

SI: Did you do part-time work or summer work?

PF: Oh, yes, I worked. I did a lot of work [as] a camp counselor but not sleep-away camp. We had a lot of local camps. The town would have a camp. There were a couple of pool clubs in the area, and they would have little camps for the kids and they would hire counselors. So, I, basically, probably from about seventh grade on, worked in the summertime as a counselor. As I say, we didn't have much money, so any money I had was money that I earned myself in these jobs. Also, in high school, during the year, maybe junior year, senior year, I worked in a drug store in Westwood a few hours after school selling things and cleaning. I guess it wasn't until college I actually started doing some reporting jobs. The other thing I did was my brother was a newspaper delivery boy, and he had this very long route. Girls could not deliver the newspaper, but he subcontracted out part of his route to me. So, he paid me a dollar a week to deliver all these newspapers. I illegally delivered *The Bergen Record*, which I told them when they hired me to be a reporter there. I don't know why they didn't let girls deliver the newspaper, but they didn't. Then, I can talk about what kind of work I did in college.

SI: Yes, we will get to that in a second.

PF: Yes.

SI: Why don't you talk about what your first few days and weeks were like at Douglass, acclimating yourself to the freedoms of college, that sort of thing?

PF: [laughter] Actually, it was fantastic, because I did come from a fairly conservative Catholic family and I didn't do anything wrong. I didn't do anything wild. My parents, I wouldn't call them strict, but I told you my life was kind of boring. I thought my life was very boring, because nothing interesting ever happened, it seemed like. I was very shy. I do remember going off to college. My mother drove me with a friend of hers and left me off. I remember we had, you know how they have that reception at the dean's house, this was at Rutgers, that very first day for all the new freshmen? I went there and I met a guy on line, and he asked me to come to a party that night that they were having at the dorm, something I never would have done before--go off with a stranger like that. I thought, "Okay, this is it. I either go and become a new person and

have a great time, or I continue to be the good little girl and obey all the rules and everything." [laughter] This is going to make me sound more wild than I am. I just said, "Yes, I'll be there." I started meeting lots of people and having friends, and it was great. I felt like I almost instantaneously became a different person, that I could just kind of explore new people and it was great. It was basically exactly what college was supposed to be, a place where you could blossom and find out what you were actually really interested in, who you were as a person. I came from this kind of restrictive Catholic upbringing, and honestly, it was like that day I became a different person.

SI: Wow.

PF: I just became less shy. I said, "I am not going to be shy anymore. I am just going to be myself." Thank you, Douglass. [laughter]

SI: Yes.

PF: Or Rutgers.

SI: Where did you live initially?

PF: I lived in the Katzenbach dorm the first year. You know which one? That's one of those bigger ones. Then, the second year, I lived in Corwin R. Everybody probably remembers which Corwin they were in. Every single one of those houses had a letter, so it was Corwin A, B, C, D, E. They were just little houses on the Douglass campus, and they were great. They had maybe eight or nine girls to share a house. It was probably more like ten or twelve, but it was great. It was a nice little homie feeling, but you were still on campus. Then, my junior year, I moved with some friends to an apartment over closer to the Rutgers campus on Easton Avenue, which is actually where I met my husband, who was a Rutgers student taking a class at Douglass. It was an early morning class, "Constitutional Law," at Hickman Hall, and we sat next to each other. He mentioned where he lived, and I said, "I live right behind you." He said, "I can give you a ride to class every morning," because it was eight o'clock, or every week. That's how we met. I'd go over to his fraternity at eight o'clock in the morning, and he'd drive me over to class.

SI: I am curious, do you remember who taught the class?

PF: His name was Lindowski.

SI: Oh, okay.

PF: Matt would know his first name. He was actually a law professor from, I think, NYU [New York University], who came to Douglass to teach this class. I think he only taught that one class, "Constitutional Law," but maybe he taught a couple of other ones. So, we took this "Constitutional Law" class. I always like to make the point that I got an "A" in the class and my husband got a "B," but we don't need to mention that. [laughter] At the time, I was the managing editor of the college newspaper, the *Caellian*. The night before the class, we stayed up all night long and didn't get home until two or three or four in the morning, because we had to put the

paper to bed. When Matt was driving me to those classes at eight in the morning, I was usually half asleep. Then, he started, with a couple of his friends, to come and help us with the paper. Every Wednesday, they'd come over with pizza and beer at midnight and help write headlines for the *Caellian*. [Editor's Note: The *Caellian* was the Douglass College student newspaper.]

SI: A lot of the women I have interviewed were there just a couple years before you. They talk about how it was still not quite *in loco parentis* but still a good deal of listening to the older women who were appointed house managers or whatever. Was there any of that kind of oversight or traditionalism that they were trying to instill?

PF: No, I think really all that stuff rapidly fell by the wayside those years. I think freshman year, we had an older woman student, like a junior or senior, who lived on our floor, whose job was to kind of keep an eye on us. I know men were not allowed to come into the dorm. I think they couldn't come up into your room. I may be wrong about that, but most of the rules were gone. By sophomore year, they were all gone. All those rules were gone. I just don't remember any of them. It was just the times. There were no rules. [laughter] I mean, basically there were no rules. This woman who was our hall monitor, she didn't care what we did. I think it was that big difference between 1968 and I was there in '71, just so much had changed in those few years.

Now, Douglass still had traditions such as the yule log. It very much was trying to maintain that identity as an all-women's college, but it had kind of shifted to more all women as in feminism and women's rights and women can be in charge of things or women can achieve whatever they want, which was great. Actually, I thought that was great. I eventually became editor of the college newspaper, which I would not have been if I had gone to Rutgers. I would not have been editor of the college paper, because at the time the men still ran most things, even though the college had gone coed. I think our freshman year is the year when it actually went coed. I never would have had the opportunities that I had at Douglass, and that's what basically gave me my career. Being editor of the college newspaper got me my very first job in journalism, professional journalism. [Editor's Note: Rutgers College, founded in 1766 as a men's college, admitted women for the first time in 1972.]

SI: Wow.

PF: Yes.

SI: Well, let's concentrate on the *Caellian* for a little bit.

PF: Yes.

SI: How did you get involved? Was it just that you go over and say you want to write?

PF: Yes. Freshman year, I immediately sought it out. I went over to their offices, which were in what was the equivalent of the student union. I can't remember exactly what they called the building, but there were offices upstairs. I remember the editor was a woman named Marie Ciari. I went over there, and actually one of my best friends went over at the same time. She and I are still best friends, we see each other all the time, fifty years later, or not fifty, close to it,

forty-five years later. I started getting assignments to write stories, and then I quickly, I think, I became the layout editor. Then, I became the managing editor. Then the last year--that was kind of interesting; I was the managing editor--and then my senior year, I was in line to become the editor. I was also minoring in Russian. At the time, I was kind of intrigued, so I took Russian language and Russian literature and that was my minor. It was at the time when learning Russian was really seen as--it's sort of like learning Arabic now--it's considered a good thing for jobs and stuff.

SI: Sure.

PF: It was just very interesting to me, and I had to decide whether I wanted to be editor of the college paper or go live in the Russia House and pursue Russian and actually spend my junior year in Moscow. I really wanted to do that so badly, but I also wanted to be editor of the college paper. Honestly, I had to decide which way to go, and I finally decided to be the editor of the paper. I'm not sure which was the smartest thing, ultimately.

SI: Well, they both sound like incredible opportunities.

PF: Oh, yes. It was great. To me, it was so exotic, the idea that I could go to Russia and spend a semester in Moscow. It's just amazing. Anyway, I decided to be the editor. While I was in college, in the summertime, I had several jobs. I worked in a nursing home as an aide, but I had another job at night working for the Pascack Valley newspaper. It was a community newspaper, with stories about town council meetings, Board of Education meetings, they had some local news. Kids would file stories about school sporting events.

I got a job there between my sophomore and junior years covering local town council meetings, which was great. It was my very first job as a paid journalist, and it was quite an education. I remember going to my very first town council meeting, and it was in Hillsdale. There was a reporter there from *The Bergen Record*, which was the county newspaper, and he seemed so mature and self-assured. All I remember is he was asking the head of the town council some questions and really pressing him on stuff. They almost got into a fight, like the councilman didn't want to give him the information, and the reporter was just kind of badgering him. I was like, "Oh, my God, I could never do this," because I was too shy. There was another woman journalist there for one of the other local community papers, and I turned to her and I said, "I don't know if I could ever be like that." She said, "Honey, I find in this job, sometimes you get more with honey than vinegar." She said, "You just go up and talk to people and just be nice and listen to them, and you'll get a lot more information than badgering them [like] this guy's doing." I don't know how true it is, but it actually was a good lesson for me at that time.

SI: Sure.

PF: I still remember that. [laughter]

SI: When you were writing for the *Caellian*, what stories were you covering? Were you covering things at the college?

PF: Yes, we covered mostly things at the college, but we did some stories about political things that were going on in the country, with Nixon and the war, figures from New Jersey. I remember we did a bunch of stories about Paul Robeson, who had been a Rutgers [student], and some of the women who had graduated from Douglass years and years ago, who, now that this was sort of an age of feminism, like, "Oh, some of them did some amazing things." We did do that. It mostly was what was going on on campus, but we did branch out. I do remember, at one point, we did an editorial. There was a very contentious race for mayor of New Brunswick. We endorsed one of the candidates. We weren't supposed to do that as a student newspaper, but the professor who was supposed to be overseeing us didn't see the editorial in advance. We published it, and he got in a lot of trouble because it already was published. We endorsed some crazy [candidate]. I can't even remember who we endorsed. I don't know if he was left wing. He was just kind of out there, a gadfly mayoral candidate. We were going to fight it to the Supreme Court, our right to print whatever we wanted, but it never came to that. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Paul Robeson (1898-1976) graduated from Rutgers College in the Class of 1919. Robeson became an actor, singer and political activist.]

SI: Who was the faculty advisor?

PF: He was wonderful. Woolfolk, Professor Woolfolk, he was the deputy dean or the assistant dean. He was one of the deans, but he was in charge of--what do you call it?--not a sponsor.

SI: Liaison, something like that?

PF: Yes, he was basically in charge. We reported to him.

SI: The *Caellian* was not independent at that time.

PF: No, it was definitely all funded by Douglass College. It was the Douglass College newspaper. We were supposed to basically run stuff by him, and quite frankly, I think he trusted us. [laughter] Maybe he shouldn't have this particular time. We had no idea we weren't supposed to endorse somebody. It just never occurred to me.

SI: Particularly when you were the editor, did you have a lot of contact with the administration both at Douglass and Rutgers?

