

Peace Drum Project
The Elders' Stories
2010

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Introduction

This year, we celebrate the *tenth year* of *The Peace Drum Project*. With this accomplishment in mind, we considered how to emphasize the Arts-as-a-career for our teen participants, and how to connect them more deeply with artists living and working in this community. So, this year's stories feature the life experiences of many of the visiting artists that the teens have worked with in recent years in *The Peace Drum Project*. These stories bring to life the accomplishments of the older artists in our midst, and they serve to inspire the teens to seriously consider how a career — a life — in the Arts would be for them. Each story is inspiring in its own way, and together as a collection, they illustrate the tremendous variety of talents, cultural experiences, creativity, and spiritual authenticity of the Arts and artists in our community.

Today, as our young people look forward to the future, they feel great anxiety about their ability to succeed in such difficult economic times. The stories of these elder artists are full of wisdom about surviving tough times and overcoming life's sometimes-painful lessons. They illustrate how one can turn these unsettling or difficult experiences into creative and healing work by being open to new ideas and 'thinking outside the box.' They also remind the teens that learning is a life-long endeavor, and that the desire to grow and learn comes from *within you*, not just from parents, teachers and mentors. At least half of the artists featured in these stories attended the Boston Public Schools — some of the very schools attended by the teens — which further bridges the gap about who can "*make it in the Arts*," and what it takes to become a successful artist in our culture.

The *words of wisdom* found within these stories echo the advice and guidance of elders from previous years, emphasizing hard work, openness to opportunities, and the importance of friends and family in giving birth to dreams and self-

esteem. While some families **did not** want their child to ‘*suffer the life of an artist,*’ or thought it could not be a financially viable career, there were adults in almost every story who fueled and supported the dreams of the artists when they were young. There was always someone—a grandfather, a friend, a sister, a teacher, saying, ‘*Don’t give up on your dreams.*’

This is why we believe that *The Peace Drum Project* is so important for the social, educational and personal development these youth. Even when they sometimes don’t understand how this *immersion in the Arts* is changing them, the teens’ evaluations and self-assessments clearly show that these experiences are inspiring new ideas and more open minds, expanding positive friendships, reinforcing the courage to take artistic risks, developing their abilities to solve problems differently, and supporting their efforts to stay in school.

A very high percentage (97%) of participating teens in recent years have graduated from high school and have gone on to college or community college. Many of them have stayed in touch with their elder partners, and the elders have followed their young partners progress in school and afterwards. We believe that this partnership between young and old through stories offers a powerful model for engaging young people with elders in a positive and meaningful way. *The Peace Drum Project* deepens the connections between youth and elders, and it builds understanding and greater support for each group within the larger community. In evaluations each year, the youth themselves rank their time with the elders as one of their favorite activities of the project.

We are inspired by the lives of the artists that we have worked with this year. Many of them have come from early lives of poverty and racial discrimination, and some have experienced multiple hardships. Some have raised families under difficult circumstances and have lost children before their time. Yet, they are all full of warmth, humor, optimism, generosity, and hope for the future. Their

resilience is not only inspiring, but provides a road map for our teens who have this priceless opportunity to connect with them, learn from their experiences, and honor their wisdom. We regret that we could only scratch the surface of their stories in our interviews. These stories just whet our appetite to know more about these interesting and creative spirits who have taken this year's teens on a journey through the last sixty years from Boston to Japan, Sudan, Tennessee, the Midwest and more. We hope that you will also be inspired by these wonderful stories.

We are most appreciative to all of the elders who were willing to share their experiences and knowledge with the teens this year. Their stories provide a bridge between the generations, and create common ground that helps to build a stronger community for us all. Young people today need more opportunities to work with elders because their stories teach us that peace is not randomly found. It is built through patience, caring about your community, and hard work. Many hopes, dreams, and challenges remain constant across generations, and knowing that others have faced similar obstacles, and have overcome them, gives power to youthful dreams and aspirations.

