

BARNARD COLLEGE CLASS OF 1971 ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The Reminiscences of  
Linda Balagur Peyster Zappulla

2015

## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Linda Balagur Peyster Zappulla conducted by Amanda Breen on March 18, 2015, and by Katherine J. Brewster on May 8, 2015. This interview is part of the Barnard Class of 1971 Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

Barnard Alumni Class of 1971 Oral History Project      Session: 1

Interviewee: Linda Balagur Peyster Zappulla      Location: (Telephone Call)

Interviewer: Amanda Breen      Date: March 18, 2015

Q: Where were you living when you decided to apply to Barnard?

Zappulla: I lived in Freeport, New York, which is a suburban town on Long Island. I went to Baldwin High School.

Q: How did you find out about Barnard?

Zappulla: I have no idea. I don't recall how I found out about Barnard. It was one of two schools that I applied to. It had the major that I thought I was interested in, and I did major in Latin American Studies. It was one of the few schools that had that topic as an existing major.

Q: What was the other school you were interested in?

Zappulla: State University of New York at Albany. I think at the time it was called Albany State College, or something like that.

Q: Were there other factors that led you to apply to Barnard, or was the Latin American Studies major the sole determinant?

Zapulla: The only thing that I recall is the major. You know, I liked New York City, so I guess the fact that it was in the city was a positive, but I don't think that was really a determining factor.

Q: Did you live on campus during your first year?

Zapulla: Well, that's a complicated answer. When I first went, I was a commuter because I lived within fifty miles of Barnard, and they didn't have enough campus housing. So I got a dorm room, I'm thinking around January, so kind of mid-year. But by then I was pretty involved with a student at Columbia and more or less was living at his apartment on Claremont Avenue.

Q: What were your first few days at Barnard like? Did anything differ from your expectations?

Zapulla: No. I think I enjoyed—you know, I was commuting, so I would take the Long Island Railroad and then a subway up to school, and I was enjoying classes. I was making friends. I was not terribly involved in the commuter—I think there was a room for commuters to hang out in, and I don't recall that I ever got involved in that scene. But I just remember enjoying the college experience and finding the commute was okay.

Q: What are some of your fondest memories from your time at Barnard?

Zapulla: Well, I mean, that's a big question. Well, I guess the first year, I had made some friends during orientation, and, you know, was able to stay connected to those girls, and we

became friends that lasted both throughout the college experience. And some of them I'm still friends with now. So certainly that was important. I had this boyfriend. He was a member of the Zeta Beta Tau [ZBT] fraternity, and so we spent a lot of time there with his friends.

Q: How did you decide on the Latin American Studies major?

Zappulla: I probably need to answer the prior question a little more fully. I married the Columbia student that I met early in my freshman year in June, at the end of my freshman year, so that kind of changed my status at Barnard. I then began to live off campus. I graduated from Barnard, but as a married student I was a little bit distanced from the campus activities.

Q: Would you like to add anything else, or should I move on?

Zappulla: I think we can move on.

Q: How did you decide on the Latin American Studies major?

Zappulla: I was interested in Spanish. I had taken Spanish from the time when I was in sixth grade, and so I didn't quite want to be a Spanish major. I liked history and government, and that seemed to be a major that combined the two. It also involved a lot of classes at Columbia. So I took probably two thirds of my classes at Barnard, and as I got deeper into my major, maybe a third of my classes at Columbia. So I enjoyed that, but it was just a combination of topics that I was interested in.

Q: Were you involved in any extracurriculars either on campus or in the city, or were you primarily focused on academics?

Zappulla: I would say I was focused on academics. I always had a summer job, but I did not have any part-time jobs during the school year. I think because I was married, I didn't get involved in campus activities so much.

Q: Were any of your friends involved in campus activities? Were there any clubs or organizations that were popular?

Zappulla: I don't recall.

Q: Do you feel that Barnard offered you a unique college experience?

Zappulla: I do.

Q: Why do you feel that Barnard offered you a unique college experience?

Zappulla: Well, some of it I realized in hindsight when I would go to reunions and I would attend lectures given by professors. I was always struck by the quality of the language that people used compared to the language that I was hearing every day in the business world. So there was a value in the communication capabilities of Barnard people, students as well as faculty, and just

an acceptance of intellectual curiosity as part of the daily conversation. I think the last thing would be something that I didn't really recognize at the time, but the benefit of going to a women's college meant you're in a classroom with primarily women. Many of my classes had men in them, but there was no effort to impress the boys. It was just about what you wanted to say and how you wanted to present yourself in class. And I think that's one of the unsung benefits of a women's college. I don't know that I would go out of my way to choose a women's college, and I didn't choose Barnard because it was a women's college, but I think I got that benefit from it.

Q: You taught school for several years before getting an MBA at Harvard and pursuing a marketing career. What was that transition like? Was the MBA always your ultimate goal?

Zappulla: No, I knew nothing about the MBA when I graduated from Barnard. I was suddenly struck by "What am I going to do after college?" I was taking a teaching class, History of Education or something like that, and I was able to get a student teaching job at a local junior high school. And that became a class—I got credits for doing that student teaching. It was in a bilingual program at a junior high school nearby. So I was using my Spanish, which was handy. But it wasn't that I was planning a career in education—I just sort of fell into that. And then as I was teaching for three years, I thought, you know, I'm really more ambitious than being in the classroom. I didn't find New York City public school administration appealing. So I was moving to Boston after those three years of teaching, and I got a job in business, and I had the opportunity to see a lot of resumes, and it seemed to me that the people with the most interesting resumes were the people who had an MBA. So I applied to Harvard for an MBA, and when I

was accepted, I found that I was again in a room of like-minded people, which I really appreciated. They were smart, but they were ambitious. And they were not looking to become doctors or lawyers, they were just interested in business. It became a great fit for me, but it was not something that I planned from my Barnard time frame.

Q: When you were applying to business schools, was Harvard the only one you applied to?

Zappulla: It was. I don't know where I got the chutzpah to do that, but it was the only place I applied.

Q: Were you still living in Massachusetts at that time?

Zappulla: Yeah, I was living in Boston at the time.

[END OF SESSION]

Barnard Alumni Class of 1971 Oral History Project      Session: 2

Interviewee: Linda Balagur Peyster Zappulla      Location: (Video Call)

Interviewer: Katherine J. Brewser      Date: May 8, 2015

Q: [By what name would you like to be known and have attached with your interview?]

00:00:26 Zappulla: Well, I started at Barnard as Linda Balagur. That was my maiden name. I got married at the end of my freshmen year and became Linda Peyster. So I graduated as Linda Peyster. Ten years later I divorced Bob Peyster, and ten years after that, married Bob Zappulla. So on Facebook, I'm Linda Balagur Peyster Zappulla, which is a bit of a mouthful, but at least everybody who might know me would find me.

Q: [During this interview, we want to know about your life before, during and after Barnard. Where would you like to start?]

00:01:55 Zappulla: You know, it's a really hard question, obviously hugely open ended. I've been looking at the questions, which are quite amazing and thinking, "Boy, I don't remember most of this." You know, tell me a story about—who was a specific person—I think I have a lot more concepts than specifics. But maybe during the course of conversation, there'll be an occasional specific that will come up.

Q: [Tell me what you remember about your life growing up.]

00:02:43 Zappulla: Sure, okay. I was born in New York City. I was born at the French Hospital in New York City. And three years later, my older brother and I and my parents moved to Long Island, where there were two more kids born. So there are four of us and we have eleven years from oldest to youngest—brother and sister, sister and brother. So I am now very close to my sister, who's five years younger than me, which means she is going to turn sixty in two months. She's facing that. My two brothers, who were very much at odds during, I guess, the adolescent years of my younger brother. They barely spoke to each other. But now, they're very close, even though they're eleven years apart. And people who don't know them say when they have the same facial hair that they look like twins, which the older brother thinks is great and the younger brother is not so happy about, as you could imagine.

Q: [Tell me more about your experience growing up on Long Island.]

00:03:49 Zappulla: I grew up in Long Island. We lived on Green Avenue, which was a tree-lined, dead end street. My husband used to tease me that I was always looking to recreate Green Avenue when we were looking to buy a house, that that was the kind of street and environment I wanted. So that was interesting. I never saw it that way, but that's what he saw. So I walked to public school, I think we were a quarter of a mile from the elementary school and a half a mile from the high school. Took a bus to the junior high school. In those days, it was junior high. I lived in the town of Freeport, but I was in the Baldwin School District. And Freeport was pretty heavily black and the school district was not so good.

Q: [Tell me about your awareness of and experiences of racism growing up, of class differences.]

00:04:47 Zappulla: Baldwin was very heavily white and the school district was very good. In my class, there was one black girl. That's what we called them in those days and I think that's what they called themselves. Her name was, coincidentally, Betty Black, and she was a friend of mine. She was in our circle, although, perhaps, not in my closest circle. I would say it was a pretty standard, suburban upbringing. We had one car. My father would either go with some neighbors or a taxi to the Long Island Railroad and go to work in New York City and my mother was a stay-at-home mom with, you know, eventually four kids. She worked one year when my younger brother was in high school and earned enough money that she and my father went to Europe.

Q: [Tell me more about your Mom.]

00:05:44 Zappulla: But other than that—she worked before they got married. She was a buyer at Macy's. And she was a college graduate, but she was a traditional 1950s housewife.