PF: Not at Rutgers, but definitely Douglass. We would interview the dean all the time, and then this deputy or assistant dean, we spent a lot of time talking. Of course, Douglass College had its own student government, so we spent a lot of time talking to them. I'm trying to think of what we did. We did have some interaction with the *Targum* people, because sometimes we'd cover the same stories. We were a weekly. *Targum* was a daily, so we tended to be a little bit more feature-y. We would do more features.

SI: I would imagine that civil rights issues were somewhat frequent. Do you remember any of those stories coming up?

PF: Honestly, I can't remember too much. There was a lot of activity among the black students at the time just wanting to get more recognition for clubs and activities. It was probably focused more on that than civil rights outside of the college.

SI: That is what I meant, like more local issues.

PF: Right.

SI: I do not think it was in your era, but there were protests at Cooper Dining Hall, that sort of thing.

PF: Yes. I'm trying to remember, and I don't remember those when I was there.

SI: Okay.

PF: I do not remember those while I was there. Do you think it was after?

SI: It was probably earlier, in 1969. I think there was an African American house that was created.

PF: Yes, and I think that was before me. A major was created right when we came, which I think had been a demand of some of the students. Rutgers, my freshman year and onward, had made quite an effort, I think, to recruit a lot more or accept a lot more African American students. I think the African American student population rose pretty dramatically in those years. Then, there was also Livingston College opened, I think, at that time, and that actually attracted a lot of African American students. The whole campus population was becoming pretty diverse, right around that time, like '70-'71.

SI: Yes, I know that Livingston had a number of student papers. There were alternative papers in New Brunswick.

PF: Right.

SI: Was there any interaction between the papers or staffs?

PF: No, not really, no. If we had it, it was with the *Targum*. Any kind of interaction was with the *Targum*, partly because we shared the same facilities to print it, so we would have to go over there. I can't remember where we did it, but I remember to actually get the printing done, we used the same facility that they did, so we had to coordinate. We just knew the editors and the people who worked on the paper. We, of course, thought we were superior. [laughter] They thought they were superior.

SI: At that time, could Douglass women write for the *Targum*?

PF: Oh, yes.

SI: Okay.

PF: Yes, they could, yes. '71 [1972] was the year when Rutgers just started accepting women. Then, there were women who were starting to work on the *Targum* that went to Rutgers as well, but there was so much going back and forth. The classes, people just took classes in both places. Then, obviously, socially, there was a lot of intermingling between those two schools, at least between Rutgers and Douglass. It was a little bit different with Livingston, and--what was the Ag School?

SI: Cook.

PF: Cook, yes, right. Both of them were a little bit more isolated, at least in my circles.

SI: What about your major or minor? Are there any classes or professors that stand out in your memory?

PF: American Studies, I was in American Studies. It was a pretty small department, and it was relatively new, the whole concept of American Studies. I had a wonderful professor. Her name was Linda Brown. She was very much into urban policy, which I was also very interested in. I think a lot of it resulted from all the riots in the late '60s. I just was intrigued by it. I remember she took us on field trips into New York, and we spent a whole day going to Staten Island, the big garbage dumps there [Fresh Kills Landfill], the biggest one, I think, in the country. We spent a whole day there, at the garbage dump, and just talked about the creation of garbage and what happens to it and how cities deal with it. We got a tour. I thought this was great. So, she was great.

Then, we had Angus Gillespie and Michael Rockland, who were doing a lot of great stuff on New Jersey history and folklore. It actually turned out to be a pretty good department. It was very open. I mean, you could almost do anything in it. American Studies was so broad. Quite frankly, I took it because I was interested in everything, so I didn't want to get tied down into one particular area. I knew I wanted to be a journalist, so I felt, "Oh, well, this will be interesting because I can learn about anything I want to." It actually turned out to be good. Then, I could also do the Russian. Quite frankly, academically, it wasn't very rigorous. I took a little economics and, as I say, Russian. I took some science courses. My main focus by far was the student newspaper. I spent a lot of time working on that, especially when I was managing editor and editor. It was almost like a full-time job.

SI: What are some of the challenges you faced in those jobs?

PF: Well, it was just meeting deadlines, coming up with enough story ideas, editing them to make sure that they read well, and you're working with a group of basically volunteers. Some people would say they would do something and then just wouldn't do it and then you'd be stuck. It was a really good experience learning how to manage people and how to inspire them to do the job and also realizing that some people are really good, some people aren't so good, and you just have to work with that. We also had to deal with the administration of the University. We also had to sell ads. We raised money by selling ads, so we had the business side of it. We had a

budget, had to learn how to live within that budget. So, it was a great experience. It was a really good experience, but a lot of it was the managing people side, which I liked.

SI: Do you have any memories or impressions of the dean? That was Margery Somers Foster.

PF: Yes, I have memories of her. I'm trying to think of what stands out. She was definitely more the old school. She had already been there for quite a while I think, by the time we got [there]. I'm trying to remember. The administration of Douglass really emphasized the idea that women were strong and women could do what they wanted to do, very much. Even though Douglass had been around since the 1920s, it very much fit with what was going on in the country in the early 1970s. It was kind of the time, I guess it was a time of women, because a lot of people knew it was just the time when companies were starting to think, "Oh, we really should hire a woman. We should have a woman on our staff." I benefitted from that when it came time for me to apply for journalism jobs. I believe I benefitted from that. The college administration was very supportive of that idea, that this is a women's university. We are here to try and help turn out accomplished, confident, capable women, which was great. I'm not sure, quite frankly, that I would had gotten that in a coed school. For me, somebody who had only gone to all-girls schools, I actually think it was a very good thing for me to do that, actually. Having been very shy, it just worked out well for me personally. [Editor's Note: Margery Somers Foster served as Dean of Douglass College from 1967 to 1975.]

SI: I am trying to think if there are any more Douglass-related questions. Do you have any other memories of Douglass that stand out in your memory, before we move on to your first job?

PF: Let me just think. You can have some raisin bread if you want. Help yourself.

SI: Okay, thank you.

PF: This is my grandmother's recipe from Ireland, the one from Tullamore, Ireland.

SI: Oh, yes.

PF: Right from the peasant. [laughter] Let me think; I'm trying to think more about Douglass.

SI: It is very good.

PF: The only other thing was that between my junior and senior year, I applied for an internship at *The Bergen Record*, which was considered one of the best local papers in the country, but it just happened to be the local newspaper that I grew up with. They had [an] internship, a summer intern. They hired one person. I applied for it, and I got it, which was the best thing that ever happened for my career. I think I got it because I was the editor for the Douglass newspaper. I think I got it partly because I was a woman, and they thought, "Okay, this is a good time to hire a woman as an intern," because I went to Douglass and because I had grown up in Bergen County. Also, I think I was good, but I think being a woman helped me. Then, that basically set me on my career, because I got that internship.

They assigned me, my first story, they sent me out to go cover--there was a store in downtown Hackensack that had been a men's clothing store for generations. Now, it was the grandson who ran this men's clothing store, and he was shutting it down. They wanted me to go interview him in the final week of the store [about] why he was shutting it down. When I went to interview him, he told me, "This is not where the future is. The downtown is dying, and nobody is coming downtown to buy clothes." He said, "I'm going to take this money and I'm going to build a sports facility," he said, "Exercise is what's the new thing." He started talking about running and playing tennis, and he was going to invest in building a sports facility. So, this is in …

SI: 1974.

PF: '74, yes, '74. I came back, and I was on deadline. I had to write this story, and the guy had been great. I wrote this story about the guy closing down. It turned out to be a really good story, because it was so symbolic of what was going on around the country. I had to write within an hour on deadline, and they were so impressed. They just loved [it]. They thought I was really good. At the end of that internship, they offered me a job for when I graduated to come back and work there, which was highly unusual for anybody in 1975 graduating to have a job, especially in journalism. So, I totally lucked out--although I did a good job!

SI: Yes.

PF: I think being editor of *Caellian* really made a big difference.

SI: Wow.

PF: So, anyway, I was lucky.

SI: You graduate in '75. You already have this job lined up at *The Record*. In general, tell me about the state of the paper then, as you saw it from your perspective, because, obviously, newspapers have changed dramatically in their scope and in their size. I would imagine it was a pretty bustling operation at that point.

PF: It was very big, not only bustling, but it was growing. It was a family-owned newspaper, the Borg family owned it, and they invested a lot of money in the newspaper. When I got there, it really just was covering Bergen County, but there had been a newspaper strike in New York. I can't remember what year that was, but when the New York newspapers were shut down, *The Bergen Record* got so much more circulation because it was one of the few papers in the area. People couldn't read the New York papers, so they subscribed to *The Record*. So, the company got tons of money from new subscriptions. [Editor's Note: Newspaper workers in New York City went on strike in 1962 and again in 1965.]

When I got there, it was really starting to do well. Bergen County had all these shopping malls. Bergen Mall, I forget what the other one was, but it's just commerce. Shopping malls were doing well, so they were all advertising in the newspaper. Ad revenue was up, subscription revenue was up, so they had a lot of money.

What they did is they hired this editor, this guy named Bill McIlwaine, who is kind of a legend in journalism. He had been at *Newsday*. He was this brilliant editor, and they hired him to be the managing editor. He decided to hire tons of young people, almost all from Ivy League schools, just really bright young people. There were maybe forty of us that he hired all around the same time. We each had a couple of towns that we had to cover, that we were responsible for covering all the news in those towns, but we were also encouraged to write a feature that was more in depth. They had a feature every day on the front page. It was called "The Patch," and so that's what you aspired to. You covered your regular stuff, but then you aspired to writing this more in-depth feature on the front page. We had all these young ambitious, bright people, lots of money, and it was great. It was just wonderful and inspiring. It was a great place to work. If you couldn't work at *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post* or the *L.A. Times* or any of the big city ones, which didn't hire, for the most part, young people right out of college, this was the place you wanted to be. A lot of those people went on to good jobs at *The Post* and *The Times* and *Newsday* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. Some won Pulitzer Prizes. It was just a great group, so it was the best place in the world to start my career.

For me, my two towns were River Edge and Oradell. As we mentioned before, Bergen County had seventy towns, so there were a lot of town council meetings, a lot of school board meetings going on. But River Edge and Oradell had a joint high school, River Dell High School, and when I started covering it, the teachers went on strike and it turned into a huge fight. The teachers, I can't remember how long they were on strike, but they actually, some of them ended up going to jail. A judge sent them to jail if they didn't go back to school. It became a huge story, and it was my story. Again, I got lucky, because I just had this great story that was on the front page. There was all this drama going on about the future of the schools. It was a really good story, so that helped kind of propel my career at *The Record*.

SI: I want to ask about that in a second.

PF: Yes.

SI: Of that cohort of forty reporters that were hired, roughly how many were women?