The teens who took part in producing these stories include: Livymer Caceres, Nancy Cardona, Merilin Castillo, Rogenzo Cruickshank, Jasmine Dozier, Abdiel Fonseca, Jessica Harris, Shannon Hills, Marjourie Jimenez, Ivan Richiez, Johniesha Smith, and Erys Valdez. We thank them for their respectful manner, lively energy, and curious questioning. The teens also received great support from Peace Drum Interns who traveled with them to the various artists' studios and helped with the interviews. These interns include: Prema Bangera, Emily Cobb, Susanna Derby, Eric Robinson, and Chris Watson. Courtney Williams provided fundraising and promotions support.

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on several occasions. We extend special thanks to two artists— Susan Thompson and Curtis Jones —who were both visiting artists *and* elder artist participants with us this year! Susan and Curtis worked with elders and the teens during the year, and were also willing to share their stories with us.

We dedicate these stories in memory of Charles M. Holley (1937-2006), creator of *The Peace Drum Project* and Co-founder of Cooperative Artists Institute. He is greatly missed by the many project graduates, elders, and artists who knew and worked with him over the years.

Susan E. Porter, Director

The Peace Drum Project

http://www.tribal-rhythms.org/drum_exhibit.html

Tom Menihan and Ginny O'Neil

Interviewed together by Shannon Hills and Jessica Harris

My name is Thomas Joseph Raphael Menihan, and Raphael is the only one I got to choose. I was probably named after my uncle, my mother's brother. My nickname growing up was Manny. A lot of my old buddies still call me that, but no one in my present circle calls me that.

Tom: I was born in Rochester, NY in 1945. So, that makes me 65, and I just got on Medicare, March 26. Rochester was a very nice place to grow up. I grew up in a suburb of Rochester and there was a lot of development going on. There were a lot of houses and malls, so for a little kid, there was always a pile of dirt to play in. Yeah, when I was a kid it was a farm, but by the time I was twenty and moved away, it was a lot of houses — a subdivision. Kind of, you know, suburbia. It was cool, it was good growing up, but I'm glad I'm in Boston now. It was a kind of isolated place out there. Cities are complicated places to live, but they are also pretty exciting, because there's a lot going on, and there are lots of people.

I grew up in a family of four kids — three boys and a girl. I had three siblings, and I'm the 3rd child. My brothers and sister are oldest to youngest Mary, John, me, and Peter. We were all born within 5 years. My dad was an artist. He painted portraits, did a lot of paintings, and taught at the University of Rochester. He did these amazing lithographs when he was in his 20s and 30s. Lithography is drawing on stone and printing from the drawing. While I was growing up, he had a studio in the back yard, so he would go down to the studio

everyday and do art. He would create these amazing portraits and murals, and he did a lot of church art. We grew up Catholic. It was quite amazing!

When I was seven years old, I was modeling for his art classes. I absorbed a lot from him and I always had art in my blood. I think for a while I was just overwhelmed by *his* art, and it took me a while to get out from under his shadow, you know? I was just so impressed by his way of doing stuff that — even though I was a furious doer, and always wanting to do the artwork— when it came to making a commitment to it, it took me into my late thirties to really get going on painting. I was a school teacher for 10 years in my 20s and I taught art. Or, one of the things I taught was art. Then, I became a graphic designer in my thirties. I was doing a lot of advertising and that kind of creative work. That was kind of a bridge into painting, which I got to when I met Ginny. We went to Jamaica, and we just were just blown away by the landscapes and the people, so, that inspired us to paint. I give Ginny a lot of credit because she was one of my angels that saw how much I loved art, and she helped get me there.

One word I would use to describe my family life would be *kindness*. You know, my family wasn't a perfect family by any means; we had all the typical stuff! But there was a sort of common thread, that everybody respected each other and tried to get along, and pretty much, we did.

I went to a parochial school — a Catholic school, and then I went to a Jesuit high school. It was a lot like BC High. In fact, they literally used the same plans for the building— it looks identical! Then I went to Hobart College of Liberal Arts in upstate New York. It was a pretty small school. It was co-ed, and that was a very good experience. Then I became a teacher, and ten years

after I started teaching I went to Harvard, and got a masters degree in education. That was really a great time for me to go to school; it was sort of like Ginny going back after she'd been living life for a while. You have this chance to process what you've done.