One of the questions on your list was, “Were there any ways in which you felt different from your friends?” And my sense at the time was economic difference, that we probably didn't have as much money as some of our friends. Their families took family vacations, they had two cars, their houses were nicer, newer, whatever it was. We are Jewish and it seems that most of my friends in high school were Jewish. I don't know exactly how that happened. They weren't all members of the temple we attended, but that's who they were. And there were lots of kids—obviously, even in New York, Jews were not in the majority.

Q: [Tell me more about growing up Jewish.]

00:06:47 Zappulla: There were plenty of kids that I knew that were Irish Catholic or whatever. But somehow, most of my close friends and the ones that I stayed in touch with that I'm still in touch with were all Jewish, which is an interesting observation after the fact, yeah.

My sister is the family genealogist and I just spent the weekend with her and she's new on Ancestry.com, so we've got all these very pretty family trees. And so, I've learned a little bit more about my parents' background. My father's family was from Russia, Odessa, Minsk—so I'm not exactly sure what part of Russia—Ukraine, I think, perhaps. His mother was born in the U.S. and his father was born in Russia.

Q: [Tell me about your Mom's family background]

00:07:42 Zappulla: My mother's family was from—Austria. Her mother was born in Vienna, and her father was born in Paris, and her older brother was born in Vienna, and she was the first one born in the U.S. So both of my parents were born in the U.S. of Eastern European background.

Q: [What do you remember about your grandparents?]

00:08:16 Zappulla: So my—you know, I don't know what my father's father did. He died when I was four years old. And my father's parents had been divorced, and so I don't know what he did.

My grandmother had remarried and her second husband, who was dead before I was born—so I never knew him, he was a doctor. And so, we called her Grandma Doc. I don't know what my other father—did. I think back in Russia, the family were carpenters, which is, you know, what little I remember there. My mother's father was a businessman and a diplomat in Europe. And they traveled a lot back and forth to Europe. And I learned when we did an oral history with my mother that her parents were pretty estranged.

Q: [Tell me more about their relationship]

00:09:21 Zappulla: Her father spent a lot of time in Europe and her mother and the two children were in New York, living on the Upper West Side by themselves. Her parents, my mother's grandparents, I think, sent them money. And some of the time, it was not clear—my grandfather worked for his father-in-law and in—and so, they went to Europe back and forth a lot, they mostly took a boat. I know when my mother was sixteen in 1933, she went to Europe with her mother. They went to Portugal, they were there for six months. She was graduated from high school by then, she went to Hunter High School and graduated young—smart, smart lady.

Q: [Tell me more about your Mom being smart.]

00:10:18 Zappulla: She wanted to go to Barnard, but I think she didn't get in, because we talked about that. I since learned that she hadn't taken the College Board exam because she was in Europe, and didn't want to wait another year before going to college. Barnard would have been a logical place for somebody like her from New York City. Anyway, they were in Europe and they

took a train from Portugal to Vienna to visit the grandparents. And of course, this was in the early era of, you know, Hitler coming to power and she said they were very uncomfortable in the train. They were kind of told, you know, “Look straight ahead, don’t make eye contact with anybody,” they were Jewish, they were a woman and two children traveling alone. It was amazing to kind of hear about that.

Q: [I can imagine it was uncomfortable. Tell me more about what happened.]

00:11:03 Zappulla: They did go and visit the family in Vienna. They came home and then my mother went to college. She went to the University of North Carolina. She had an uncle from England who sent her two hundred pounds and that’s what paid for her entire college adventure. Yes, she took a train down to North Carolina. You know, it was really interesting to hear about that. My dad went to NYU [New York University]. And so, that was kind of the family background.

Q: [Very interesting. You mentioned earlier that your Mom was smart and that she worked before she was married to your Dad. Tell me what you know about that.]

00:11:48 Zappulla: Yes, she worked in the linens department at Macy’s. She bought domestics. And my dad was friends with her older brother, so that’s how they met. And then, the two boys—men—went into the Army and fortunately, both of them came back. And so, they got married after the war in 1946, and in 1947 my brother was born. In 1950, I was born.

Q: [Tell me more about your Dad and what he did.]

00:12:29 Zappulla: You know, he was—I would say he was an entrepreneur. He had a number of different jobs. Some of them were jobs, some of them were his own business. I don't think he was terribly successful. But we always had food on the table and we went out to dinner every Sunday as a family and we knew that—you know, you had to ask before you ordered lobster. And there were days when he felt good and you could order whatever you wanted, steak or lobster, and there were other days when you had hamburgers and mac and cheese. But I guess that was the break for my mom, who was cooking all week. So that's one of the things that I remember.

Q: [A weekly family tradition. Tell me a story that exemplifies the main qualities of your Mom, or, your Dad for you.]

00:13:39 Zappulla: You know, I—we'll see if a story comes out, because I don't know that I have a story and I thought about it a little bit. My dad was a fairly quiet man, and he was a little hard of hearing, so I think he tended to drift into the background in many conversations. My mother was certainly, the more outgoing. And I'm going to say the more dominant parent, but not in an aggressive way. She was calm and thoughtful and, you know, took everything in stride—until I wanted to get married at the age of eighteen, then she wasn't quite so calm. I barely heard my parents yell. I almost never heard them curse. I do remember one time, one of my siblings did something and my mother shouted up the stairs, you know, something like, “God damn you,” and I thought, “Wow, that's quite something for her.”

Q: [So—outgoing and forceful. Anything else you'd like to share about her?]

00:14:45 Zappulla: You know, she was involved, but not in a leadership role in school. So she would have been part of the PTA [Parent Teacher Association] and she would invite our teachers home for lunch and make them tuna salad and biscuits or something like that. But she was never President of the PTA or any of that that I recall. Her brother lived nearby, and his only son, so my first cousin. The two couples were friendly. And so, we often would have dinner or spend the evening with my cousins. If we had guests for dinner, she would cook. She was not a great cook. I remember—these are some of the stories—we didn't have a lot of fish, but if she did it was often sole poached in milk, which is about as dull as you could get.

00:15:47 Zappulla: I never realized that squash, like butternut squash, came from the ground. I thought it came frozen in a square, because that was how my mom cooked. She had a lot of friends, women friends. Not always, but often, the parents of my friends. Some of her friends she had since 1953, people that she knew. When she moved out of Long Island, she's still in touch with some of those friends, one of whom is the mother of one of my high school girlfriends. And so, you know, we've got those connections. She didn't become friendly with this woman, Doris, until way after I was out of the house. But they became quite close friends and they played a lot of bridge. They would play bridge, they would play mahjong and—you know, she would kind of organize that. She wanted a good group, so she liked the intellectual challenge. She didn't want people who were not great bridge players.

So I always thought my mother was terrific. I don't think we were ever intimately close where we, you know, talked about a lot of personal stuff, but we were always close and enjoyed spending time together. I was not very close with my dad—as I said, because of his hearing difficulty, which he had before he went into the war. So you know, he had it as a child or as a young adult. And because he was quiet and a little introverted. When I went to business school, I did talk with him and he found that really interesting. And so, that brought us together, that gave us a little bit of a bond. But by that time, he was in his late sixties, I guess. He died in 1984 and I graduated from business school in 1978. So there weren't a lot of years there.

Q: [So you and your Dad seemed to connect over business matter.]

00:17:49 Zappulla: So you asked what he did as a profession and I said he was an entrepreneur. He had some businesses that were financial. I'm not sure if he was a stockbroker ever, but I know he was active in the financial industry. He was an equipment leasing broker, had his own business in that area. At one time, he owned a coin Laundromat and he used to bring home all the money. Wednesday nights, we would all count the money on the dining room table and put everything into coin wrappers. So that was certainly not a very professional business for him, but for whatever reason, that's part of what he went through. And over the years, mostly he worked in Manhattan, sometimes he had an office on Long Island.

Q: [Did you talk about your career?]

00:18:45 Zappulla: As an adult, I talked about my business and my career with my family all the time. My dad didn't talk about it so much. Maybe it was just, you know, Dad supports the family and, you know, we leave it at that.

Q: [More like a 1950s marriage?]

00:19:38 Zappulla: Yeah.

Q: [Tell me about any class differences you may have been aware of growing up on Long Island.]

00:19:56 Zappulla: You know, I didn't consider it a class difference. I felt like we were all middle class and, you know, maybe they were a little more upper middle class and we were more lower middle class. But I never felt that our parents were different or that our values were particularly different. It's just I was aware—so we were talking about this last weekend—with my mom, who is ninety-eight and still going strong—

Q: Congratulations.

Zappulla: Thank you, we are very, very lucky. Yeah, it really is. I lost my train of thought.

Q: [You were talking about your any awareness of class differences you may had growing up.]

00:20:38 Zappulla: Vacation, yes. So for my family—they sent the kids to summer camp. So I would go to camp for six weeks or eight weeks and my parents would kind of stay home, but that was their idea of the vacation, I think. You send the kids to camp and the parents stay home and do whatever they do. So I went away every summer—

Q: [Tell me more about your camp experiences.]

00:21:06 Zappulla: Well, I started with Girl Scout Camp, which was two weeks out on the eastern shores of Long Island in the East Hamptons in what must have been extraordinarily valuable property later. But apparently, at the time somebody gave us access to cabins with cots and you brought your sleeping bag and—and you had no air conditioning and probably no power in those cabins. But you weren't sleeping on the ground. So that would have been two weeks of summer camp when I was younger. And then, maybe by the time I was eight or ten, I went to camp in New England. Some people went to the same camp for ten years, I think I went one or two years to this camp, one of two years to another camp. Some of them were Jewish camps, some were not. One camp was a mountain climbing camp, where it was six weeks and every week, we climbed a different mountain.