PF: Oh, well, let's see, I'm going to say a third. I wouldn't say half, but I would say maybe a third. I remember, at the time, they had a couple of women editors that they had just hired, and that was new. The business editor was a woman, and then they hired an assistant managing editor who was also a woman. But that was considered a big deal. I would say, I'm trying to think, about a third were probably women, as far as the reporters.

SI: Do you think there was any kind of gender bias in terms of assignments that were given to men versus women?

PF: I'm trying to think, because we each had these towns, I wouldn't say there was in that aspect, what we were assigned to cover. I would say that there was a little favoritism in who was considered the golden boy. There would be one or two, and they usually were guys. I can't think of any of the females where they're like, "Oh, this person's a real star." They would get maybe

more of the front-page stories. It wasn't so much the assignments; it was just who got more accolades. I think there was a little bit of that, which still exists, quite frankly. [laughter]

SI: Covering this strike, was it just a matter of going out and interviewing people on all sides? How did you go about covering it? What did you learn in the initial experience of that job that you had not known before?

PF: I sometimes talk about this in journalism when I talk in journalism [classes], because the job was so different than it is now, that every piece of information I got, I had to get first hand, because we didn't get anything online. There was no computer. The wires, like the AP [Associated Press] or the UPI [United Press International], they didn't cover Bergen County. They covered Manhattan. So, everything I got, I got by talking to people, calling people up on the phone, but, more importantly, by going into the town, talking to the principal, talking to the head of the PTA [Parent Teacher Association], talking to parents, talking to the teachers union, talking to the school superintendent, talking to kids. All the stories that I did were based on personal interviews with people, which I wrote out with my little pad and my pencil. I didn't have a tape recorder. I learned just how important it is to talk to people face to face, and that everybody has a different view of the world. Everybody sees the world from their own perspective. As a reporter, the big challenge is to try and figure out, by taking all these different pieces, to try and get a better picture of reality. I have sometimes thought of it mentally as you get one fact here, another fact here, another fact here, and you're trying to almost build a three-dimensional sphere by connecting all the different points. You have to make sure you have enough points to actually build the structure. Does that make sense?

SI: Oh, yes.

PF: It goes back to the old tale of the blind man and the elephant, that everybody has a different perspective. Your job is to get all those different perspectives and, to the best of your ability, pull it together and then try and write a story that depicts that reality as honestly as you can and as accurately as you can. That was probably my biggest lesson from doing that.

I still remember every mistake I made. There was a teacher in one of the schools that got fired. This is what I can't remember; I can't remember what he got fired for. I was assigned to write a story about this guy getting fired. He might have been a coach or something. I honestly can't remember what he got fired for. I remember all these students coming into the newsroom and saying, "Please don't write this story. He's our favorite teacher, and this is going to destroy his career if his name gets in the paper that he was fired." Again, I can't remember why he was fired. I remember being so torn, because I felt so badly that they were right probably, that it would destroy his career, and that they felt so strongly that they actually came to plead to the newspaper not to write it. [I remember] my editor saying, "That's not for you to decide. This is a story. This guy is a public employee. He was fired for this particular reason. That's the news, and we need to cover it." I just remember how hard that was to think, like, "What is my responsibility in this particular situation?" The guy had a young kid, too. I wish I could remember the specifics, but I do remember that there was this kind of moral quandary, and that was the first time that had happened to me as a journalist. Sometimes, there are very difficult,

ethical decisions that you have to make. Then, I also remember a couple things--tell me if I'm talking too much.

SI: No, this is great.

PF: Okay. Some boy was killed. He was out playing baseball and was standing on a mound, and there was water around it. It was one of these lightning strikes, just kind of random, that all of a sudden, the clouds came and he was standing outside. He got struck by lightning and died. They told me to go to his family's house and try and get a comment. I remember I did not want to do that at all. That was just the hardest thing. Fortunately, nobody came to the door when I knocked on the door, because it was the last thing I wanted to do was ask them for a comment. In retrospect, now, I realize that actually a lot of people do like to share when something tragic like that happens, because they want people to know about the person who has died. But, of course, at the time, I didn't know that, and I just was appalled that I had to go do that.

Then, when I got back to the office, there was a teacher that we had the name of who taught this boy, and I had left a message asking if he had any comments about him. I was out of the office, when he called back so somebody else took the message, but they had it kind of garbled and they spelled the teacher's name wrong. The teacher said something like he wasn't a very good student. I mean, it was really awful. So, we put that in the paper, but the name of the teacher wasn't even right. The family was furious that we had this story [without] the name of anybody that they knew. Anyway, whatever it was, it was such a mess. That was another one that really got me, that I had so much responsibility to get things right, and we just weren't very careful in that instance. Here was this story that was going to be in the paper about their son dying, and we had this major thing wrong. Anyway, it was a mess, but all these things were unfortunate lessons that I had to learn.

SI: Wow. That brings home how these local papers, you had such a tie to the community, that when you are at a more cosmopolitan paper, you are not necessarily worried about what one family is going to think about it.

PF: In that teacher's strike, the superintendent of schools lived right behind my parents. It was a neighbor, which, of course, is why he talked to me all the time, but he was the person that the school teachers union and the PTA, everybody hated. [laughter] They thought he was the bad guy, but he talked to me, which was good, because that's when I learned that, [from] this woman saying, sometimes you can get more with honey than vinegar. I tend to be a very empathetic person and I am always interested in hearing what everybody has to say. People tend to talk to me, which I've found being a very good benefit for my journalism. People will just open up to me, so that allows me to cover stories from all these different perspectives. So, that woman, when she told me that, that was incredibly useful advice.

SI: You were there for three years, and then you moved to Washington.

PF: No, I went to Syracuse.

SI: Syracuse, okay.

PF: I went to graduate school in Syracuse.

SI: Oh, all right. Okay, that is the year in between. Had you gotten married in that period?

PF: Just a couple other things about *The Record*.

SI: Sure.

PF: After I covered the local towns, they promoted me, after the strike, because it was such a big story and they were so happy with the way it was covered. I got promoted to cover a bunch of governmental organizations. The Meadowlands Development Commission, which at the time was the state commission to develop the whole Meadowlands region, they were also building Giants Stadium and the racetrack. None of that had been built yet, but this was at the time when they were planning what to do with the place and space. It was a big deal. It was really interesting stuff. I also covered the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and the New Jersey Turnpike Authority. Those were my beat. I was able to do a lot of good stories, especially about the whole construction of Giants Stadium, the Meadowlands Development Commission, not so much the Port Authority. The World Trade Center had just been built, but it wasn't doing very well, because the economy was so bad, they couldn't rent it out, so that was kind of a big story. That's what I was doing, sort of the second half of being at *The Record*. [Editor's Note: In 1969, the New Jersey State Legislature passed a law creating the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission (NJMC). In 2015, NJMC merged with the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority. Giants Stadium and the Meadowlands Racetrack opened in 1976.]

SI: Okay, all right.

PF: So, that was really good experience learning how to cover broader issues beyond just little town council meetings, but what it did make me realize is how little I knew about things. They sent me to cover this story about the World Trade Center, "Go in and find out why it's not doing well." I had no clue how to do that. I just didn't know how to do it. I had never studied journalism or anything; it just had all been me just doing it. I realized I didn't know what to do.

At the same time, Matt had gone to Syracuse University. When we graduated, he went up to Syracuse to get his Ph.D. when I went to *The Record*. For three years, we had been commuting back and forth, still dating. I decided--he had one more year left--that I needed to do something to learn more about things, so I decided to go to graduate school and that I would go to graduate school in Syracuse. I got my master's in public administration. I applied for that, and it was a one-year program. I got in, so then I left the paper and I went up to Syracuse to get my master's in public administration. I just felt like all I had done was write about things, but I had never done anything. At the end of that, that's when we got married. We got married while up in Syracuse, at the end of graduate school.

I got a job down here in Washington at the Office of Management and Budget, and so I became a federal employee. I worked in the Budget Office for a year. Matt came down here, and he got a job at NIST, the National Institute of Standards and Technology. That was great. I really

wanted to do something besides just be a journalist. I figured to be a good journalist, you had to have done something else, to put it into perspective. Working for OBM was a really good experience for me, and then from there, I went and got a job at *Congressional Quarterly*. [Editor's Note: *Congressional Quarterly* produces a number of publications about Congress.]

SI: Well, let me step back to *The Record*.

PF: Sorry.

SI: When you were covering the Meadowlands development, there are a lot of different aspects to that. There is the environmental aspect. I know there was conflict between the Byrne Administration and the Mara Family. What came up those most in your reporting? [Editor's Note: Brendan Byrne served as the Governor of New Jersey from 1974 to 1982. The Mara family has owned the New York Giants since 1925.]

PF: Well, most of it was the decisions being made to build the stadium, like how big it was, who was going to get rights, what companies were going to be involved. When I look back at it, in retrospect, and this is why I really felt that I was not well equipped, I think there probably were tons more stories I could've done, but I didn't. I didn't look into what kind of corruption there might have been, the power plays among the different politicians, among the different jurisdictions, the sort of stuff that you would expect the newspaper to be doing, kind of being a watchdog for the public. I don't think I was equipped to do that, because at the time I was probably twenty-four years old, twenty-five. I was probably in over my head is the best way to say it. I covered what was happening in front me, but I didn't dig. Does that make sense?

SI: Yes.

PF: Yes. That was sort of another reason why I felt like I just needed to get better educated about things. I guess I didn't really have very good editors to help direct me through this. Maybe they thought I knew how to do it. But, in retrospect, looking back at my younger self, I think I could've been a lot better than I was. I could've done a lot better stories. I did things, I mean, I did do stuff, the environmental stuff I did some things about, trying to preserve the wildlife in the Meadowlands and things like that, but they were feature-y kind of things. [laughter]

SI: Well, you went for a master's in public administration.

PF: Yes.

SI: Why that instead of journalism?

PF: Yes, because the Newhouse School obviously is there. Because the MPA program was one year, and Matt only had one year left. I thought, "Okay, this'll be great. We'll both finish at the exact same time." That's why I did it. [Editor's Note: The Newhouse School of Public Communications is located at Syracuse University. The Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse offers the one-year program in Master of Public Administration.]

SI: Okay. [laughter]

PF: That's purely why I did it. I had already had a good journalism job. That's the kind of job that people were going to Newhouse for--was to get a job at *The Bergen Record*. I had already worked there for three years, so I thought it would be good to do something [else], and the Maxwell School has a really good reputation. I was in a track called state and local finance, government finance, so a lot of it was focused on the finances of the state and local governments, budgeting, taxes. It was right at the time when New York City was kind of going down the tubes.

SI: Going bankrupt.

PF: Yes, it was a really big story. Syracuse University, they were very involved in helping the city and doing analysis of its finances. It just kind of worked into the things I was interested in, and as I say, it was one year. They gave me a free ride. I didn't have to pay. I was the dean's assistant. I was in charge of putting together--they had a publication that came out four times a year from the graduate school, and so I had to be the editor of that. That was my assistantship.