So, instead of getting a Master's degree, and *then* going and teaching for 10 years, I went and taught, and then got my M.A. I know, it seems a little backwards, but it was a good way to do it, really. It meant so much more to me, because I could synthesize the things that I had been doing. And, it got me energized and really farther out on the scale of open schools and progressive education. That was good, because I was too restricted in the traditional school where I had been teaching. The sixties were a great time for experimentation. But then they closed the doors pretty fast once Nixon-and-all had their way. It was a great time to be teaching —very exciting.

There's a benefit to that. A lot of tradition says you go to school, and go as far as you can, and then you do something for life. But it's really not like that! Do you know that expression, '*the 7 year itch?*' That's an old expression, and it sort of means every 7 years you get the urge to move on. It's not always every seven years, but your life just goes through these cycles, and things shift. At one time you're a teacher, then at another time, you're an artist, and it's all great!

Who were my friends growing up? Well, I had friends in my classes, and some that I might consider as best friends here and there. But I think ultimately what happened was that I was really close with my two brothers. My older brother is two years older than me, and my younger brother is just a year younger. So once we got into high school, we sort of discovered each other again. You know

how one year apart can be a lot during those early years. So we went through that period and out the other side. Then, at the end of high school, we became buddies and we really hung out together. We had a bunch of friends in the town that all hung out, but it was really my brothers who were my best friends during those years.

Favorite things to do at 16? Well, if you really want to know the truth it was in no particular order, playing sports and drinking beer. Probably in the opposite order! We were just typical, in a way. I've got to say, my four years of college were an amazing gift from my parents at a time when it was affordable. It was still expensive for us. I paid \$3,000. dollars a year to go to college. I didn't take full advantage of college academically, but I grew a lot socially, and I grew a lot athletically. I became a really good athlete, and it helped me get my first teaching job. So, it was good in a way, but I didn't seize the moment academically. I'm the less for it, but I have no regrets now. It was just my period of growing up. I have a theory that suburban kids don't *'hit the wall'* until they are thirty.

I played soccer when I was a kid. I was an early *'soccer junkie'* in a time in Rochester where the only kids who played soccer were the European immigrants —the Greeks, the Poles, and the Italians. So soccer wasn't a popular sport, but I loved it, and I still love it today! I also played lacrosse, and a little basketball. No I don't play now, but I watch it! Yeah, I played some pick-up games into my forties. We played over at Emmanuel College for years, and in Jamaica Plain.

Oh yeah, my parents were pretty strict. Ours was one of those families where our father was the boss, and our mother was the boss too. But she supported

our father and he did the discipline. Yes, she was a stay-at-home-Mom. It was that period when you could have a stay-at-home-Mom, where both parents didn't have to work like they do now. It was an amazing time...before AIDS, before terrorism, before kids stabbed and shot each other. Back in the good old days, kids used to just beat each other up.

Oh yes, we definitely had curfews. As we got older it might have gotten later, but I remember we had a tradition of going in to kiss Mom goodnight. And that was fine until we started coming in with beer all over us. Poor Mom, but those were the teenage years! Still, it was pretty disciplined and we didn't get away with much. If we did get in trouble, we got grounded, or punished *with work*. My father was an avid reader and he was always trying to turn us on to reading. But we were from the TV age, and we were kind of resistant. He even liked reading so much that he would try to punish us by making us read! He didn't know it, but that went against all the rules, and that's how you really make somebody hate something— make them do it for punishment! But, God bless him, he did get me into reading. So, he was strict and we were aware that there were consequences if we acted up.

Do I remember a scary thing from childhood? Well, the thing that pops into my mind was when I was twelve years old. It was Thanksgiving weekend — and we were out of school. My father came in and woke up my brother and me and told us that my cousin, who was about the same age as we were, had been killed by a drunk driver. It was one of those reality checks when you're that age, and suddenly, you're looking at death in a new way.