Q: [Where was this camp?]

00:22:10 Zappulla: I think it was in Keene, New Hampshire. And it was the Boston University Sargent Camp that I attended. So, I didn't mention that when I went to elementary school I

skipped second grade, so I was a year younger than all of my classmates. And I'm a year younger than you, presumably, Katherine, which is important at this age to remind people.

Q: [Yes. Agreed. Very important.]

00:22:43 Zappulla: Yeah. So when I was fifteen, all of my friends were sixteen, and they were all camp counselors. I wasn't old enough. So I didn't want to go to camp as a counselor in training because that would have been embarrassing, so my parents sent me to Mexico for six weeks to a school where I did a Spanish language immersion class. And, you know, it was just an amazing experience. It was on the university campus. We lived in the dorms. We had the freedom of, you know, being in a university at that age. I had a Mexican boyfriend who was just adorable, and met some people that I stayed friends with for a while. The following summers I worked at home. I got a summer job. But that was sort of the vacation story.

Q: [Sixteen! That's really young to travel abroad by oneself. And, sounds like a wonderful experience for you.]

00:23:43 Zappulla: Yeah, right.

Q: [Tell me a little about your experiences with sexual exploration, drugs, etc.]

00:24:13 Zappulla: You know—we didn't really talk about it a lot. I think that my mother was a little bit of the "don't ask, don't tell" school. You know, there was a little pot and LSD going

around the high school and I don't remember ever getting, you know, parent lectures about, Stay away from that stuff. You know, you just knew that you weren't supposed to and if you did, you certainly didn't tell your parents about it. I didn't get any lectures. I do not recall what the birds and the bees conversation might have been. I didn't get any lectures about, you know, staying a virgin. We just didn't—she didn't talk about that stuff with us. How she reacted to all of the women's lib stuff wasn't a subject of conversation. I always had the feeling that I could be anything I wanted.

Q: [What do you remember about the male-female roles, if any, in your family?]

00:25:15 Zappulla: I never felt in the family that there were stereotypes. But it was not really a subject of conversation.

Q: [In your family no sense of male-female stereotypes.]

00:25:32 Zappulla: Correct. And maybe that was because my mother had, you know, a strong personality and was the spokesperson of the parent unit more than my dad.

Q: [Tell me about your experiences with men and dating, etc.]

00:26:05 Zappulla: My first boyfriend was Kenny Silverman in 7th grade. We went steady. I don't know how it started, but we went steady. And I seem to remember I had a ring on a necklace, you know, on a chain around my neck. I would have been eleven, you know? Pretty

juvenile. I remember sitting on the couch in his basement making out, which at the time consisted of, I would say, pretty dry kisses. And our song was “The Lion Sleeps Tonight.” So—I don’t know why we broke up. I have this vague notion that I broke it off, but I don’t have any recollection of why. He, subsequently, maybe in high school, started dating a girl a year behind us, who he subsequently married and I ran into them at a reunion, a high school reunion years and years later.

Q: [And, in high school?]

00:27:16 Zappulla: But I went out, I dated a fair amount. I had a lot of boyfriends. I don’t think I had anybody who was—you know, for a year after that. The boy that I went to the senior prom with was not from our school, he was a friend of somebody I met on that trip to Mexico. My senior year in high school, he was a freshmen at Bard College. And he was the first boy that I had sex with. But I don’t remember it being any of a, you know, “Oh, my God, I’m going to lose my virginity,” because there was probably a fair amount of, you know, petting and hands-on stuff before that. And so, that would have been the sexual revolution. We didn’t—I wasn’t a revolution, it was just we, you know, kind of inched into it, I think. And didn’t consider it something that we had to stay away from, and if we wanted to do it, we did it. I was certainly sexually involved with the boy—I don’t know whether to call him a boy or a man, but the—

So I told you I got married at the end of my freshmen year at college. We became sexually involved right away, and we were certainly sexually stupid because—so we met maybe the third week at school or something, so let’s say we met in September. In December, I found myself,

“Oh, my God, I’m pregnant.” He had a friend—a fraternity brother whose dad was a doctor and I went to the doctor and I got a shot. And I wasn’t pregnant anymore. So obviously, I had some kind of an abortion. I do not know what it was, chemically. And it was not this amazing, traumatic experience for me, either physically or emotionally.

Q: [Tell me about your relationship after the abortion.]

00:29:26 Zappulla: We stayed together, this boy and I. I sort of say in hindsight the reason we got married—he wanted to get married. He was a junior, so it’s not as if he was, you know, much older. He wanted to get married and I didn’t want to have to say to my parents, “I want to live with him,” because that was something—that would have been a big deal. You know, it was one thing to say, “My mother was don’t ask, don’t tell,” but to let your—I would have then been eighteen-year-old daughter live with a boy—I didn’t even know what Barnard would have said about it. So summer vacation was coming up and I was going to have to go home and live, you know, with my parents. He had an apartment by then, so he was not living with his parents. And his parents were supportive. So somehow, we ended up getting married.

Q: [In order to live with him you decided to get married?]

00:30:25 Zappulla: And just to kind of follow that thread, we—he graduated from Columbia—I didn’t say that. He was at Columbia, he went to medical school. And then, he did his internship and residency in Boston, which of course, I had moved up there with him. And then, I went to business school while he was a fellow, I think, a post-doc. And it was during that—so we were

married, by then, ten years. And it was during—so we were separated once or twice before that and—I sort of say we had five good years and then five years where I was trying to get up the guts to tell my parents I was going to get divorced. So aside from the fact that we were separated, then we got together, we were separated, we got together—when I was in my second years of business school, you’re going through all this job search and I was having a really hard time figuring out—did I have to stay in Boston?

Q: [Trying to decide how to end your marriage.]

00:31:35 Zappulla: Because he had another year in his program. Or could I go anywhere in the world? And when I went in and talked to a career counselor at—I was at Harvard Business School—somehow, in that conversation, I realized that I had to sort out my personal life before I could decide what to do, um, for a job. So that was the how and when I made the decision to get divorced. And so, at Christmastime of my second year of business school, I moved out. I found a sublet apartment in downtown Boston and, you know, lived there, finished school and that spring, got divorced.

Q: [Tell me more about your concerns around telling your parents that you wanted to get a divorce.]

00:32:37 Zappulla: You know, it was just—being able to admit that I’d made a mistake and they were right. And I don’t know, you know, if they were “right.” I mean, this was not the right man for me long-term—if I would have waited a year, would we have split up or would we have just

gotten married a year later? Because that's what they would have liked to have done, they just, I think, felt it would have been easier for them to understand or to tolerate. So I don't think it was a value thing. I didn't realize at the time—and this would have had nothing to do with me, that both my grandparents had had issues with their marriage. My father's parents were divorced. My mother's parents were estranged. And so, they never mentioned that to me as part of a, you know, rationale for why I shouldn't get married early because my one grandmother was fifty-five years old when she got divorced from her first husband.

Q: [Wow! I can only imagine that must have been difficult for her, having been married so many years as well as divorce being really unusual at that time.]

00:33:43 Zappulla: Right, right. Yeah.

Q: [I'd like to spend a few more moments on your grandparents. Do you remember what your grandfather did?]

00:33:53 Zappulla: Well, she—so we talked about the fact that I didn't know what my grandfather did, but I forgot to say that my grandmother was a businesswoman. She had a dress manufacturing business. And so, my father worked for her for a number of years. So, you know, all this is sort of coming back. My father knew how to sew, knew how to use a commercial sewing machine, which my mother did not. So my dad taught me how to use a sewing machine. And when I was in high school, junior high and high school, I made a lot of my own clothes.

And my mother never knew how to use a sewing machine. It was my dad who taught me how to do that.

But I think it was just a matter of, you know, not being comfortable—knowing that they'd be disappointed and they'd be unhappy and sad on my behalf. I think that's what it was.

Q: [Your parents would be unhappy and sad on your behalf. We've talked about your first marriage and you're now in Boston, in Harvard's Business School and about to get divorced. I'd like to back track a bit and ask you to talk about your experiences in the Spring of 1968.]

00:35:05 Zappulla: Uh-huh. Okay. Yeah. Yeah. So—not as connected as if I had probably been on-campus for two reasons. He was a pre-med student, and he was a junior, and he was trying to make sure he got, you know, all the classes he needed to get into medical school on a timely basis. He knew he had a long academic thing ahead of him. He was one of three boys. His middle brother was a freshmen at Columbia. And so, just as an aside, the reason I met Joy Rocklin who was then Joy Pollack is she was dating Stephen Peyster, who became my brother-in-law. So that was sort of fun.

But Stephen was very involved. Stephen was living on-campus, I guess he was a freshmen, he was probably living in the dorm. He was in some of the buildings that were occupied. So we were aware of things from him and we were scared on his behalf. So we were not involved personally, but Stephen, who was always about the cause, was out there both physically and emotionally. So that was really more of our connection to it. And you know, I would say that even though I consider myself a bleeding heart liberal, at the time I was probably not so keen on

occupying a campus building. So I might have been a little more conservative at that time. But we were not very connected to that.

Q: [What, if any, was your involvement with some of the other political issues of the day? Vietnam War, nascent women's movement, etc.]