SI: Oh, wow.

PF: I had an office. I was given an office next to the dean, and it used to be Daniel Moynihan's old office, because he had been a professor there. So, I was like [Editor's Note: Ms. Fessler puts her feet up on the desk and her hands behind her head. Daniel Moynihan (1927-2003) served as a U.S. Senator from New York from 1977 to 2001. He began his career at the Maxwell School and rejoined the faculty there after he retired from the Senate.]

SI: Yes. [laughter]

PF: Maxwell was great. Maxwell's an amazing school, and they had all these connections. The reason I ended up at OMB is because they had tons of connections down here in the federal government and they just funneled students from the MPA program. They just all went into government jobs down here, OMB, Congressional Budget Office, GAO [Government Accountability Office]. You just slid right in, basically.

SI: Are there any professors from Syracuse that stand out in your memory?

PF: I had one--the guy who was in charge of the state and local finance program, named Roy Ball, who was very good in that area. He's actually the one who helped me get jobs. There were also a lot of good internships at the time. Actually, the Port Authority had a very, very prominent one that I was a finalist for, and they brought me in. I don't know how many people they ultimately gave internships, but they brought twenty people in from graduate schools around the country to be an intern there. I think they maybe picked five out of the twenty. I don't know. I didn't get it. He helped me. There was a presidential internship that I was interviewed for. I didn't get that one either, but they were very helpful in getting people those jobs.

SI: What did you do more specifically in the OMB?

PF: So, I worked at--it was called the Budget Review Division and our job was--there were four little units and each unit had three or four people in it, so there were maybe sixteen people in the Budget Review Division. We were basically in charge of putting together the budget. So, it used to be that the budget--the OMB has all these different entities, like the Commerce group and the Defense group and the Health group, and they put together their budgets for the agencies in those areas. Then, we were the ones who brought it together into one budget. All the numbers had to add up, and we actually were in charge of printing the physical budget, because at the time they came out with this big budget appendix that was six hundred pages. We, in fact, had to oversee it and print it and make sure everything was correct.

My little unit was called the Appropriations Division, and our job was also to follow the appropriations bills from the time the president proposed them all the way through Congress, through the committees, through both chambers, conference, until they were signed into law and then came back to the president. We had to then write a report recommending whether the president should sign it or not. At the time, I was twenty-six. I was given a few appropriations bills, sort of the way at *The Bergen Record* we each had towns. So, I had a couple appropriations bills. I had to go up to the Hill and sit in on all the markups, when the subcommittee would mark up the appropriation bill, and I would write a report each time, saying, "Congress did this, Mr. President, with your budget request, and they added this amount. They took away this amount." Those reports would go to the head of OMB, and they would track them all along. At the very end, I pulled together a report--Jimmy Carter was president at the time--saying, "This is what's in this bill," and then OMB would recommend, "You should sign it or you should veto it" and why. I got to write that, and I thought for a twenty-six-year-old that was kind of cool. It was great. Supposedly, Carter read those. He was one of the few presidents who actually read those reports before he decided what to do.

I used to get to go over to--we were in the New Executive Office Building. My bosses were in the [Eisenhower] Old Executive Office Building, but I used to get to go into the West Wing. I was just delivering booklets, briefing booklets, and stuff. I loved it because I was always fascinated with the presidency, sort of going back to Kennedy being assassinated. I just read everything about the Kennedy assassination. I loved Washington. I loved politics. I loved government. I just was so intrigued by it, and so the fact that I was able to walk into the White House, I cannot tell you. Little, old Pam, who, I told you, had this really boring kind of suburban life, the fact that I could walk into the White House and deliver papers to the press secretary or the vice president's office, it was the best thing in the world for me.

I remember the first time I went, and it was a Saturday. It was way before security was so tight. I was twenty-six, so, of course, all the guards were like, "Hey, how are you?" A young woman, they were just [friendly]. [laughter] I remember one of the guys said, "Have you ever been in the Oval Office?" I'm like, "No." He goes, "Here let me show you. The president's not there." He took me in, he showed me the whole Oval Office and everything, and I was like, "Wow, this is amazing." That would have been 1979. I loved it. It was great, and I actually did contemplate for a while staying at OMB because I was offered a job to go work in the--it was a slightly different unit--it was called the Budget Analysis Division and they did all the economic analysis

for the budget. I was interested in state and local finances, government finances, so I was kind of intrigued by doing that, but then I also wanted to go back to journalism. I kind of missed it. Again, I had to decide once between going to Russia or being a college newspaper editor, so here was again a choice. Am I going to stay and do this, or am I going to go back to journalism? Ultimately, I decided, "I'm going to go back to journalism."

SI: I am curious, being able to see the federal bureaucracy at least from different perspectives, do you think they were also making efforts to hire more women and include more of a diversity of people?

PF: I am trying to think. I kind of didn't feel that way as much at the federal-government level. I'm trying to remember why, because still most of the jobs, the higher-level jobs, were all male, but one of the little divisions, there was a woman in charge. In my group of four, two of us were women. I felt that the federal government was a little bit more in the forefront of being diverse in a way that I didn't feel when I first started, say, working at *The Record*. There, in government, I didn't feel like I got the job because I was female or that that was much of a factor. It might have been, but it just didn't occur to me.

They were willing to give me any opportunity. As I say, I got this offer. To work at the Budget Analysis Division, it was actually a pretty big deal, because I wasn't an economist, but that was a really good job that they were offering me. I did get the feeling that they wanted to help me advance. I was very much encouraged at OMB. OMB is a great place. It sounds like it could be incredibly boring, but you're very close to the president. You're very close to the top of the government, and there's not that many people. You have a lot of authority and ability to make decisions at a pretty young age, so it was good. I have a lot of respect--that was the other good thing about it--it made me realize that a lot of the people who had these jobs were very committed, highly-skilled people who really cared about what they were doing. I think, for a lot of journalists, there was always this feeling that a lot of people in the government were just lazy or corrupt. People would say to me, "Oh, what kind of secrets did you learn?" as though there's something nefarious going on at all times. It wasn't like that. For the most part, these were really smart, decent, hardworking people. I mean, there were one or two people who were lazy or just did the very, very bare minimum, but you would get that anywhere. So, it helped me a lot covering government going forward.

The other thing I did, I had that opportunity to go to Capitol Hill and actually see the political process from behind the scenes, right from the start, so that actually helped me a lot when I went--my next job was to go to *Congressional Quarterly*, which we covered Congress, and I basically did what I was doing at OMB but for a publication. I had to cover what these congressional committees were doing, and it helped quite a bit.

SI: Well, let me pause for one second.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: Working at *Congressional Quarterly*, how did that opportunity come about?

PF: I actually had one friend who had worked at *The Record*, who had come down here and got a job at *Congressional Quarterly*. I knew him, and I knew that he liked it there. It had a very good reputation at the time. It also had a reputation as the place that hired young people, so a lot of people got their start at *Congressional Quarterly* in Washington in journalism.

I did apply to a couple of other places. I think I applied to *The Washington Post* and *The Washington Star*, which were the two papers at the time. I got an interview at one. In fact, one of the women editors at *The Bergen Record* that I told you about had moved to *The Washington Post*. I was able to go and get an interview with her, but they didn't have anything, or I just didn't get offered anything.

I went and got an interview at *Congressional Quarterly*. I sent in my resume, and I didn't hear from them. I called up, and they said, "Oh, well, come on in." I went in and had an interview with the managing editor. It just turned out that they had a newsletter that they were starting. It wasn't the regular magazine, but this newsletter that was supposed to be, it's almost like what *Politico* is now, which is like little scoops, little gossipy stuff. They were looking for somebody to work on it. It was called *Congressional Insight*--and it came out once a week. It was all written in an abbreviated language, almost like tweets. When I think about it, it's kind of funny, but that was the new thing, that people would pay money for these inside publications that would tell you the latest in what was going on behind the scenes. So, of course, they hired someone who had no clue what was going on behind the scenes. [laughter] Anyway, it was great. I got the job, and I worked on that for about nine months.

Then, the woman on the magazine who covered the budget, Gail [Gregg], she was pregnant at the time and she was going to stop working. They were going to hire somebody to fill this budget job. This woman, Gail, she was pregnant with Arthur [Gregg] Sulzberger III, the one who is now the [publisher] of *The New York Times*. She was married to the other Arthur Sulzberger, his father, obviously. They were going to move back up to New York, and she was going to have the baby, so she was leaving. When she left, this job opened up on the magazine. The woman who was already covering taxes got that job, but then that left open the tax reporting job, so I got the job to cover taxes in Congress. This was in 1980 when Ronald Reagan came in and was proposing these massive tax bills. Again, I had this great story right away walking in the door, so it was great. I didn't know anything about taxes, but I learned really fast and I was kind of off from there. It was great. When Arthur Sulzberger became publisher of *The New York Times*, just recently, I was like, "I owe it to him, his birth." [laughter] It was great.

I covered taxes until 1986. I covered it from '81 through '86. Taxes and budget were the big stories in Washington at the time. That's when David Stockman came in and was revamping the government. They were trying to cut down all these programs. They were trying to cut taxes. We had the tax reform effort of 1986, so we got to cover that. I got to be on television a lot. I was on C-SPAN. I was on CNN. It was great. But a lot of it was doing things that weren't all that different from what I was doing at OMB, which was going up and hanging out and finding out what was going on and what Congress was doing. [Editor's Note: David Stockman served as a representative from Michigan from 1977 to 1981 and as director of the Office of Management and Budget from 1981 to 1985, during the presidency of Ronald Reagan.]

SI: This question may stretch back to the OMB period, but I imagine a lot of your job was spent building relationships with people who were permanent staff on these committees.

PF: Yes, and the best lesson I got when I first started at *Congressional Quarterly*--and it might have been when I was still on the newsletter--one of the other reporters said, "What you should do is go spend a lot of time with the minority staff because nobody else is paying attention to them, and if you go and you develop relationships with them, they're going to be happy to talk to you. They know a lot of what's going on, and that's a good way to just get started." The majority staff, they're talking to everybody and they don't have as much time to devote to you--not that you should ignore them--but the minority staff [do]. Well, I did that, and then the next year, the Republicans took control and so I knew all the majority people then. I had been the only reporter who was spending time talking to them, so it was great. It was another good piece of advice that somebody gave me that proved incredibly valuable. In fact, one of the people, the senate finance committee director, was Bob Lighthizer, [who] is now Trump's trade representative.