Well, yes, we had a lot of funny things that happened. So - oh, I remember just one little funny incident when we were traveling with my parents and this guy

comes riding down the road on a bike. It was a weird bike, and every ten seconds or so his wheel went lopsided. My father and my brother were hysterical laughing. It was weird, but maybe you had to be there.

I think that I always had art in my mind even during those teenage years when it really wasn't that clear to me. But, I was lucky. I got my first teaching job I was in my early twenties. I really got the job because I was a lacrosse player and they needed a lacrosse coach at this school. But I could teach English, History and Art, so I ended up in the English Department. The guy who was the head of the department kind of mentored me, and he helped me realize that art was important. He helped me sort it out.

Ginny: Well, I would have to say that being an artist takes the cake. The last twenty years, this is what we've both been doing — being artists. For 17 years we've been going to Jamaica and painting as artists-in-residence — living our dream. Sometimes, we look at each other, and we say it over and over, "*We're so lucky.*" We love being together, and we know that we're lucky.

Sometimes, I've given talks on being an artist, or how to become an artist, and I get really practical. I just say work towards getting yourself a place — a house or an apartment; so if you want to go someplace and travel, you can rent your place and it can help to support you. You want to get self-sufficient so you can do what you want to do! You don't get paid a lot for being an artist, but we have been able to live our life as artists with very little money. We bought this property 35 years ago for \$30,000. So we had people renting apartments all these years, and it helped us pay the mortgage. Tom also had a graphic design business, and that helped keep all the balls in the air. So it gave us some income to be able to paint. I was lucky to be able buy these houses. Even though my

family lived on very little income, by the time my mother died, through the sale of the house in Brookline, she was able to leave twelve children \$4000 each. And, that's what we did. We were able to buy a house and that made a big difference! So my advice is to work any job that you can so you can buy a house, and that can help to support you.

Tom: One of the guys I admired is the mentor that I mentioned before: Don Roberts. He got lung cancer in his late sixties, and he had a choice of going through a lot of medical treatment, or going up to this island in Maine where he had a house and a bookstore. So, he went to the island in Maine. And he lived for about 4 more years without all of the chemotherapy and surgery. We talked to him about it, and he was really an inspiration. He broke the news to us about his cancer, and we were feeling real bad. But he said, *“Don't feel bad. I'm going to do this. This is the most beautiful time of my life. I have this bookstore that I've always wanted, and that's what I'm going to do until the day I die.”* And that's what he did.

My biggest adventure? Oh, it was definitely meeting this lady here! It was a coincidence, but it was something! (**Tom and Ginny telling the story together.**) Oh, yes, you should have seen the day that we met. Well, we were thrown together for this job. So, we were given each other's numbers and we had been trying to schedule an appointment. Finally we had the meeting which ended up as a half-hour business meeting and a 3 hour chat. It was like soul mates catching up. There was something magical about it. It was so unlikely because here was this married lady with five kids — and I was three years older than him — but we talked and talked, and went through our whole lives with

each other. We just saw into the spirit of each other on that day. It was amazing.

Ginny: My name is Virginia O’Neil. I changed my name to Ginny when I was a teenager, so that’s my nickname. I don’t have a middle name, but all my sisters and brothers have middle names. I asked my mother why I didn’t get a middle name, she said your name is so long already— four syllables, I figured you didn’t need a middle name. I thought that was a very good reason. And I love not having a middle name when I’m filling out forms.

I was born here in Jamaica Plain on April 29 in 1942. I loved growing up in Jamaica Plain. My mother was living in the Heath Street Projects (Bromley Heath) — it was just at the end of World War II. Before I was born, my family had been living in a project in Southie; then about 1941, they built the Heath Street Project, which had bigger apartments with three bedrooms, maybe even four! So, they moved all the big families from the different projects over to Jamaica Plain and almost everyone around us had like, 6, 8, or 10 kids. Everybody mostly had mothers *and* fathers, too. With a big family, you would qualify to get into that housing even if you had a job. The country was just coming out of the depression then and times were tough. My sisters would tell me that they would walk down Day St. following the horse-drawn trucks going by. They were shoveling up horse shit to sell, because people needed to use the manure for growing everything.