00:38:19 Zappulla: You know, I was not involved in any of that. I was a young, married woman. I, you know, was cooking and dragging my laundry in one of the shopping carts. I was going to class. You know, my commitment to my parents, who gave me the money that they would have spent on the dorm—and that's what I lived on. So our two parents really supported us while we were in college, married, by giving us the money they would have spent for our room and board and that's what we lived on. And then, we had summer jobs, but we did not work, um, during the school year. So I think that, you know, the focus and the priority was, you know, my commitment to my parents that I would finish college, wouldn't drop out, that I wouldn't get pregnant. So I was not involved, really, in any of it.

Q: [Tell me more about your sense of the women's movement and Feminism at the time?]

00:39:28 Zappulla: I was always in favor of it. I always took it for granted that I would do or be whatever I wanted. My first job out of Barnard was as a teacher, but that was not what I went to Barnard for. You know, one of the questions is, you know, "What were your plans when you got there?" My plan was somebody was going to advertise Linda Balagur or Linda Peyster "travel the world for us," because languages were my thing. And sort of in my senior year—and I

graduated in three and a half years—so in my last semester, I said, “Oh, my God, what am I going to do?” I was taking a History of Education class with Patricia A. Graham and I don’t know how we got into this conversation, but she said, “You know, I could get you in as a student teacher to one of the local public schools and you could take—I could get you credit for that.”

Q: [So, like an internship for credit.]

00:40:39 Zappulla: So I had the four points that I was already taking and she was going to give me this other thing. And then, you know, you could see if you could get a job as a teacher. And so, that’s what I did. I did student teach at a junior high school at Columbus Avenue and 107<sup>th</sup>, and ended up getting a job there. They got funding for a reading specialist, not that I had any training in reading, but a reading specialist in the bilingual program. And so, I graduated in January and they hired me immediately for that spring semester in the bilingual program. And I taught these kids, these mostly immigrant kids in the neighborhood, I taught them reading skills. And I had to make up my own materials because there really wasn’t anything. And so, I did it in English, I did it in Spanish, I had some Korean kids.

Q: [Sounds like you were challenged and emboldened by the experience.]

00:41:38 And then, I got hired as a regular teacher at the same school and I taught there for another two years. And the reason I was bringing it up was because we were talking about my professional expectations. And I realized after a couple of years that I was not a classroom teacher. I was getting complacent, I was sort of taking the easy way out. And that’s not what I

wanted for myself. I wanted to be challenging and doing my best. And I did not see the New York City Public School Administration as a place I wanted to go. But I was too ambitious to stay in the classroom. And so, when we moved—my husband graduated from med school, we moved to Boston. I didn't get a job as a teacher, although, I had an offer to teach Spanish at the Brookline Public Schools, which would have been a very, you know, prestigious place to go. So I got a job in business.

Q: [Tell me more about your business experience and how that lead you to apply to Harvard Business School.]

00:42:39 And after a couple of years of looking at resumes and deciding that people with a business degree were the ones with the most interesting jobs, I applied to Harvard and, you know, went there. So I don't know that I explicitly felt engaged in the women's movement, but I think I took advantage of it. I think I associated with it emotionally and connected with it. I just was not particularly a social activist personality.

Q: [Tell me more about your experience as a woman at that time, late 1970s, in Harvard Business School.]

00:43:35 Zappulla: So the year I started—and it'd be interesting to—if you tell me that Columbia was the same, there were fifteen percent women at Harvard. And the year I graduated, it was up to twenty-five percent, so that was a big increase. Harvard is a big class and we had about 800 kids in each year. And we were broken up into ten sections of about eighty kids. And so, in your

eighty kids, you had, you know, less than ten women. But what connected us was we were all smart, we were all ambitious, we cared about business, we had all different backgrounds. I was, you know, certainly one of the softer backgrounds with a liberal arts degree and teaching. But within the classroom, I didn't have any issue or concern with being a woman.

Q: [To answer your question about women in Columbia Business School—There were about 400 people in my class of 1978—about twenty-five percent were women, and that percentage stayed stable while I was there. Tell me about your experiences as a woman in business, discrimination, sexual harassment, accepted and welcomed, relationships with other women, etc.]

00:44:34 Zappulla: Certainly, in some of the jobs and in some of the specific disciplines there were more of fewer women. Harvard does not have a major for an MBA, but if people asked me, I say I majored in Marketing because I did more marketing classes my second year. The first year was all core curriculum and you took it with those eighty people in that section. And those were the people with whom you became really close friends. And so, I made some great friends. I was married, and I used to joke the first year that mine was going to be the first marriage that Harvard Business School helped. Because for the first time, my husband, who was a doctor, was having to pay attention to the household because I was so busy with school.

Q: [So he was having to pay attention to the household for the first time in your marriage.]

00:45:32 Zappulla: Right, exactly. So—but I loved Harvard. I had a great time there. We had a couple of women professors, so you know, that was a positive for the women in the class. There

was a Women's Students Association that I was a part of. When I was at Barnard, I think because I was married, I didn't get involved in the school government or any of that leadership opportunity that being at a women's college should offer you. But at Harvard, I said, "I'm going to do everything I didn't do before," because I had this second chance to be involved, and maybe I had grown into my own leadership mindset. And so, I was the class president, representing the section on, you know, some school councils. I was involved with the Women's Students Association and the Marketing Association. So I was active and I loved that.

00:46:35 Zappulla: And so, that carried forward with me, personally and professionally. But last year, there was a lot of publicity about Harvard Business School and issues surrounding women. We were at a reunion and the women in our class were looking at each other and saying, "We didn't see this. This was not our experience." And so, I don't know if—it's hard to imagine we were oblivious. But I never looked at being a woman as an excuse or a reason not to succeed or a reason why I should be given some privilege that, you know, I didn't earn. And financially, even though it seems to me maybe there were issues in industry with women getting paid less, you know, with a Harvard MBA, I was often among the better paid of my peers.

00:47:36 Zappulla: And so, I never had that feeling that I was only earning seventy-seven cents for every dollar that, you know, somebody else was earning. And I do give some credit to, you know, the prestigious business degree, which you would have experienced, as well. And you know, my own personal capability and the fact that I just expected things and, you know, went for them.

Q: [You were among the better paid of your peers.]

00:48:16 Zappulla: I was.

Q: [Tell me more about your business career.]

00:48:23 Zappulla: So I feel like my career had three large buckets. The first dozen or so years, I was in consumer products marketing. I went to Corning Glass Works right out of business school. I had done a—

Q: [Corning Glass Works in Corning, New York? What a coincidence. I grew up near there in Albany, New York.]

00:48:38 Zappulla: Yeah, yeah. I had done a marketing strategy project with the Consumer Products Division and I had gotten a summer job in Boston with their medical products division, which was located in Boston. And so, when I was interviewing—I was very interested in Corning. I was not that keen on going to a small town in upstate New York, you know, being from New York City and all, but I decided if I was going to be at that company, I better see if I could live in Corning. And so, when I took the job, I went to, um, Corning. They had offered me a job in the field as a sales rep, and they said, “You can go to San Francisco, you can stay in Boston, you can do anything you want.” But I thought what I really wanted was corporate marketing and that was going to be in Corning, so I better test it out. And you know what? Corning is a lovely place to live. In the end, I did not want to live there.

Q: [Tell me more about not wanting to live in Corning, NY.]

00:49:48 Zappulla: It was too small. I did not want to—even if I was married and raising a family, I didn't want to live in such a small place. So after a couple of years, I accepted a job at Lenox China in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, right next to Princeton. I actually bought a house in Princeton. And so, I was kind of following a product management career path. And then, I got recruited to go to Europe and work for a European company and bring their product, which was fine jewelry back to the U.S. And so, I sort of said, "Well, this is the job I wanted coming out of college." And so, I thought, "If I don't try it, I'll regret it." And so, I did accept that job. I lived for a year in Europe. I lived in the United Kingdom and in Italy, outside of Venice.

Q: [What happened next?]

00:50:47 Zappulla: And then, I when came back to the U.S. I was based in Miami because I was supposed to sell to the entire Western Hemisphere. This was a privately owned company by a man with a very big ambition and probably not quite so big a pocketbook. But I convinced him we should focus on North America, where I had, you know, the language and the connections. And so, that's where we started. So I ran that business for about three or four years and we were doing pretty well, but part of our business model was we offered our customers credit. So if I made a million dollar sale, I would let the customer pay for it after I delivered the product, but I had to buy the gold and produce it in Italy, bring it back to the States, get it to him and wait

another month for him to pay. And that was in our business plan right from the start. But I think that as we grew, it became harder and harder for the company in the U.K. to front that money.

Q: [Sounds as if you eventually ran into a cash-flow problem.]

Zappulla: Right, he kind of pulled the business back a little bit and I left there and I went back to New York and I went to work for Revlon at that time.

Q: [Tell me more about your experience at Revlon.]

00:52:17 Zappulla: And I was at Revlon for five years.

Q: What exactly were you doing for Revlon?

00:52:23 Zappulla: Yeah, I was marketing the Revlon brand in the department store. So we would have a Revlon counter like you have an Estée Lauder counter. And in those days, Revlon was trying to stay in the department store to give the prestige image to the product that was also distributed in the drug stores and in mass market, you know, Target and Walmart and so on. So it was a fun job. While I was back in New York, I met my second husband, which is a great story, which I can tell you after. But in the meantime, I am at Revlon and I had just gotten pregnant, I was thirty-nine years old. So this was a pregnancy that was watched and managed and I knew I was two weeks pregnant and I got laid off.