That's one of the great things about covering the Hill is that it's very much like a small city. Everybody gets to know each other quite well, especially among the staff and the reporters. Sometimes the politicians change, but the staff and the reporters all get to know each other. Then, a lot of those people, when somebody becomes president, they go off and they become their chief of staff. I ended up having that base that's helped me all along in Washington because a lot of those same people are still here, but they are much more powerful. They've got ten much more powerful jobs, people like John Podesta, who was Clinton's chief of staff, or Leon Panetta. I covered a lot of the budget stuff, and he was chairman of the House Budget Committee. He would just spend hours talking. He was so happy to talk. Then, he became head of the Defense Department and then he was, I think, he was CIA.

SI: CIA, yes.

PF: Then, he was also chief of staff [for President Bill Clinton]. So, it was great. It was really a good foundation. I was covering Congress at a time where it was much more congenial and there was a lot of bipartisan efforts to get things accomplished. People like Bob Dole, a Republican, and Ted Kennedy, a liberal Democrat, they wanted to see certain pieces of legislation passed, and they would work with each other to get it passed. So, there was a lot of negotiations going on and compromises, but they accomplished things. A lot of things were happening. It wasn't just this antagonism that we see now. It was great. I thought it was a really great time to cover Congress, just a lot of great stories going on, renewing the Civil Rights Act. They had to save Social Security. The Social Security fund was going bankrupt. There was a big effort to do that. I covered that. As I say, [I covered] all the tax bills.

SI: Yes. Was that the one where President Reagan and Tip O'Neill, the Speaker of the House, really got together?

PF: Right, right.

SI: Yes.

PF: They worked overnight on Social Security; they all went and met in Blair House. [Alan] Greenspan was the head of this. They put together this bipartisan Social Security Commission. They really were about ready to run out of money. It wasn't like, "Oh, we're going to run out of money if this doesn't happen in ten years." They were right on the edge of running out of money. Then, as I say, the tax bills were big deals. The tax reform effort was another one where Ronald Reagan worked really closely with Tip O'Neill, and they actually did try and make the tax code a little easier and simpler. I mean, they also cut taxes. There was just great politics going on.

I also learned, again, that actually being there and just talking to people, hanging out in the hallways and grabbing people, was the best way to learn what was going on. You can't really be a reporter sitting at your desk and reading things online or just talking to people on the phone. You actually have to be there to really get a sense of what's going on.

SI: Obviously, relationships are very important. Do relationships ever sour for some reason?

PF: That's a good question. I have not had that, but I'm sure people do. I mean, people just kind of pass on. Obviously, I'm not covering that stuff anymore, so I've kind of lost contact with a lot of people. I have not. I honestly can't think of a relationship that's soured, yes.

SI: You said you covered taxes up to 1986.

PF: Yes.

SI: What was your next beat?

PF: Then, we had our first son David, who you met, in 1983 and then our second son in '86. I took a little time off, just six months, but then I went back to work at *Congressional Quarterly* part time as an editor. I did that for about three or four years. I edited a bunch of different topics. Then, I went back and I covered defense and foreign policy for about three years, but I was not the main defense reporter or the main foreign policy reporter. I was sort of like a third person that could cover other stories, like if there was more that needed to be covered that they couldn't handle. I'm trying to think of what else I did. I feel like I should've done more than that. [laughter]

SI: Was that during the Gulf War?

PF: Yes, so, I covered the Pentagon budget. I covered the congressional debate about going to war, because they actually did debate that, and people kind of being torn. I think I only worked four days a week. So, after I had Peter, I was able to manage part-time gigs at *Congressional Quarterly*, I think, until I left, by part time, I mean three or four days. I think when I was editing, I was only doing it three days. Then, I went back to reporting; I was doing it four days. But because it was a weekly, they just had more flexibility. They actually were very nice and accommodating, which was great.

Then, I just got tired of covering Congress and wanted to look for something else. That's when I applied--I had some friends who worked at National Public Radio--and that's when I applied

there, so I went there in '93. I got a job there as an editor to start, and I was on the National Desk. I was in charge of the Midwest. Even though I was based in Washington, we had divided the country into four, and I was the Midwest Editor. I worked with all of the member stations in the Midwest. There are reporters who sometimes filed for us, and NPR itself, the network, had about five full-time reporters who were in different places in the Midwest.

SI: Are there any other memories of *Congressional Quarterly* before we move on to NPR? Just a general question, as women are becoming more of a force in these new fields that were relatively new when you were entering in the 1970s ...

PF: Yes.

SI: … Questions of things, such as leave time, how you would be viewed if you decided to have a family? Were those discussed often among your colleagues, or did you see it as something that may adversely affect you or your career?

PF: Honestly, I didn't so. I think it's because of where I worked.

SI: Okay.

PF: I think CQ, *Congressional Quarterly*, was very accommodating, and it was a very family-friendly organization. There were a lot of female reporters and a lot of us were having--not only the women but the men, too--were having children at that time, so there were a lot of people with young children. They were actually very flexible in giving at least the women time off, not the men, unfortunately. I honestly never felt that it was a disadvantage to me. Now, it may have inhibited me from going someplace like *The Post* or *The Times*. I might have just internalized and thought, "Oh, well, they're never going to want somebody who would only want to work part time." By the time I went to NPR, my kids were ten and seven, so they were a little bit older--so I was ready to say, "Okay, I will work full time." But I think, I bet, internally, it was one of these things I thought, "Oh, well, I could just never really deal with the high pressure of someplace like *The New York Times* or *The Post*." I never even really tried for either of those.

I look back now, some of my colleagues and some of my good friends--when they were my age but later, like ten years later--a number of them became foreign correspondents, and in their early years, they did all this exciting [stuff]. I mean, they covered the Gulf War. They covered Rwanda. They had all these sorts of foreign experiences that I just never even tried for, and I think it's because I had little kids. I just wasn't willing to take that risk, whereas sometimes there are--we even have women today who work for NPR who go to some of these warzones. They have little kids that are back home. I just never even thought of doing that.

SI: You said *Congressional Quarterly* was very family friendly. I have interviewed women who, in their profession, they said, "If I took a maternity leave, that was it for my career."

PF: For the most part, I don't think journalism is quite the same.

SI: Okay.

PF: Yes, and it might have been the places where I specifically worked, but *Congressional Quarterly*, as I say, was very family oriented. In fact, when I went there, the woman who covered the Supreme Court, Elder Witt, worked part time. That was in 1980. A lot of companies didn't do that, didn't allow journalists to do that, but they were already starting to. Again, I think it was partly because it was a weekly magazine, and we didn't have [the daily deadlines]. Now, people, even if you work for a weekly, you're posting online twenty-four hours [a day]. You're always posting stories online, but there was nothing, never anything like that. I wrote one magazine story a week, and I had all week to write it. So, if I missed Monday and my deadline was Friday, it wasn't like the end of the world. I could usually catch up. I think that was another reason it was such a good place for that, because it didn't have a daily deadline.

SI: You left in 1993. I know in the early 1990s there were a number of sexual harassment stories related to the Pentagon and Congress. I am trying to remember when the Bob Packwood story was, if that was just before or after.

PF: I think that was before or around the same time. It was around '92 or '93. I remember it, because I covered Bob Packwood because he was the head of the Finance Committee at the time, when I was covering a lot of stuff. I actually never--I interviewed him all the time, but I never had any [issue]. I mean, I was kind of clueless, I guess. All this stuff just kind of went right over my head. I never had an issue. I remember thinking, when that came out like, "Oh, huh." So, it was around that same time. It must have been the early '90s. [Editor's Note: Robert Packwood resigned from the U.S. Senate in 1995 amid accusations of sexual misconduct against women.]

SI: Okay.

PF: Do you remember if it all came out after that, like '93?

SI: I was in elementary school, so I kind of remember from the news.

PF: Right.

SI: I want to say it was either '93 or '94.

PF: Yes. So, it was probably right after I had left.

SI: It was very early in the Clinton Administration.

PF: Right.

SI: Did you ever write any stories about that kind of sexual harassment?

PF: Not at all, not at all.

SI: Yes.

PF: In fact, when the whole #MeToo movement started, I and a couple of my friends, we are probably an exception, just never really had any instances of any kind of sexual harassment that I recall, which we seem to be in the minority. I know Strom Thurmond was always making these comments to women, "Oh, aren't you such a pretty lady," stuff like that, but at the time you just kind of [thought], "Oh, that's just who he is" and you just ignored him. [Editor's Note: Strom Thurmond served as the Governor of South Carolina from 1947 to 1951 and as U.S. Senator from 1956 to 2003.]

SI: I was wondering if it was a kind of open secret that only just broke at the time.

PF: There were sometimes rumors about people. Now, my friend, I told you, one of my best friends, we started at the *Caellian* together. She's still a very close friend of mine. She became a reporter on Capitol Hill, worked for the *San Diego Union* and she was there a little bit before I was. She had a number of occasions where she went to interview some congressman and then he started making suggestions, which was all around that time. But I don't even remember her telling me at the time. This is only some stuff we talked about recently. I don't remember my colleagues ever raising it as an issue.

SI: What was the work culture like? Was there any kind of difference that you noticed between *Congressional Quarterly* and NPR?

PF: Yes, they're two entirely different places. *Congressional Quarterly* was very focused. Everybody had their own beat, so it was very collegial in that everybody knew, "You're in charge of the Pentagon. You cover taxes. You cover the budget. You cover housing." We were very focused on who our audience was, which was lobbyists and members of Congress, for the most part, or researchers. It was fairly, again, focused, and it was all written.

NPR is international. I always liken it to a Middle Eastern street market. You had one show, *All Things Considered*. You had *Morning Edition*. You had the Washington Desk. You had the National Desk. You had the Foreign Desk. You had the Science Desk. You had the Arts Desk, everybody kind of doing their own thing. They would try and come together and figure out who was going to do what and what was going to be on what show. You basically could cover the world. There was no limit. The only limit that you had was in your creativity and ambition. If you had an idea for a story and nobody else was doing it, you could go do it. It's just an entirely different world.

Plus, obviously, it was all related to sound. You're not just news but sound, so a lot of people were more artistic. You had the journalists, but you also had the artists and the technical people, the engineers who were so integral in the technology and the sound. You had the pressures of having to fill these shows. You had a two-hour show in the morning. At the time, it was only an hour in the evening. You had to fill this time every single day, no matter what. You also had this audience of millions of people--it wasn't as big, obviously, as it is now--all around the country who were really sort of passionately interested in what you were doing, just everyday people. It was an entirely different audience.

It was great or is great, but it was quite a change from *Congressional Quarterly*. I remember one of my first observations, when I went to--every morning, they had a meeting, a story meeting, with the heads of each of the shows and the news desks and the managing editor, "What are we going to cover today? Who's going to do what?" I remember when I first went there and I looked, I thought, "Everybody looks so tired." [laughter] I don't know why that just struck me that people just looked tired already and stressed. I just think it was a higher level of anxiety in the newsroom. That was way before today, when it's even crazier.