So it feels like we’ve came a long way since those days! When I was four years old, my parents sold their car and bought a house on Wyman Street, so then we moved into a house. There was an apartment downstairs; we lived on the second floor and in the third floor attic. Another family that had six girls and a

boy moved into the first floor. There were ten girls in my family, so there were about sixteen girls living in that house! I'm one of twelve children; I was the seventh child.

I went to Blessed Sacrament school here in Jamaica Plain for kindergarten right through 12th grade. It was just up the street from my house. We were taught by nuns. It's closed now; they're making houses out of it.

My mother was amazing! She was born on the island of Madeira, a Portuguese island, and she came to the US as a small girl with her mother and father and five brothers and sisters. At first, I think they lived in Cambridge, and then in Medford or Malden. She was the only one in the family who spoke English because when they came here she was only two. So, as soon as she got into kindergarten she started translating for the family.

My mother met my dad when she started working. So she was about 17 years old. My father was a policeman, and he was 20 years older than her. He was born in 1889— believe it or not. So, he met my mother and they got married. They had a boy first, then and he wanted a second boy, so she had ten girls, *and then* she gave him a second boy when he was 63!

When my father was growing up, his father died when he was in fifth grade, so he had to quit school and help support his mother and three sisters. That's how it was in the early 1900's. And, when he went to find jobs, almost everywhere there was discrimination because he was Irish. They had signs in the windows: '*Irish need not apply.*' So, you'd go in and, '*Oh, your name's Dan O'Neil? Uh uh, we don't take Irish here.*' They thought of Irish as the scum of the earth. So

there was big prejudice going against him, but he had to work and he did find work.

There were newspaper stories about our family because we were very famous when we were growing up. My mother would make all of our clothes alike from the time there were about four girls, then there were five girls. My father was from old Boston, like I said, early 1900s. He said, *'Mother, our girls are just as wonderful as the swells that walk down Commonwealth Avenue and on Easter Sunday Morning.'* The 'swells' he meant were the rich people who would walk there after church. They lived on Commonwealth Avenue or Beacon Street. So, he said, *'you make such beautiful clothes, lets take the kids down and walk down Commonwealth Ave.'* So, they did that that first year — they were all dressed alike one after another and another. Then, the next year they did it again. Then, I was born, so there were six girls, and then eight, by the time the ninth girl was born, it was, *'Oh the O'Neil's are having another baby.'* In fact when the tenth girl was born, the newspaper got it wrong. They had a story in the paper, *'Mrs. O'Neil finally had a boy.'* Then, the next day, they had to put a correction in the paper! Nope it was another girl. Then it was another newspaper story when it was a boy! And, this was all happening right here in Jamaica Plain.

My older brother never got to live in the same house as my little brother. They didn't even meet until Danny was three years old. When Danny was born, my brother Larry was stationed in Germany. He had married a woman there and he was coming home with his wife and two children. So, that's when the two brothers met for the first time.

I feel like my life kind of goes through the whole century in a way because of my father who was born in Gloucester in 1889. His family moved to East Boston when he was a young boy. During the depression in the late 1920s and 30s, he had a job as an insurance man. In those days, when you had life insurance, you paid a dime or a nickel a week or a month. A man would come to the house to collect it. So my father's job was to go around and collect the money. During the depression there were times people couldn't pay that nickel or dime. But, because my father still had a job — and even though he had all those kids, he'd say— "*Alright, I'll put the nickel in for you.*" So, at different times over those years, the father or the mother who had the insurance died, and because he had put in the nickel or the dime, they got the insurance. I have met people all through my life in the past fifty years that said, "*Oh your father, I remember him; he saved our lives because he put the nickel in our insurance.*" It's amazing living through that whole century, I lived through half of it.