Brewster; [Thirty-nine. Two weeks pregnant. And laid off. What a challenging time that must've been.]

00:53:21 Zappulla: Yes, right, right.

Q: \_\_\_\_\_ [??]

00:53:30 Zappulla: Well, a year and a half, Yeah, uh-huh. Yeah. So—

Q: \_\_\_\_\_ [??]

00:53:43 Zappulla: Oh, \_\_\_\_\_ [??] that's what it's called, elderly primigravida. Which even if you're forty, doesn't sound very nice. "elderly" was always my grandmother, certainly not me. I have begun to say it's okay to call my mother elderly at ninety-eight.

Q: \_\_\_\_\_ [??]

Yes, right, so we're kind of following the career path and then I can come back to the personal path. So I got laid off and it kind of blew up my fantasy of being, you know, this stylish, pregnant executive. I was Vice President at Revlon and it's a very fashionable industry, so I was really looking forward to buy all those great maternity clothes. And so, I didn't.

Q: [What happened with your job search while pregnant?]

00:54:42 Zappulla: I was looking for a job. I did some—project work for somebody, and so, that kind of kept me busy and kept some money coming in. But I did not end up getting a job before my son was born. I do recall, I was interviewing with the jewelry company, Monet [Jewelry], the costume jewelry company. And this was in—it must have been in October, because my son was due November tenth or something like that. And so, this was a second interview and they said, “So if, you know, if we decided to hire you, when would you be available to come to work?” And I said, “Well, really, I probably can’t come to the work till after the first of the year.” And they looked at me and they said, “Why?” And I said, “Well, I’m going to have a baby in about three weeks.” It turned out I had the baby sooner because he came early. They didn’t realize that I was pregnant. You know, I was a tall woman, they didn’t know, I was wearing a black maternity suit. I guess, you know, the desk was probably blocking belly and they thought I was a big woman.

Q: [So they had no idea you were pregnant while you were interviewing for the job?]

00:55:50 Zappulla: Right, so that was pretty funny. But you know, it was just part of the fantasy that I had that did not take place. So then, I was home a couple months after Matt was born and that was lovely. And you know, it was probably very nice because I wasn’t working most of the time I was pregnant, I could really relax. And you know, my doctor said, “Get lots of rest.” And initially, I was thinking, “What? Are you crazy? How am I going to get a lot of rest? I work full time and all of that,” but I did. So in the end, that all worked out. And then, I got a job working for the local utility—the gas and electric utility on Long Island, which—LILCO [The Long

Island Lighting Company], if you ever heard of it. And, the utilities were looking for a change agent.

Q: [Tell me more about your experiences at LILCO.]

00:56:50 Zappulla: I was hired as a marketing manager for the gas business and they were going through deregulation. And so, they wanted somebody to help them learn how to become competitive. And I was there for seven years and eventually became Director of Marketing for both gas and electric. The electric marketing was really more conservation marketing programs to have people use less electricity. But it was very interesting. I had the chance to do business-to-business marketing, I did my first direct mail and database marketing. So really, professionally, I got a lot out of it. And I was working for man who I really liked and he moved to Kansas City. And he spent several years recruiting me and I kept saying, “I don’t even know where Kansas City is.” And eventually, he made me an offer that I thought, you know, this is interesting and my husband said, “Let’s go.” So we came out here and we looked at it and we said, “This is a pretty town,” and we moved.

My husband was ten years older than I and he was a carpenter. And so, he retired when we moved here and he became the stay-at-home dad. And Matt was going into second grade. And you know, we moved here, we bought a house. This was a start up—I didn’t mention that. This was another start up, which of course, after a year closed, which was not unexpected. But we liked it here at that point, and so, we decided to stay. And so, I got another job—I got a job in the telecom industry with another start up. That was part of the deregulation of the local telephone

industry. And I would say that was my favorite job of all. I just loved working for that company. It was already two or three years old, so it was not a brand new start up.

Q: [Tell me more about this experience.]

00:58:58 Zappulla: We were doing well. We were using consumer marketing techniques to market to small businesses—in the B to B world [business-to-business], so I felt like I was really contributing something. We were growing like crazy. Eventually, we got a big investment from KKR [Kohlberg Kravis Roberts] and they pushed us to go public. So we were in the process of putting together a public offering. Our executives were on the road. We had put together, you know, this amazing financial plan and we could grow substantially, as long as we had, you know, this influx of cash. While we were doing that, of course, was when the tech bubble burst. And so, we did not go public. And after a couple more years, we went through two bankruptcies. The company is still alive. It was merged with another company, it was taken over. It's changed a lot. But being part of that growth process was really exciting.

And so, after that—so that was my dozen years in the telecom and utility world, then I worked for Payless Shoe Store. So I was doing retailing and fashion. So that was kind of my professional background.

Q: [Payless Shoe Store? The store that sells shoes at a discount?]

01:00:35 Zappulla: So Payless was initially a private label company and I—say it again?

Q: [They had their own brand of shoes? Didn't know that.]

01:00:46 Zappulla: Yeah, they sold shoes under their own names. They didn't have any Nike or, you know, brands that you would recognize. And so, they had started to do a strategic study and they concluded that the way they were going was going to put them in a death spiral against Walmart and you can't win. So they decided to become a house of brands. And I put together, gosh, more than a dozen brands. We either acquired a brand—for example, we acquired the brand Airwalk. And we developed brands, we licensed brands—we licensed the brand Dexter—and we developed brands from scratch. So I did all of that brand development work for them. I worked with the merchants who buy the product. Well, what I didn't realize about retailing is that basically a retail company is a marketing entity.

So whereas, I was used to the marketing department owning product, price, place, promotion—that was the whole company at Payless. And so, marketing was really more of the promotion and advertising, but we were asked to be the strategic driver of the company. And so, if the merchant who buys the shoes had two brands that were junior brands, how do they know which brand to put a pair of shoes in? And so, I developed some tools that help them. And I'll give you an example of Airwalk, which I mentioned—was a kind of a skateboarding brand, and very individualistic. We also licensed—actually, we acquired the brand American Eagle [not American Eagle Outfitters]. And that was more of a preppy kind of brand. And so, the brand identity for American Eagle is “my life, my friends, my style.” And for Airwalk, it was “be real, be free, stand out.”

Q: [So, sounds as if you brought the idea of branding to Payless and successfully implemented it within the corporate culture. You changed the way Payless does business.]

01:02:58 Zappulla: And so, with some kind of collage imagery and those kinds of brand essence statements, the merchants could say, “Well, this is more funky, this is more individualistic, this shoe should go in that brand. This shoe is preppy and social and it should go in this other brand.” And so, that was really a very exciting way to bring to life the uniqueness of a brand in a business that was not used to doing that at all.

And then, I also was responsible for some of the geographic areas. So I had responsibility for the U.S./Hispanic market and for—our marketing in Canada, which is unique and some international marketing in South America. So my Spanish all of a sudden, you know, had some value, although, it was pretty rusty by then. But it was a lot of fun. And it was, as we used to say, it is not rocket science. It is twelve dollar shoes. So even though it was a big business, it was over a billion-dollar business, you know, it wasn’t rocket science. So it was fun, it was fun.

Q: [Tell me more about your accomplishments at Payless.]

01:04:31 Zappulla: Well, in Canada, we expanded to the point where we had 300 stores, over 300 stores. We developed a marketing plan that allowed us to compete against Target, which a couple of years ago had gone into Canada with great fanfare and they have come out of Canada, actually. They have withdrawn from that effort. So competing effectively against Target was

huge. Bringing a dozen brands to life in a company is a big deal. And it really changed the whole strategic approach of the company. In the U.S./Hispanic market, we developed a bilingual direct marketing program that was pretty complex, but that centered around geography and gave us enough focus on addresses and language capability, so that we could send bilingual postcards or, you know, direct marketing pieces the households that were surrounding some of our stores that were in particularly strong Hispanic, um, pockets.

And we were able to deliver—I'm making up these numbers because I don't remember the statistics. But let's say we delivered twenty percent more productive direct mail pieces than we did in our regular English language across the country program, which was very successful. So we took a successful program and customized it for the Hispanic market in a very effective way. And then, my favorite accomplishment in all of my different jobs was when I hired people and was able to coach them and help them reach their potential. You know, hire somebody as an analyst, promote her to a manager, see her come up as a director—and they happened to all be women. So that was very rewarding. And when I decided it was time for me to part company, I wasn't quite ready to use the word retire, but I did.

Q: [Can you give me an example of the result of your experience mentoring women?]

01:07:01 With Payless, I saw one of those people that I hired right out of grad school become director, you know, behind me. So that was nice.

Q: [So when did you retire?]

01:07:20 Zappulla: March 1, 2013.

Q: [Tell me more about your decision to retire.]

01:07:30 Zappulla: Well, let's go back a bit—because I think the answer will make more sense later. So I moved from Florida back to New York. And this is going to be how I met my second husband. When I was living in Florida, I learned to scuba dive and I moved—

Q: [Sorry to interrupt, and, what led you to Florida?]