It was just a whole different level, but it's great because there are also so many different types of people. It is much more diverse in the type of people. You have some people who are interested in politics, but you had a lot of people who only are interested in arts or who are interested in science. It was just so much broader than *Congressional Quarterly*, where most of those people were interested in government and public policy. You had that at NPR, but you also had this much broader range of people. For me, it was a very diverse staff. I told you that I grew up in this town where there were no African Americans. It wasn't even until I went to college that I interacted with African American people. NPR was just much more diverse. A lot of my colleagues were African American or Hispanic. Some of the editors were. [It was] certainly not as diverse as it probably should have been or even should be today, but from all my other experiences, it was a much more diverse workforce, which was wonderful.

SI: Starting out as the Midwest Editor, you are coordinating what the five reporters are doing and working with the local affiliates and what they are sending in.

PF: Right.

SI: How does that work? Are you directing them? Are they sending you stuff and you are trying to plug it in?

PF: It's very, very interactive. That's why we have that meeting every day. Also, I would talk to the reporters, say, "Oh, what's going on in your area?" Three of them were in Chicago. One was in Detroit. One was in Kansas City, and one was in St. Louis. Then, I had all these member stations all throughout the Midwest. The member station reporters, they would pitch me ideas. They would say, "We're working on this story in Des Moines about blah, blah, blah." If I thought it had any national interest--I would always say, "Why should somebody in New Jersey care about this story?" I would make them explain to me, "Why would somebody listening in New Jersey care about this thing that was going on in Iowa?" Sometimes, they could explain why they should care, and to me, that was a sign of, "Well, okay, this has the potential to be a national story or of national interest." If I thought it was good and the reporter was a good reporter, I would work with them on this story. Usually, those tended to be features, the ones from the member stations.

Now, my staff, the ones who worked directly for NPR, if there was a breaking news story in Chicago or Detroit, [they would cover the story]. Don Gonyea was in Detroit at the time and he covered the car industry, so there were a lot of big car stories at the time. Chicago, obviously, has a lot of news. It would just be obvious what the story is, "This is happening here." I seem to just sort of walk into these stories, but one of the first things that happened after I'd only been the

Midwest Editor for a month, a few weeks, [was] the Mississippi Flood of 1993. The Mississippi started rising slowly and slowly, and all of a sudden, the whole Midwest was flooded. That was the story that we covered non-stop for about two or three months. All these towns got destroyed. You probably don't remember because you were too young. [Editor's Note: Journalist Don Gonyea began working for NPR in 1986. Since 2010, he has worked as the National Political Correspondent.]

SI: No, I remember. I was going to ask you about that, yes.

PF: I had to deploy my reporters, say, "Okay, you should go here. You should go there." We would constantly be on the phone, saying, "Okay, what have you got? What's going on here?" It was very much a back-and-forth thing. I also worked with the member stations there too because obviously, we had member stations all the way up and down the river. The shows were really interested in covering the flood.

That's the other thing. You bring in a story, but then you have to almost sell it to the shows sometimes, because they decide what they want. Not only did you get the stories, [but you also negotiated]. That's why I talked about this sort of Middle Eastern market, open-air market. There was a lot of negotiation back and forth, "Oh, I've got this great piece from Iowa about blah, blah, blah." The *All Things Considered* producer would say, "Well, I have no space on tonight's show because I have all these other stories." I was like, "Well, you really should put this on." They're like, "Well, how important is it? Can it go tomorrow?" Then, you're just constantly negotiating. I'd say, "Well, it should be about four-and-a-half minutes long." They'd say, "Well, how about three minutes?" Then, you [say to the reporter], "If you don't do three minutes, I can't get it on." There was a lot of that kind of stuff, that was part of the job. It was pretty much a real back-and-forth thing. I was constantly paying attention, reading the newspapers from the Midwest, trying to get a sense myself of what was going on. It was just the time where the web was starting to emerge, so we're starting to get a little bit of some material online but not very much. We actually had newspaper clippers who would clip articles from newspapers that seemed relevant.

I did that for about a year, but, obviously, a lot of it was the Midwest floods. We covered tons of other stories, too. Then, for the '94 elections, because I was so interested, because I had come from *Congressional Quarterly*, the woman who was running the coverage for NPR asked me to be help with that, so I helped with that. Then, when the '94 elections were over, NPR was starting to do this thing for the '95-'96 elections, where we were going to try and get a lot more of the local stations involved in our coverage. We got some big grant to bring them in, so we'd get real grassroots, ground-up political coverage. I became the Political Editor for NPR. I was in charge of all the network coverage for the '96 elections, but that started in '95. That was great, too. I had this huge budget and a staff of people. I was in charge of all our election coverage for that cycle, what we did from the debates, the conventions and election night and all that stuff.

SI: Wow.

PF: That was good.

SI: Are there any memories stand out from that experience? Because NPR goes more in depth into some of these aspects, how do you decide what is the aspect to drill down on?

PF: I would try and always think about, "What's new? What's different?" This is not the case as much today for NPR, but, at the time, we perceived ourselves as being everybody's secondary news source, that people got their main news from the network news at night, the *CBS Evening News*, that type of thing, or the major newspapers. That's where they got their breaking primary news and that what they got from NPR was something slightly different. They got more the personal stories. They got the analysis. They got a second-day, more in-depth look at things. I think that that's what kind of drove our coverage at the time. What is the story that I can tell or that we can tell as a network that is something people wouldn't see somewhere else? Just about how the campaigns are being conducted, what people are saying. We held some forums, sort of the precursor of town hall meetings--what are voters saying?--which wasn't really done that much at that time. [We covered that] more so than what the candidates [were saying]. Now, we did have reporters going with the candidates, but they would do a little bit more of a feature-y story.

We weren't doing anything online. It wasn't like you had to tweet out. If Clinton or somebody said something really newsworthy, people didn't hear it until *All Things Considered* came on in the afternoon or *Morning Edition* came the next morning. It was just a little less breaking-news driven.

One of the things I think about when I go back is the technology. When I think about what we did with that technology. Right now, you have this digital recorder. My reporters on those elections and for that flood, they're going out with this big cassette player and a microphone that's got a cassette tape going. When they need to file from the road, they have to have an attachment that connects to the phone. They had alligator clips; they had to connect it to a phone line and they had to try and feed some of the tape over the phone from these cassettes. That's if they weren't near any of the studios. We would be recording it in a studio on this side. Let's say they went and interviewed all these flood victims. They'd have to go through that tape, figure out where were the things that they wanted to use out of it. They might have two hours' worth of tape, and they know they only want to use twenty seconds. They have to go find it, feed that over the phone. We would record it on a big reel-to-reel tape on our end. Some producer would have to go through that. We would slice it with razor blades, tape it. When the reporter would file their part, we would have to mix the two together, what the reporter said and then the quotes from the people they talked to. Then, there would be sound underneath it, which would be a third track. All this would have to be combined in the studio, and it was all done manually. It would have to be done on deadline. It was incredibly labor intensive.

I think of these reporters, especially our reporter who covered the campaigns, she'd be in some godforsaken place at midnight or two in the morning, looking for a phone or a phone booth where she could hook up these alligator clips and try and feed the tape to somebody in Washington. It was incredibly time consuming, when you think of what we do now. We record things digitally. You take that; you download the tape. You can pretty easily find it. You can isolate cuts right there on your computer. You can send that to the producer. The producer mixes it on the computer, and it's done. They press a button, "Send," and it goes right into the

studio. It can go on the air, instead of having everything spliced together with tape on a reel to reel, which the producer goes tearing into the studio two minutes or sometimes ten seconds before it's supposed to go on the air, putting it on the machine, and pressing it and hoping it's going to sound okay.

SI: Wow.

PF: That was a lot of work. It's still a lot of work. It's just amazing, if people had a clue what went into those stories, that anything got on the air. [laughter] Part of my job as an editor was to try and coordinate this and make sure those reporters were able to get what they had reported and get it into the studio, so that it could go out on the air, which was quite a big job, but also have meaningful stories at the same time. It was a great job.

Then, I became a Deputy Washington Editor, and, actually, NPR, again, allowed me to work part time. My kids were getting a little older, and I was interested in--after the election, because I worked around the clock--not working quite so much, because I wanted to spend more time with the kids. They allowed me and another woman to share a job, and we were both the Deputy Washington Editor. She worked half time; I worked half time. We did this for about a year or so, which was great. NPR was also very accommodating. Again, I didn't get any sense that it had any detrimental impact on my career.

That was when Clinton and the impeachment and the Monica Lewinsky scandal was starting, and I started working more and more and more. Then, the Washington Editor left, and they asked me to be the Washington Editor. I became the Washington Editor and had to oversee all that coverage, and that's when journalism started getting crazy. I could almost mark it with that time. I guess it was '98, right? Does that make sense? '97-'98, I guess. [Editor's Note: For a year and a half in 1995-1996, President Bill Clinton had an affair with Monica Lewinsky, a White House intern. News of the scandal broke in January 1998, amidst the expansion of Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's investigation into Bill and Hillary Clinton's Whitewater financial dealings to include the Clinton-Lewinsky affair. On December 19, 1998, the House of Representatives voted to approve two articles of impeachment, perjury and obstruction of justice, although the Senate did not vote to convict in January 1999.]

That was just the time when publications and other media outlets started posting things online. *The Washington Post*, the next day's *Washington Post*, and *The New York Times* came out at midnight online of the day that they were published. It still wasn't this twenty-four-hour thing. I remember all of a sudden, I had to stay up every night as the Washington Editor to at least midnight because stuff kept breaking, especially with the Monica Lewinsky stuff, every day. All of a sudden, it started becoming more of a twenty-four-hour job, because if you didn't stay up until midnight, I would get a call from the morning show, "*The Washington Post* just reported that they found this blue dress with a stain on it. What do we do?" Then, it was right around that time that all of a sudden, news started becoming more of a twenty-four-hour thing. I just remember that so clearly, "Oh, my gosh, my day is not ending." It's just continued since then.

It was so crazy being Washington Editor at the time of the impeachment and the Lewinsky stuff that I went to the Managing Editor, I said, "I really would like to get back to reporting." I said,

"The next time there's an opening, could you please consider me?" Then, they did, and that's when I went back to reporting. I had never actually reported on air before. I never had done radio reporting, but that's when I started at NPR reporting, yes.

SI: One of the things that stands out about the impeachment and the Lewinsky scandal is you started getting these other Internet sources becoming big sources and players, such as the Drudge report and that sort of thing. How did they affect the business as a whole? As an editor, how do you decide what to give credence to? [Editor's Note: Drudge report is a website that posts breaking news and links to other news sites. On January 19, 1998, Drudge first reported about the Lewinsky and Clinton scandal, followed two days later by *The Washington Post* covering the story.]