What did I learn from my family? Well, I would say it was kindness, but also love and happiness. I learned to be joyful in my life. My mother would just make games out of everything, "*Ok, it's time to clean the house now.*" And we'd kind of spin each other on the back and— "*OK, TaDa.*" We had our little way and we'd say "*vrrrrmmmm,*" then we'd all go around the house and clean. We also learned a lot about prayer. We had to like kneel down and say the rosary every night. It was on the radio every night at 7 o'clock, so all through my life, at 7 o'clock, you know you'd just finish dinner, and OK, here comes the rosary. So, we'd kneel down at our kitchen chairs and say the rosary. It took about 15 minutes, and even if your friends came knocking at the door we'd say, '*I'll be right there.*'

I don't even consider myself a church person anymore. To me, God is in my own self— in my heart, in every person's life and spirit, and in the whole world. Life is different now, you know. But it was nice. It was wonderful the way my family did it for themselves. It was full of love, and that was a good thing in those days.

We had a lot of fun in my family. You know, we were singing and dancing together. We had our act— the Ten O'Neil Sisters— and we wore gowns that my mother made for us. So at one of these shows I went into the audience to watch the rest of the show, and apparently everyone else went home in the two cars. My mother must have thought I was in the car with my father, and my father thought I was in the car with my mother. So I was still there sitting in the church, when the show was over. The priest was there sitting there next to me, and suddenly he said '*Oh no, your parents have left without you!*' He had to go call my parents, and they hadn't noticed I was missing! So, this was the problem being the middle child, but it also allowed me to sneak out and not be noticed.

I was probably one of the most delinquent of all my sisters, but I was still a great kid too! I was working hard when I was fourteen. I was scrubbing pots and pans in a hospital, and I was the short-order cook for the nurses. So I would work hard, but also play hard and drink. Yes, there were consequences. I got hit a couple of times. When my mother didn't know what to do with me, she would snap me across the legs with a strap a few times.

When I was 14, 15, or 16, I did the same things all kids do. I would be drinking beer with my friends. But reality hit when I was 18 and my father died, so I had to go to work. I had finished one semester at Framingham State College just

before he died, but I had to quit school to help my mother support the family. I got a job working in an office, but I would also go out with my mother early in the morning before work to clean two banks. Before my father died, my parents had this cleaning job going out from about 4 to 6 AM, — then they'd come home and wake us up for school.

So, when my father died, my mother kept the job. So even when I worked in an office for a couple years before I got married, I'd have to get up early, like 4:30 in the morning, go out to Allston to clean the bank, and then go downtown to Kneeland Street, clean that bank, and then I'd go home and get ready for work. Going into banks and having to clean the bathrooms, mop the floors, clean up people's ashtrays, ugh! But my mother made everything happy. It was hard work, and creepy, but you had to be responsible. You knew, you were really helping the family and contributing, so it made you feel good.

Then I got married, and by the time I was twenty-five I had three little kids, so I didn't drink once I got pregnant.

My sister Julie really became my best friend when our family moved from Jamaica Plain to Brookline. By then, I was the oldest one at home after my older sister got married. I had a choice then, I could have a room to myself or give it to my sister. I realized that I didn't really want it, so I gave it to my younger sister. So, she had a room to herself, and Julie and I stayed in the same room because we were best friends. And, Julie and I are still best friends. Julie, and her husband Werner, and Tom and I are best friends. They live in Roxbury, and we live here, just about two miles away. We were just all in Jamaica together. We were there for the whole winter, then they came in for the last three weeks and we all hung out. So we're still really good friends.

When I was a kid, I used to play softball for Jamaica Plain CYA but I never really learned how to play sports that much. I swam at Curtis Hall and stuff, but not with teams. Nobody ever taught me how to bend my knees until I met Tom. I was about thirty by then! Now I like swimming, so Tom and I go to Curtis Hall for aqua aerobics, because it's right there. We walk a lot and ride our bikes. Now my biggest exercise is stairs because this house has three floors and I have my laundry in the basement, so I probably do 100 flights a day! I don't walk, I run, so stairs are my exercise! In fact, I hardly ever sit this long. I had back problems through my twenties, thirties and forties, so I'm much better standing!