01:07:56 Zappulla: Led me there? So when I was in Florida working for this jewelry company. It was very high stress job. It was a privately owned company, the owner was just, you know, manic about everything, so I was really stressed out all the time. This was in the era of the Telex. And so I would come into my office on any morning and it was already—you know, it had been six hours of daylight in England, and so, I had these Telexes—you know, the paper was folded out the door when I came to work at eight o'clock in the morning. And so, once in a while—I'm very fair and I don't go out in the sun much, despite living in Miami, so I didn't go out on boats very often. But once in a while, a friend would invite me out, you know, for a boat ride. And so, we went out one time and he gave me a mask and fins and I was snorkeling. And down below me were people who were hanging around with the fish and I thought, "I want to be one of them."

Q: [Tell me more about your experiences scuba diving.]

01:09:03 Zappulla: And so, I took scuba diving lessons, I got certified and I thought this was great. And then, I moved back to New York. And so, I went to New York to work for Revlon. I said, Well, I guess I could be a vacation diver or I could learn to dive with a wet suit. So I decided I didn't want to only dive on vacation. Initially, when I was working at Revlon, I was living with my mother on Long Island and I joined a dive club on Long Island and I went out on day trips with the club, you know, rent-a-wet suit and I learned how to dive in cold water. And then, I moved into the city—I had bought an apartment on 80th and West End Avenue. And I stayed part of the club, but I never went to meetings because I lived, you know, in town. But I went on a dive trip to Saint Thomas with the club and that's where I met my husband, Bob Zappulla. He was a diver, he was a member of the club.

Q: \_\_\_\_\_ [??]

Zappulla: But because I hadn't met him in New York, you know, I had met him for the first time in Saint Thomas. We got along great; we had a wonderful time. I came home and I said to a friend of mine, I said, "You know, this is probably better off as a vacation romance because we're so different." This is a man who did not go to college, he's a carpenter, you know, his family is blue collar. He's got grown kids. But he called me and we started going out and were, you know, together ever since then. So that was great. And we went scuba diving all the time. We probably went three or four times a year and we did day trips, you know, we continued to do those day trips on Long Island.

01:10:54 Zappulla: And after a couple of years, we got married and he already had two kids. His kids were fifteen and eighteen, I think when we met. And he didn't want more kids. And I said to myself—because I always imagined I would have children and the first Bob and I did not have kids. And I went through a period of time when I thought about, you know, Should I just have a kid myself? Should I have, you know, a child by myself, artificial insemination? And I decided I didn't want to go there, that even though I thought I could handle it financially and, you know, emotionally, it probably wasn't the right thing. So I never did pursue that. But when we were getting closer and he didn't want more kids, I thought, "Well, here I am." I met him when I was thirty-six. By that time, I was thirty-eight or thirty-nine. So okay, I decide I want to have kids, I'm going to get rid of this man and I'm going to see if I meet somebody else.

01:12:02 Zappulla: And what are the odds I meet somebody else? What are the odds that person wants to have kids? What are the odds I get pregnant? I was going to be forty-one, forty-two. So I said, "You know what? I will just bite the bullet." And I said to him, "You're going to just have to hold me up when I get miserable if, you know, somebody else has a child and I'm not." But you know, that was the agreement that we had. So we got married. We got married in March. And three months later he said to me, "So were you serious about having a kid? Would you still want to have a kid?" And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Okay." The next day I went and had my IUD removed and, you know. I mean, literally, I couldn't believe it, but I was pretty happy. And I was pregnant a year later. You know, so you asked how fast did we get pregnant, that was sort of the sequence of events.

Q: [What a wonderful story! He changed his mind about having another kid so that you could.]

01:12:59 Zappulla: So I was forty when Matt was born, what a beautiful fortieth birthday present, even though I was not employed. And I was always the primary breadwinner. You know, I made a lot more money than Bob. But he had a steady job and he was a saver, so we both came into the marriage with a similar amount of cash in our pockets. Eventually, I got a job, which of course we knew would happen. And when we were living on Long Island we had a live-in housekeeper for most of the time that we were both working, which was a real luxury because we never had to worry, is the housekeeper going to come in the morning, is the daycare going to come. You know, the kid's sick, you can't take him to a day care.

01:13:50 Zappulla: And so, that worked out really nicely for us. We didn't have to spend weekends doing chores—she did a little bit of house cleaning and she cooked during the week. So we didn't have to spend our weekend doing house cleaning and laundry and that sort of thing. So it was really nice. And his parents lived in Brooklyn. My mother lived, um, in Freeport. And so, my mother was half an hour away, his parents were forty-five minutes away, we saw them pretty often. My mother used to complain we didn't ask her to babysit often enough. But you know, when you're older and you have this baby, you just drag him everywhere. So then, eventually, we moved. And we were living in Kansas City. We had been here about six months when—let me back up on one more thing. My father-in-law died while I was pregnant with Matt. So he died in 1990. So my mother-in-law was a widow and she was living in their same apartment and she had a stroke right after we came to Kansas City and she came to Kansas City to convalesce.

Q: [Tell me more about that experience, your mother-in-law living with you.]

01:15:06 Zappulla: Bob was the stay-at-home dad, so he was at home. He could look after her and we had plenty of room in our house. And she recovered almost entirely and it was great. And she stayed with us for the rest of her life, which was another two years. So we had that rare, these days, three generations in the household. She was very easy to get along with, she—for her, our household was luxury because she had lived in a five-room apartment with four children and her father-in-law in Brooklyn. And you know, so to live in this house where somebody comes and cleans it, you know, every week or every other week—but it was great. She was easy to get along with. She cooked a lot, she was great to—you know, she loved being with her grandson.

01:15:58 Zappulla: So that was really nice. And so Kansas City was good to us. And in—let's see—2006, it was just before one of our Barnard reunions, Bob was diagnosed with lymphoma.

Q: [Lymphoma? Oh no! My Mother had Lymphoma. As I remember, there are two kinds, whose names I'm forgetting. One is more serious than the other. What kind did he have?]

01:16:26 Zappulla: Large cell diffuse lymphoma, non Hodgkins lymphoma.

Q: is that the less serious one?

01:16:35 Zappulla: Well, honestly, I don't know, but this one eventually killed Bob, so it was pretty serious.

Q: [I'm so sorry. If you feel comfortable, tell me more about your experience with your Bob's illness.]

01:16:47 Zappulla: Well, you know, they said to me when we first got the diagnosis, "If you have to have cancer, this is the best one." And it was a fifty percent recovery opportunity—you know, chance of survival. And of course, we assumed we'd be on the top side of the fifty percent. We weren't. So he went through lots and lots of chemotherapy, a number of surgeries, radiation therapy, he had a stem cell transplant. We went up to, um, Omaha for six weeks for the stem cell transplant. Our son was a junior in high school at the time. And so, Bob died—seven years ago. Yeah, yeah, it was seven years ago last week, in fact. So it was a big transition.

Q: [That is a big transition. Even though you may know that a person is dying, when it actually happens, it's still a blow.]

01:17:49 Zappulla: Right, right. Well, my son by then graduated high school, he was a junior when Bob was diagnosed, and Bob died at the beginning of his freshmen year of college, so two weeks into his freshmen year. So my son went to University of Illinois, which was about 400 miles away. And we drove him there in August. Bob was pretty sick by then, but he wanted to go. And we had, you know, a mini van and we put cushions in the back of the mini van. And so, Bob, you know, slept most of the way there and we got a wheelchair when we were at the hotel.

And we took him to his dorm and Bob got to see him settled into his dorm. I mean, we knew it was coming. So then, two weeks later, Matt had to come home because Bob died. So while Bob was sick, I was very lucky because Payless was super supportive of me.

Q: [That's fantastic!]

01:18:57 And, basically, my boss let me do whatever I needed to do and gave me the structure to keep my life, you know, alive, as opposed to kind of being drowned by the health stuff, which is pretty overwhelming. So during that time, it was clear to me that my personal ambition had waned. You know, the priorities and the things you care about just change. And I wanted to work, I loved being a professional, I loved being good at what I did, but I didn't care as much. I didn't need to be the president, or I wasn't looking for the next promotion. So Bob died and I continued working and I was very grateful for that. I think it was really helpful for me. But after a while, I was just sort of tired of it and, you know, the politics and the personalities and issues. So I just—you know, started talking to my financial planner and I kept saying, "So what if I were to retire now? What would it look like?"

Q: [And, what did your accountant say?]

01:20:02 And he just kept saying, "You know, you're fine, you can do it." So I did. And I had continued to live in our house. It was a pretty big house, five bedrooms, four baths, not a lot of property, but it backed on a creek. It was a beautiful house and I used to really like having a house. All the time I was single, I had a house. But this house was not fun anymore. And I don't

know if it was because of the memories or if it was because of the weather. But I kind of jokingly said it was the hot summers that did me in, because I loved gardening and I had put in a beautiful garden and I had done some new landscaping and then we had this really hot summer—weeks and weeks of 100-degree weather and everything died. Oops.

01:20:57 The next year, we planted it again and it died again. And the third year, we planted it again and it died again and I said, “I’m through.” It’s just—I mean, I had to spend \$10,000 for a new driveway. What a boring place to spend \$10,000! You know, it looks just like a driveway, and yes, I needed it, but it was—so while I was working, I just couldn’t envision selling my—you know, getting together to move. But as soon as I stopped working, I started getting my house ready to put on the market and I decided I wanted a more urban lifestyle. I was in New York at Barnard and I took the bus down to, you know, 80th Street and was wandering around my old neighborhood and I thought, “I could live here in a heartbeat. I don’t know anybody in New York anymore and I probably couldn’t afford it, but I like the energy.” And so, I looked around. Where in Kansas City could I live and get some of that?