PF: Right, so, I think Drudge was a little later than that, or do you know …

SI: Well, I just listened to the podcast *Slow Burn*, which did a whole thing on this.

PF: Yes.

SI: I think the Drudge report put out one of the key pieces of evidence.

PF: Okay, so maybe it was just starting then, yes. The difference between then and now is, so even Drudge report, when it came out, it would come out just once a day. You still weren't getting this twenty-four-hour, breaking-type news, where, at ten o'clock in the morning, there'd be a tweet about this, and, then at 10:20, there'd be a different tweet from somebody else. You weren't so inundated. There might be one or two things that would come out or maybe one thing like that from Drudge during the day. Basically, what it was was, "Oh, well, this is something maybe we should ask questions about." It didn't quite direct the news coverage like these things seem to now.

Now, things seem to take on a life of their own, so that you might have to spend a whole day covering the fallout from some big revelation. The thing I'm thinking of, just pops into my head, just because I covered voting stuff, when *The Intercept* came out with an article that this contractor had found some information about how she thought that the Russians had tried to manipulate and tried to hack into the systems of [an] election vendor. When they were like, "That happened," all of a sudden, everybody's got to cover it, which is good--it was important news--but that didn't exist. Then, it was just a little bit more slow moving, "Okay, this is just another thing that we should ask and look into." They certainly weren't given the same kind of credence as *The Post* and *The Times*. CNN was starting to get a little bit more credibility as a news source; their reporters had good contacts. I still don't feel like it dominated our coverage so much. We tended to probably get more scoops from ABC News, the network news. We thought, "Okay, we have to follow up on that," rather than these other sources that you're talking about, whereas now I think it's much more evenly spread around. I mean, you get stuff from *BuzzFeed*. You get something from *Politico*. I think a lot of them have very good reporters who are very well connected, so you just have a lot more information. The news coverage is just being propelled in so many different directions simultaneously. Plus, you have the president tweeting; you have everyone tweeting. [laughter] It just wasn't anything like that at all.

SI: What year did you go back to reporting?

PF: It was the end of '98. It must have been, yes, because I did cover the end of Clinton. I became the backup White House reporter for the last couple of months of Clinton, when he was doing all the pardons, handing out pardons, because our other reporters were off covering the election.

SI: Does that mean you would be in the press room?

PF: Yes, yes, so I did that. Our main White House reporter at the time, Mara Liasson, who I had been editing, was on maternity leave. I basically covered the end of the Clinton administration. Then, I covered the beginning of [George W.] Bush, a little bit, but not too much. Now, I'm losing all my years here. Then, what happened, I had different random things that I was covering. When Bush came in, Don Gonyea, who had been covering the campaign, became the main White House reporter. I was, again, just kind of like the backup White House reporter, so I was covering other things.

Then, 9/11 happened and I ended up covering homeland security, because, all of a sudden, this new entity emerged. That was at the time that they were trying to figure out, "Okay, how do we tighten security in this country?" First, Bush just had Tom Ridge be his first Homeland Security Secretary, who was in the White House, and I just kind of covered him as part of the White House. Then, that eventually turned into this big new agency. That's what I ended up doing a lot of coverage on. I covered the creation of TSA [Transportation Security Administration] and Customs and Border Patrol and all these new entities and all the security measures and things we were doing with homeland security and the privacy issues. That emerged from me having covered the White House. [Editor's Note: In 2002, Congress passed the Homeland Security Act, which created the Department of Homeland Security and the cabinet-level position Secretary of Homeland Security. Tom Ridge served as the Homeland Security Advisor from 2001 to 2003 and then as the first Secretary of Homeland Security.]

SI: What do you remember about the actual day of the 9/11 attacks?

PF: Of 9/11? I was driving to work, and I was listening to WTOP, not NPR, because I was listening for the traffic. The guy said something about, "Oh, we got this report that a plane had gone into the World Trade Center." It was at the time where they were just speculating, "Okay, it was just a small plane, probably some small plane, a pilot got lost or something." As I was driving, the second plane hit, and the guy on the radio just said, "Oh, my God, a second plane just hit the World Trade Center. This is not an accident." I was almost at work, and, of course, I remember so clearly turning on NPR. We were airing a feature story, and it was before we really got that we are a major news source for people. We were not yet at the place where we are now, which is that we are a major news source for people and that we have to be covering breaking news as it happens. I think that it was 9/11 that actually made us realize that we had to make that shift, because, as I say, I turned on NPR and they were still airing some feature story that had been planned.

Then, I got to the office, and, of course, everybody is around the televisions. Then, they had the big major news [meeting]. We always had this morning news meeting with all of the heads of the different desks and the major editors and the producers of the show to figure out, "Okay, how are we going to cover this?" We were all sitting right outside, the rest of the reporters, everybody, we were sitting outside the room watching the TV, and I cannot remember, this is terrible--I cannot remember the sequence of events, if the Pentagon got hit before the towers fell. I should know this, because I also covered the 9/11 Commission extensively. They happened pretty close to each other. Anyway, all of a sudden, we got a news report from one of our reporters at the Pentagon, "The Pentagon has been hit." I just remember so clearly watching the TV, and because I had covered the World Trade Center and the Port Authority, and all of a sudden, to see the smoke, and I said, "Oh, my God, one of the towers just collapsed." You couldn't really see that it was [collapsing] because they were like this. [Editor's Note: On September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four planes and carried out suicide attacks on the Twin Towers in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., killing all of the passengers onboard the planes and over three thousand people on the ground. At 8:46 AM, hijackers crashed American Airlines Flight 11 into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. At 9:03 AM, the South Tower of the World Trade Center was struck by United Airlines Flight 175. At 9:37 AM, American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon. At 9:59 AM, the South Tower of the World Trade Center collapsed. At 10:07 AM, Flight 93 crashed in Pennsylvania, after passengers attempted to regain control of the plane from the terrorists. At 10:28 AM, the North Tower of the World Trade Center collapsed.]

SI: One behind the other.

PF: Yes, just the way the angle was. I said, "Oh, my God, it just collapsed." I remember running into the editor's meeting, I said, "The World Trade Center just collapsed." Everyone just kind of looked at me like, "What are you talking about?" I said, "No, it collapsed. The whole building just fell down." Then, of course, the second one fell down. By then, we're starting to go on air live, where they started talking to the reporter who was at the Pentagon who had to flee. We had all our New York reporters heading down to the World Trade Center. A lot of it was talking to reporters on the phone, live on the air. Then, we were all assigned different stories.

Now, I was the backup White House reporter, but Bush was not at the White House then. We didn't know where he was. I don't know if he had taken off yet from Florida, but there was a point where he left and was up in the air and they didn't know where he was going. They actually assigned me a job, a story about the World Trade Center, because they knew I had covered it and I knew all these people who had worked with the Port Authority. I started calling people on the phone and trying to pull that story together, but so much was going on that everything was overtaken. That was kind of a feature-y story. It kind of got overtaken with the fact that all of a sudden people started thinking that Congress was going to get hit, because there was still a plane missing. The one in Pennsylvania was still missing, and they didn't know where it was going. There were reports that it might be headed to either the White House or the Capitol. We had people sent up to the Capitol. Then, there were all those rumors--you might not have known this--but especially in Washington, there was like a different rumor every fifteen minutes, like there's a fire at the State Department. The mall was on fire. Then, at one point, they closed off the intersection outside my building, because they thought there was a bomb on

the corner. They told everybody in our office to move to the back of the building, and it probably was nothing. It was probably just a bag or something. This was all while we were trying to cover all this stuff.

I remember my son David had just gone off to college. He was a freshman at the University of Michigan. He had been there only a few days. He calls up and he's like, "Mom, are you okay? Is everything okay? I heard that the Capitol might have been [attacked]." NPR was very close to the Capitol. I didn't want to tell him that everybody was around my desk because we had just been told to get away from the front of the building, because there might be a bomb out there. I'm sure you had similar experiences, but it was just this cascading series of events.

Also, we had newscasts every hour. We're all filing news spots, updates for the newscast. Then, what I had to do--we thought Bush was coming back to the White House--we wanted to make sure somebody was at the White House if he came back. I think he did come back that night, I can't remember, later on, and addressed the nation. [Editor's Note: On September 11, 2001, President Bush returned to the White House at 6:58 PM and addressed the nation at 8:30 PM.]

I had to go back to the White House around six o'clock, seven o'clock at night. Whenever it was, it was dark. I remember it was dark. I walked from NPR to the White House, and the streets of Washington were empty. I got within two blocks of the White House, and there were all these guys with machine guns that had formed a barrier all around, like on this side of the Treasury Department, all around the Old Executive Office Building, that whole four block area. I had never seen anything like that, obviously, in Washington, in my life. I showed them my press pass. They let me go in, which they probably wouldn't do today. [laughter] I had the White House press [pass], so they let me go in. I remember walking down the street to the White House, and it was totally deserted. There was not one human being around, except I realized I'm inside this circle of guys with machine guns, automatic weapons. I'm thinking, "Oh, my God, why am I walking into this building?" into the White House. That was the first time I got scared, because we still didn't know. There was still this thought that there might be a second attack, not from the plane, but that there would be something else. I just remember walking into the White House, and I've never seen that area as deserted and isolated, and just all of a sudden getting terrified. Anyway, I went there, and I covered whatever Bush was saying that night. We just worked basically around the clock for the next twenty years. [laughter]

This is one thing about journalism. When there's terrible things that happen and tragedy, you feel like you have a role. You have something to do. That is an incredibly useful thing as a human being, because you think, "Okay, I have a job to do," and it allows you in some ways not to think about it as much. You're so busy covering it and trying to get the news out that the emotional impact comes later. I like that in a lot of ways. It makes you feel like you can do something, and mostly in these kinds of occasions, you can't do anything. Firemen get to do something. Policemen get to do things. The military sometimes get to do things, but most people, you just are helpless. This makes you think, "Okay, I've got a role." As human beings, we want that. I do remember a very good friend of mine calling at the end of that week, who was up in New York and he worked for *The Wall Street Journal*, and he left a message on my phone. He said, "I just want you to know that listening to your calm voice on the air was so

reassuring this week." He said, "You don't know how much it meant to me to hear your calm, reasoned voice, a familiar voice." I was just like, "Okay, that's nice." That's why I do it, I think.

SI: Let us take a break.

PF: Okay.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: The day of 9/11 and the days after are very hectic. How long do you think you stayed at the job that day?