My dreams...well, I guess I just envisioned really happy times. I think I always wanted to do artwork, but I didn't really think I was going to be able to do that. I kind of dreamed about being an artist. I didn't know that much about art, but I loved to draw. It was always my favorite thing to do. I was very practical – I knew I had to do the practical things to help the family. But I always loved to do art.

Tom knew I liked to do art when we met. I was just finishing college — I went to college after I had five kids. I was married to another man at that time and he wasn't kind or nice to me. I had grown up with kindness and love, and I just thought, this is wrong — I can't stay in this. I was in it for 14 years, so during the last 4 years, I said, *'I'm going to get out of this.'* But, with five kids, I'd have to find some way to support them, so I'd better go to college and get a degree. And that's what I did, I went to college! I just went down to Boston State College and said, *'I want to go to college.'* So they said: *'Well you can't just start, alright, you'll have to take a course and we'll see if you can do it.'*

But, I was in a hurry, so I begged them. I said, *‘I really have to start, I’ve got a fast track I’m on!’* “

So I started, and I did college in three and a half years. During primary school vacations, I had the five kids following me around the hallways at college because I had no one to baby-sit. Also, they started a day care center, so my two year old was able to go to the day care center for those four years. It was hard, but I did it. I was president of the senior class, valedictorian at graduation, and summa cum laude. Then I got accepted to graduate school at MIT. I was just *so* ready for it! I majored in city planning, and when I was at MIT I got tapped by Governor Dukakis to come and work in the state energy office. So, I became Director of Information and Education in the state energy office. It was a long hard wait for that. It was a long 14 years and a struggle to get it, but I made it.

Another thing that I experienced when I was going to college was that I got into the committee against racism. It was at the time of school busing, and my kids were going to school in Roxbury, because that was what we had chosen. They went to the Trotter School on Humboldt Ave. So, it was amazing to see busing come because my kids were already going to school there. So, there were all of these people from all over the city who were already bringing their kids to school there. We had parent things, and all the Black parents and the White parents were all together. Then, when busing came there was so much turmoil. They made rules that said when they had parent meetings, all the Black parents had to sit on one side of the room, and all the White parents had to sit on the other. These were rules coming down from the government to keep people from fighting, but we were in a whole different situation! We didn’t have a

problem. And the interracial couples are going: *'You mean I got to sit here and my husband's got to sit there?'* It was such a terrible thing. You know that whole thing — racism— people didn't even understand it. It isn't universal, and it isn't everywhere.

One thing I thought in college, you know being an older student, often times in the class the professor in the class would say, *'what does everybody else have to say about this topic?'* I'd often wait because I'd have plenty to say, but I wasn't the only one in the class! But finally I'd have to speak up. The only people in the class who would speak up were the older students. I couldn't believe how the younger students could sit there like that. I recommend getting totally involved as much as you can when you go to college because you've got to bring yourself in to it. Let them know you have your story and you are anxious to learn. Get involved and stay involved and raise your hand and talk and join the clubs. I was involved in the committee against racism and was going to the gay and lesbian rights rallies! So, just be involved in school and get all you can out of it.

My mother was my inspiration, as Tom's friend, Don Roberts was. She also died of cancer at 69 years old. When she learned she had terminal cancer, she was at the hospital with my sister. As they were walking out of the hospital and my sister was just devastated because she had learned this terrible news about my mother. Then suddenly my mother said, " Oh, I just remembered I have to go and visit this woman and drop her off a few little things that I brought her. I was in the hospital with her last week and she needs these things." So, here she is — she's just been given a death sentence — and she's still thinking about other people! So, she was a great inspiration of loving kindness.

Tom: What was the happiest moment of my life? Well, how many days ago was that? Yes, we're into the present, and this day right here right now is the happiest day. We love sharing this with you, too!

Ginny: The most memorable moments of my life were when I had a new baby. Each time — of the five times I gave birth — was like a miracle happening to me. I had five wonderful children, three sons and two daughters, and they are the best friends in the world to me and Tom. And we are blessed with eleven grandchildren ranging in age from ten to twenty-five, and we have three great grandchildren.