01:22:00 Zappulla: And so, I did find an area which I am very happy with. It’s called The County Club Plaza. Do you know Kansas City at all?

Q: [No.]

01:22:11 Zappulla: It’s a shopping area and there are some high-rise buildings and some houses surrounding it. And so, where I moved to, I can walk to the bank, I can walk to the drug store, I

can walk to dozens of restaurants, the movies. If I worked at certain law firms, I could walk to work. And so, I decided I was going to move. And so, I did.

This kind of brings the retirement—why I did it, and what do I do. So I said, “What am I going to do once I move?” And I had a bunch of things I wanted to do. I wanted to teach, I wanted to coach. I liked to coach people. I wanted to keep doing some marketing, some consulting and I was already involved in several volunteer things and I wanted to do more of that. So that was kind of my package of what retirement might look like. And it’s really busy.

Q: [Tell me more about your busy life, now, in retirement.]

01:23:16 Zappulla: Well, I have been teaching marketing at University of Kansas, and University of Missouri Kansas City, just as an adjunct, so one class a semester. I want to keep doing that. I am not teaching this semester and I need to be a little bit more proactive to try to gin up something for next semester, but I haven’t had the time to do that yet. I am coaching. I volunteer with SCORE. Have you heard of that?

Q: [Yes. I think my father volunteered with SCORE shortly after her retired.]

01:23:47 Zappulla: Used to stand for Service Core of Retired Executives. It’s associated with the Small Business Administration. And it doesn’t stand for that anymore because we’re not all retired. I’ve been doing a lot of counseling of people who are wanting to start or expand their small business, and we give classes. So I’m teaching there and I’m doing some business

coaching, which I really enjoy. And then, I'm involved with a couple of other nonprofit things. And I am president of my temple, which is a really time-consuming task. Hopefully, I am at the halfway point.

Q: [Tell me more about your experience being President of your temple.]

01:24:37 Zappulla: Well, it's two years as president and two years as immediate past president. I'm in my second year of president. So I'm hoping that that will roll over. And I travel. You know, I do some personal travel, I do some family travel. I was planning to go to that little mini reunion that you guys had in November. And my cousin got married in New York City the week after and I just couldn't go to New York three weeks in a row, because I had something else, as well. So I have been doing those things.

Q: [It's sounds as if your life is very busy and fulfilling. Tell me about what's happening with your son, now.]

01:25:29 Zappulla: Matt is twenty-four years old. He is in grad school at the University of Illinois, getting a Masters in Mechanical Engineering. That's where he did his undergrad. I'm looking for a photograph to show you. Because he had a really rough time his first couple of years—you know, when his dad died, he kind of got distracted—he did not have great grades the first year or the first two years. And so, he wanted to get a Masters of Engineering, but he didn't get accepted at the University of Illinois. So he got a Masters of Business instead at the

University of Illinois and he fulfilled the family tradition where every one of the children and grandchildren so far have an MBA, so that—

01:26:36 Zappulla: I don't know—let's see, if I can put this in front of the phone. Does that help?

Q: [Yes.]

01:26:53 Zappulla: So he's a really—he's a very handsome man. He is six foot four, 220 pounds. He's a triathlete, you know, so it's all muscle. He's a really sweet man. I am so lucky. You know, he's just a lovely person. And we get along really well. He is a scuba diver, so we have tried every year—when he's had winter break, we've gone in January on a dive trip together. But you know, I mentioned that I have two stepdaughters and they are his sisters, but they are really a generation older than he is. They were, I don't know, twenty-two and twenty-five when he was born or something like that. When he was small, they were more like aunts.

01:27:44 Zappulla: But now, maybe two, three years ago, I could see their relationship change and they really are like siblings, it's just a delight. And so, there's two girls—one is now forty-nine years old and recently remarried to a very nice man. The other one is forty-seven, divorced from the father of her child, my granddaughter and not with anybody. And Nicki just turned eighteen, is a freshmen in college, the first of her family—I mean, neither of her parents went to college. So Matt was the—he felt the paternal need to make sure that Nicki did what she needed to do and he went down—they live in Virginia—he went to Virginia and took her on college

tours. He helped her fill out her college application. He got her a new computer. I mean, it's just beautiful to see them.

Q: [Tell me more about their relationship.]

01:28:44 Zappulla: You know, on the one hand, he's her uncle, but he's only seven years older than she is. So they have a very interesting relationship. She respects him, she looks up to him, but she also feels a younger connection with him. So I have made a conscious effort to stay connected with my stepdaughters. We see each other a couple times a year. Doreen and Nicki typically come to visit once a year and I go to see them once a year. Fran—doesn't have as much vacation, and so, mostly, I see her when I visit them. Yeah—so.

Q: [What, if any, thoughts have you had about dating since Bob's death?]

01:29:40 Zappulla: Well, I certainly would like to have another relationship. I have dated a little bit. It certainly took several years before I was ready. The first time I said I wanted to date, I realized I was ready to talk about it, but not to do it. And then, a year later, I did date somebody for about eight months, but he was quite a bit older than I am and I decided that that was not going to work. So that's something that I would like to have in my life. From time to time, I have done something about it. Right now, I am not doing anything about it. My sister, who was briefly married, has met several people through online dating and so has encouraged me once or twice. I've used her experience as motivation.

Q: [How would you describe who you are, today?]

01:30:37 Zapulla: Where I am right now is interesting relative to that, because I feel like when I was working, I had a much greater sense of who I am and what I'm all about. I feel like being in this retirement mode, even though I'm busy and I'm doing a lot of things that I care about, I feel a little bit more at loose ends. And so, in terms of meeting somebody and communicating who I am or—or speaking to, you know, a matchmaker, it just feels—it's an odd time for me and I haven't quite figured it out. I would like to keep teaching. I would like to do some consulting. I'm doing some work, interestingly, right now, for the man who brought me from New York to Kansas City. We stayed friends. And so, I'm doing some consulting for him right now and I feel really good doing that.

So obviously, that's of more value to me than the volunteer counseling that I'm doing. And I don't know quite what to do about that observation on my part, because I don't think I want a full-time job. I don't think it would be terribly easy to get a full-time job right now. And so, I'm kind of working my way through that. I like to travel, so there is certainly travel in my future. I am going to Spain and Morocco in October. I do have a friend with whom I travel, a woman is also a widow who has two kids, one of whom is the same age as my son. We get along really well. So I met her, maybe six years ago. You know, so that was lucky because you don't always make good friends late in life.

Q: [Tell me more about your relationship with her.]

01:32:36 Zappulla: We do a lot of things together. She lives here in Kansas City and she's a doctor and she's counting down to retirement, but she's about two years away yet. She's exactly my age. But financially, she needs to get that time frame.

Q: [What are your hopes and dreams for the future.]

01:33:00 Zappulla: You know, there are probably travel items—you know, scuba dive in the Red Sea, go to the Great Wall of China. I said Red Sea, but I didn't mean—I do mean the Red Sea, but what I meant to say was at the Great Barrier Reef, so Australia is on the bucket list place for me. So you know, I have some travel that's on my bucket list.

Q: [Is there anything more you'd like to share about your life, your time at Barnard, the impact of your experience at Barnard on your life. etc.?.]

01:34:00 Zappulla: So—I guess—I'll make two comments about Barnard and Barnard women. When my son was confirmed—so he was in tenth grade—each of the kids got up and made a little speech, you know, two or three-minute speech. And there was this girl who made her speech about whatever it was she talked about and I said to him—I said, “She needs to go to Barnard. She is a Barnard girl.” And he said, “What are you talking about? You know, you're crazy.” And I said, “Would you mind if I talk to her?” He wasn't great friends with her, but I didn't want to embarrass him. He said, “I don't know.” So I went over to her and I said, “You know, this is going to sound crazy, but I was really impressed by what you had to say, and I want to just tell you about a college that you might not think about living out here in Kansas City.” I

went to Barnard and I told her about Barnard. I said, “I don’t know why what you said spoke to me in the way it did, but I think you would be really intrigued to consider Barnard College.” I don’t know what happened to that, but I did try to send her there.

And then, another friend of mine has three daughters, twin daughters who are now freshmen in college. Last year or a year and a half ago, I was visiting them and they were talking, one wanted to go here and the other one was thinking about that. She was thinking about Barnard and she wanted to know why I went and what did I think about it. And she’s there. She’s there, yeah, yeah. So we talked and, you know, I told her some of the things that—I didn’t apply to Barnard because it was a women’s college. I applied to Barnard because it was one of a very few schools that had a major in Latin American Studies, which when I was in high school, was what I thought I wanted to do. It is what I majored in at the end.

But I ended up at Barnard and I loved it. And there were a couple of things that were really meaningful to me and they’re a little different now I think than when we went, when Columbia was for boys and Barnard was for girls. You have a choice now, you can go to Columbia as a woman or you can choose a women’s college where there might be boys in your class and you’ll certainly have men instructors, but you’re in an environment where you can be the leadership team without consequence, without worrying about it. And it just gives you a unique experience in the world. The other thing I noticed about Barnard more when I went to reunions than when I was there was the incredible articulate nature of our colleagues and our professors.