PF: Oh, I probably got home around midnight or one in the morning, I guess, so, from nine AM until two AM the following day. Then, every day that week, we probably all worked until midnight or so. I do remember clearly that Friday night coming home and collapsing on the couch and waking up, the TV was on. Actually, my husband had been stuck in New Orleans. He finally was able to drive home, so he hadn't been home for three days. He finally got home, and we were watching TV. I fell asleep, like a dead sleep, and I remember waking up. *Nightline* was on, and they were showing pictures again of the towers. I thought, "Oh, my God, the World Trade Center collapsed." It was like, it sounds weird, but it was like the first time it really hit me, what had happened and that all these people died. That's what I was talking about with journalism, sometimes you get to kind of delay the impact, and it really was five days later, four days later, that I thought, "Oh, my God," how awful what had happened was.

Then, afterwards, as I had mentioned, there was the whole debate about what to do as a country, how to respond to this, and building up this whole infrastructure, the Homeland Security Department. Two things happened. One, I covered--there was the 9/11 Commission that they pulled together, to look into what went wrong. That was actually a really fascinating story to cover. I covered the whole commission and all their deliberations and their testimony, and that was really a good, solid story, "What went wrong and how do we fix it?" One of the solutions was to try and create this department that pulled some of these security measures together. Also the whole thing was, we had nobody connecting the dots between the CIA and the FBI, so we needed a Director of [National] Intelligence, somebody who would coordinate things. All those changes were made. How good they've been, well, I don't know. I think they've served some purposes.

SI: Did you cover the PATRIOT Act?

PF: That, I did not cover. Our Justice Department reporter covered that. More of the civil liberties side, other people covered, but I covered more the mechanics of pulling together this whole new department. The whole regime of airport security was just dramatically different and immigration and visas, all these borders, all the entry rules and regulations, so much changed, information sharing. I don't know if you recall, but we had numerous incidents, especially the couple of years right after 9/11. We had the anthrax scares. Remember, everybody was opening packages with white powder in them. There were bomb scares everywhere. We had a number of attempted terror attacks. We had the underwear bomber. We had all these threats that we as a

nation had not really thought about before and just this whole vulnerability and then to just have to switch our mindset, so that we actually do have to protect ourselves from these things in a way that I think now we are having a similar recognition, that we have to protect ourselves against cyber and information attacks, which we were kind of naïve about in some ways. Then, it was just so much more that we were physically threatened in a way that we just never thought about before. [Editor's Note: In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, letters containing anthrax spores began arriving at congressional offices and media outlets. Five people died, and seventeen people fell victim to anthrax exposure. The FBI and other federal agencies concluded that Bruce Ivins, a government scientist, perpetrated the anthrax attacks. Ivins killed himself on July 29, 2008.]

SI: You talked earlier about how building these relationships is kind of a long-term game. People you met in the 1970s or 1980s may come back to help you as they go further in their careers. Was there any change in terms of how open people were after 9/11? Was there any kind of shutdown of avenues of information?

PF: Not really. I'm trying to think.

SI: Was there reticence to talk to reporters?

PF: I didn't find that in the Bush Administration or the Obama Administration. I think it's shut down a lot more in the Trump Administration. I do think that there is a gradually progressive effort by all public entities to be more in control of the information that they give out. So, it's not even just government. It's companies, non-profits. Everybody's hired a PR [public relations] person or a communications department, and their main people have been taught how to respond to questions in sound bites. It wasn't so much the government providing less information or people being less accessible. It is that everybody is much more conscious about communications. It's become a more professionalized field in some ways. That, quite frankly, has made it more difficult for reporters, because the best information you get is just having a conversation with somebody who's not being guarded, who basically will just tell you stuff because they trust you and they could say, "You didn't get this from me," or, "This is on background." They would explain stuff to you, and I think that there is a lot less of that now than there used to be. It's just because everybody has a PR person. It drives me nuts.

SI: When you first started reporting on air, you had obviously been a print reporter. You said you had gone on C-SPAN and that sort of thing, but was there any way you developed yourself as an on-air personality?

PF: Yes, it was quite a transition, because on air, you're almost performing. You are performing. Even though you have a written script for your produced pieces that you're reading, you have to not sound like you're reading. You have to sound like you are talking to your best friend and telling them a story, and that takes a while to do. You really have to project yourself out there. I was used to, sort of going back to this, I was very shy and I kind of used my pad and pen as something to hide behind. I liked to not be part of the story. I was just like this hidden presence that would listen to people and take it all in and then write it or report it. Then, when you're on air, you become part of it. You really have to put your personality into it. You have to

have energy and emotion, and it's a different thing. I really had to learn that. The writing of the stories, the reporting the stories was not a challenge, but it was the actual presentation of it that was something new I had to learn. I honestly can't say that I'm still even comfortable with it, even having done it for twenty years. Some people are perfectly natural. They walk right in, and they sound great right from the beginning. They've got great personality. They're naturals. Then, other people like me have to learn it. I guess, since I'm still doing it, I'm probably okay, [laughter] but it always seemed strange to me.

SI: The September 11th attacks, obviously, were like the Pearl Harbor attack or the Kennedy assassination, events that grab everybody by surprise. Are there other stories that you remember covering that were really striking to you?

PF: What we haven't talked about--it was one of the things I had covered over the last, let's see, what year is this? This is terrible.

SI: 2018. [laughter]

PF: For the last ten years at NPR, I was [a correspondent on the National Desk], covering voting issues--but we won't even go there--I've been covering poverty. I'm the poverty reporter at NPR, which is something I wanted to do. We didn't have a poverty reporter, and it was something I hadn't covered at all, these issues of housing and food insecurity and welfare issues and income inequality. I've got to tell you, those have been, for me, the most rewarding stories that I've done. I have met the most incredible people covering those stories, and they're people who sometimes are homeless or they're just really struggling. Some of them, these people that I interview, they're just amazing, the odds that they're up against. They've got to work so hard just to survive. What I think is so great for me personally is that I've covered all this policy stuff, tax stuff, homeland security, and then this is more the real people that are being affected by it. We don't hear enough about that, anywhere in the media. NPR, I think, is fairly good at covering that type of stuff, but I just think there needs to be more of those stories, that these are the people who we need to know.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

PF: I kept meeting all these great people, so I suggested to my editor, a few years ago, doing a series of stories about some of these amazing people and we called the series "Doing More with Less." They were just profiles of people. Some of them had alcohol problems, some were immigrants, one guy was homeless and had gotten out of jail, but they saw around them these social problems and they just decided that they were going to try and fix them and with hardly any resources had set up some organization or operation to help all these other people who were in the same situation as they were, with nothing. I mean, they didn't have anything, and they were just doing incredible work. I did this whole series of profiles, and I thought it was amazing. To me, that was one of the most rewarding things I've done as a journalist. It wasn't a big news event per se or a really famous person. It was about these human beings just trying to survive against all odds and then really excelling.

SI: What is the mix between something that you pitch because you think it is an interesting, important story to cover or a new way of covering something versus things you are assigned to do?

PF: Since now I'm covering poverty, it's much more feature-oriented. It's not a news-driven beat, so I do get to probably propose an overwhelming majority of the stories that I do. It's sort of like when I was an editor with those reporters in the Midwest. It's a constant back and forth. I might suggest to my editor this story, and they'll say, "Oh, that's great, but also can you just cover this little thing that's going on?" or, "Oh, that's a great idea. How about we take this particular angle?" which might not have been something that I was thinking of. It's definitely a back and forth, a kind of negotiation in some ways. Because I've been doing it a long time, I think I do get a little bit more flexibility to do stuff that I think is warranted. That's the advantage of having a beat, because you get a sense of what's going on in that area, like what's going on in housing.

The big issue right now in the whole nation is this lack of affordable housing, that people are just being completely shut out of the market, or they have to spend so much of their income on housing, especially in a lot of urban areas. Then, of course, that's driving up homelessness. You also have the racial aspects of who can buy houses where. I just know that from covering poverty, half the people I talk to, that's their biggest issue, is they have no place to live, or they have some really crappy place that they live in that they pay an exorbitant amount of money for. They might not even have heat, and there's terrible crime around.

Another big series I did about two years ago, when I was walking around with some housing advocate talking about this issue, he said, "You know, you should go to housing court and see what goes on there. You wouldn't believe the stories that people bring to housing court. These people are being evicted." I told my editor, "I think I'm just going to go hang out in housing court and meet people and then follow them home. If they let me, I'll go home with them and find out what their stories are." So, I did that. I went into the D.C. housing court, and it was unbelievable, the hundreds of people just being evicted constantly from their apartments. Then, I got a bunch of their stories. I watched what happened in court, and then I went home with them. I was able to do profiles and then meet the landlords and find out what their situation was. Because I was covering a beat where I was familiar with those issues, I was able to figure out a way to illustrate one of the main aspects of poverty in America. I might not have been able to do that if I wasn't already covering poverty. This was before Matt Desmond's book *Evicted* came out. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Matt Desmond, a sociology professor at Princeton University, wrote *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction.]

SI: One last question for today. I know you are in the process of writing a book. Have you done any other outside writing?

PF: Not really, no. This is my first book. I've written some magazine articles here and there, but I haven't done much outside, just because my full-time job takes up so much energy. I've always wanted to write a book, even when I was a little girl and was interested in Nancy Drew and Lois Lane. I always wanted to write a book.

This is a topic that was of interest in our family. The time was right, and it's another slice of American life. It kind of works a little bit into what I was saying about covering poverty issues. This is another story about people who are disadvantaged. We as a society decided that people who had leprosy should be taken from their homes and isolated and confined in some remote area in Louisiana, hoping that the problem would be forgotten, that the problem would go away. It turns out that leprosy is probably the least contagious disease there is. Ninety-five percent of the human race cannot even get it. For the other five percent, it takes long-term sustained contact to contract the disease. It's just very difficult to get. We now have a cure. But it was all because of the stigma of leprosy, and the image from [the movie] *Ben Hur* and the Bible and, "This is a terrible thing and people's arms fall off," which does not happen. The human race almost got into a tizzy over this threat that really was not a threat, and it was all kind of tied in with fear of immigrants coming in and bringing in germs. That's the story.

SI: I look forward to reading that. [Editor's Note: Pam Fessler's non-fiction work *Carville's Cure: Leprosy, Stigma, and the Fight for Justice* is scheduled to be published by Liveright Publishing on July 14, 2020.]

PF: Me too. It's right there.

SI: Yes. [laughter]

PF: As you see, I am writing notes to myself to make sure I keep on the themes, "Stigma, worse than the disease, makes solving problem harder," just to remind myself as I'm writing. These are the themes.

SI: Well, thank you so much for your time today. I really appreciate it.

PF: It was great. Thanks a lot.

SI: Thank you.

----------END OF TRANSCRIPT----------

Transcribed by Jesse Braddell 1/14/2018
Reviewed by Lauren M. Smith 3/21/2019
Reviewed by Kate Rizzi 12/2/2019
Reviewed by Pam Fessler 1/22/2020
Reviewed by Zach Batista 2/19/2020