I don't know if you found this—I want to hear a little bit about your business school experience when we're done with the interview side here. I went to business school and I feel like my vocabulary sank and sank and sank. Even though I feel I am articulate and better than the average writer, I just don't have the skills that I used to have. And every time I go to Barnard, I feel like I'm surrounded by well-spoken people and I just don't see that elsewhere. So that is something that I value and that I associate with what's unique about Barnard.

Q: [I want to thank you for being willing to share your story. I've enjoyed listening to it and feel honored by your openness. Is there anything else you'd like to say before we end the interview?]

01:37:53 Zappulla: Well, it's very interesting because, of course, trying to answer these questions I go back in time, and the way you're approaching the questions took me more deeply into some of the things than I would otherwise have been—so I have enjoyed it, as well.

Q: [Thank you. And, one more thing has occurred to me that we haven't touched on, yet—your spiritual life. Tell me a little bit about that part of your life.]

01:38:12 Zappulla: Okay. It may not be as robust a topic as you might think. I was raised Jewish, but not terribly involved. My first husband was Jewish, similar not involved, and I joke that if I was married to somebody who was Jewish, I probably would be less involved than I was because I was married to somebody who was not. When Bob and I decided to have a child, I said, “You know, I cannot raise a child Catholic.” My husband was Catholic. And he was okay with that, I think even though he was pretty religious and became more religious—because he was divorced,

and the way that church at the time treated divorced people, it was so aggressive and mean spirited, I think he was somewhat turned off by it. He was active in the Knights of Columbus and after his divorce they basically said, “You can’t be part of this anymore.”

Q: [How painful that must have been for him. I had no idea that there was still such intolerance among Catholics then.]

01:39:22 Zappulla: So all his friends—you know, I mean, he could be friends with them, but he couldn’t attend meetings and he couldn’t be part of that organization. So he said, “As long as we raise him with some kind of religion, that’s fine.” So we had made the agreement we were going to raise him Jewish and when we moved here, I was sometimes the first Jewish person that anybody had met. Midwesterners don’t have a lot of Jewish connections. There are about—let’s see, what did I figure? There’s less than 20,000 Jews in Kansas City and the population of the larger area is slightly under two million. So you know, a very small percentage. Although, it’s a pretty robust Jewish community here, it’s not very big.

And so, we joined the temple to put Matt in Sunday School. I felt I needed to be involved as a parent because he wasn’t getting that much at home as he would have if it was a Jewish household. So you know, I was on committees and I made friends with people. Several times they asked me to join the board and I said no. They said, “Why?” I said, “Well, first of all, I’m not Jewish enough.” And they said, “Well, it’s not about being Jewish, it’s about running the business of the synagogue.” So that’s kind of the spiritual versus the business piece. And so, I

don't feel like I'm terribly spiritual person. I am very involved in the synagogue and I have some perspectives on both worship and spirituality in that context, but it's not a huge part of my life.

Q: [Tell me more about your involvement in the running of the synagogue.]

01:41:18 Zappulla: I am involved in, you know, making sure we have the right staff and that the budget is balanced, and that people behave nicely. We have all this stuff with people's stupid bad behavior recently, which is really frustrating. You know, it's hard enough to manage bad behavior in a business environment when you have money over somebody, but when you are working with volunteers who are just obnoxious or bullying other people, it's really challenging. So I'm very involved. It takes a lot of my time. It's not what I want to be known for. They think I'm doing a great job, you know, so these are some of the business skills you alluded to earlier. But it's not for me. You know, I'm doing it because I am here and when I jokingly said to you, you know, if I could get out of it I would. If I looked back and there was change—you know, say, I didn't get on the board or something—would I have done that? I don't know.

Q: [Tell me more about deciding to say, "yes," finally, to being on the board of the synagogue.]

01:42:28 Zappulla: You know, I have a tendency to raise my hand, I like to—fix things instead of complain. I think one of the things that's frustrating for me is this is not what I want to be known for, but it is what is taking up all of my time right now. And I'm learning from it. You know, there are certainly some aspects of it. But I'd rather be known for my business work. Isn't that funny? You know, they say, "You'll never regret having had more days off," but—and I

don't regret doing this, but it's really taking too much of my time. It's overwhelming. We've had some difficult challenges. We've had enormous staff changes. You know, every time you turn around something bad goes down. We're at a very good point right now, actually, which is nice. But it's been draining. And so, it's—you know, maybe in five years I can look back and say, "Boy, I really did a lot for them and I'm glad I did," but right now, I'm just trying to keep my head above water.

Q: [So—you've told me a lot about your work with the Synagogue. And, if you feel comfortable, I'd like to hear about your spiritual life, as well—your spiritual growth and development.]

01:43:45 Zappulla: Oh, spirituality. I am a member of a reformed synagogue and that is the least traditional of the three Jewish denominations. It's the one that is the most—I mean, all Judaism is about questions and about challenging things. But Reform Judaism is the one that is the most associated with—you personally assess the issue and determine what you want to believe, determine how you want to practice, what you're going to do. It's very open minded in that regard. And it has become more traditional—or our congregation has become more traditional in my view, recently, which is not my personal preference. We use a lot more Hebrew. I don't speak Hebrew. I know a lot of the prayers because I've heard them so many times. I look around once in a while, I'll bring a friend and I'm thinking, "Oh, my God, you know, this is really had to follow because there is so much Hebrew here."

And so, you know, there are things that have evolved in a way that have not been my favorite. An evolution that I have liked a lot is in the music. We do not have a cantor, which is an

ordained position similar to a rabbi. We have a music director who is a musician with a lot of Jewish background and incredible music skills. And she has been extremely open about bringing more people into the music. If you want to be in the choir, you can be in the choir. You don't have to be able to sing. She'll let you be part of that experience. There are things that I like about our worship and because—when my son was home, I went a lot to expose him to it.

My mother-in-law used to come with me, even though she was a devout Catholic because it was something social to do and she liked being in a house of worship, even if it wasn't hers. So everybody at the temple knew her, even though she was Catholic. And I do attend services pretty regularly now because I go with a couple of friends. So you know, it's one of these odd things. And you know, I guess the biggest observation, which I wouldn't say to a lot of people, is this is not what I want to be known for. Although, at the moment, it is probably what I am known for. And so, maybe that's part of my dilemma in the whole retirement thing and, you know, how I would characterize myself.

Q: [How would you characterize your relationship with Judaism?]

01:47:11 Zappulla: You know, I would say mostly not from a faith point of view. I'm a very pragmatic person. And so, if the rabbi was somebody that I liked and he was comforting to me, that was great. I don't associate that with, you know, faith taking me through. We had a real tragedy about fourteen months ago here in Kansas City. It was in all the, you know, national papers, I don't if you would remember it, though, where this neo-Nazi guy came and shot three people at Jewish organizations. He shot a grandson and a grandfather outside of the Jewish

Community Center, and then he drove half a mile and shot a woman who was going to visit her mother at a Jewish nursing home. The three people that were killed were not Jewish.

And so, the woman whose son and father were killed is a Methodist. I've met her and she's become pretty well known in the community because of this tragedy. And she just talks about how, you know, her faith holds her up and it, you know, has taken her through this time and helped her find something to do to, you know, convert this hatred into love and future and opportunity. And that's her, that's not me. You know, so I feel like there's a difference in that.

Q: [You come to Judaism from a pragmatic perspective, not a faith perspective.]

01:49:06 Zappulla: Yes, absolutely.

Q: [Tell me more about your relationship with the community of the synagogue.]

01:49:10 Zappulla: Well, because I've been very active, I have a lot of friends there and when Bob was sick, you know, they were there at the house, you know, bringing food when we needed it and driving him to chemo, if I wasn't available. You know, they were there for me, took me out to dinner, took me to a movie, held my hand and have continued to do that. So there is a community there that I am very connected to, and that's part of why I can't really quit this job because, you know, that's where all my friends are. And I never would have expected that my entire community of friends would be, number one, Jewish, and number two, you know, centered around the synagogue. You know, I mention that it was an interesting observation to me that my

childhood friends were all Jewish, and I have no idea how that happened or why because while my parents were Jewish, they did not say, “Only associate with Jewish kids.”

I knew parents who did that. I have a friend now who, when his kids were in high school, used to say to me, “My sons know that I will pay for any expenses they have if they’re dating Jewish girls and I won’t pay for expenses if they’re not, if they’re dating non-Jewish girls.” I mean, that’s pretty—I don’t know that I personally like that idea, but he was trying to motivate his kids every way he could. Neither one of them is married, so I don’t know where that’s going to land.

Q: [So—when you think about your son dating or marrying,—how important is it to you that he marries someone’s who Jewish?]

01:51:09 Zappulla: Right, right. You know, it would be lovely if my son were to marry a Jewish girl because I would like to, you know, contribute to the longevity of the Jewish faith. But since I married somebody who wasn’t Jewish—although, by the time I was thirty-nine, my mother didn’t care. It’s something that would be nice for a variety of reasons. It makes life easier in some specific regards. But he’s not terribly interested in it right now. Although, now when he comes home, I don’t ask him to go to temple with me, but he says to me, “I should probably go with you, shouldn’t I? To show my face as the president’s son.” But that’s part of, you know, him supporting me, which is pretty sweet.

Q: [Thank you so much for taking this additional time to talk about your spiritual and religious life. And, thank you for adding your story to the B’71 Oral History Collection.]

01:52:10 Zappulla: You're welcome.

Q: [Good night.]

01:52:13 Zappulla: Okay, thanks, all right, goodnight.

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