



Oral History and Folklife Research, Inc.

AN INTERVIEW WITH PENNY PLOURDE

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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KJL It is September 8, and we are in Vassalboro, and we're speaking with Penny Plourde. Do you mind if I ask you what year you were born?

PP 1954.

KJL 1954. A baby boomer like me.

PP In a month, I'll be 60.

KJL I've got one year on you. I was born in 1953. My first car was a 1953 Chevy. It came off the assembly line the same year I did.

PP That's cool.

KJL So 1953, you grew up--

PP '54.

KJL Excuse me, 1954. You grew up with all the baby boomer things, "duck and cover," and all that.

PP You know, the rock and roll age, and protests, civil rights marches; everything that was different than anything else that had been before happened in the '70's and the, well, early '80's, so yes, I'm one of those.

KJL So you watched the anti-Vietnam protests, and Woodstock...

PP Absolutely, absolutely, right. Those are musical and productions and peace movements that to some extent I participated in when I was able to, either at school, or in the summers, but yeah, absolutely, I'm one of those.

KJL You participated in some of the peace movement, then. Can you tell me about that?

PP I did, sure. My parents are originally from Fort Kent, and we moved as children to New Jersey. And my parents stayed a number of years, but once the civil rights movement started, they decided to return to Maine where it was still peaceful and calm. The interesting transition was I was probably twelve--eleven, twelve, something in that range, and so I got to witness so much happening. But when I became eighteen, or of age and was on my own, I often went to civil rights events, a very committed person, to whatever people do, whatever they're able to do, they should be able to do it. And if it's speaking your mind; if it's chaining yourself to a pole, or a bus, or leaving the country. If that's what you want to do, then you should be able to do it. And so I got some opportunities. I didn't know at the time that they were opportunities; I just thought they were things that you did. But they really became the foundation for the work I subsequently did, and in my personal life, the goals that I had wanted, and that my family had wanted for me really came out of that. I was enabled, I was supported--not encouraged, but supported. And so that's how it happened.

KJL You used an interesting word, “opportunities.” Do you mean participating in marches, or...

PP Opportunity to me is something that is available for us as individuals, or collectively as a body to take advantage of, to explore; to see, feel, touch. Let me give you a specific example. I was about the only person in my home town that was disabled. And my opportunities were I wanted to go to school. I wanted to be in the school, as did my parents. The school’s choice was to educate me at home, out of the environment of other students, and my family worked very hard to make sure that the school board understood, sort of got the nuance, of being integrated, versus not integrated, or not socialized. Because they were fearful that I would fall, or I would injure another student, and the school was not accessible, it had a series of steps. They really felt strongly that it was not an opportunity for me to go to high school. It would have been a burden for them. So they wanted to set up an arrangement where I had tutors come to my house. And my family wouldn’t have anything to do with that.

So ultimately, opportunity for me means exploring; doing things that others can do, but do it my way. I’ve never felt that my disability was a handicap. I have spinal bifida. It’s a neurological disorder that you’re born with and lots of people use the word “handicapped,” or not so much now, the word, “crippled,” but it’s occasionally used, and I look at it that in my disability there are many abilities. And abilities to me equals opportunity. I can choose to live, socialize, be part of a community, or I can choose not to. So when I look at things, I look at it from the perspective of, “Well, can this disabled woman do that thing--go to the movies, have a job, get a vehicle, make an income. And I always felt that I could do that--maybe differently than others, but I could do that. And I believe that other people with disabilities should have the same opportunity to fly as I did.

KJL Now, the disability rights movement came along a little later than civil rights and women’s rights. Do you see any connections in terms of a progression there?

PP Absolutely, you know, women and those who have civil rights afflictions, if you will--they’re people who don’t have the opportunity to be who they are and go in the world often times are handicapped by that. But every woman, every male, every child can be disabled. And so the women’s movement to me was also a movement that helped disabled women begin to get out in the world. The civil rights movement taught us--or we, the disabled--that in many ways that if we want something we have to fight for it, because nothing comes easily when you have a disability. There’s a challenge every single day. It may not be much of a challenge, or it may be a horrendous challenge, but what the individual has to remember is that they are just as privileged as the next person and can take advantage of whatever life offers. But it’s no longer the days when many people with disabilities were sheltered; were kept at home and shunned from the rest of the world. So there’s a lot of language changing and belief changing that had to happen along the way. And I still think we’re in that journey.

KJL So in the ’80’s and -90’s you would have been in your late 30’s or early ’40’s. You apparently were following the disability rights movement.

PP Absolutely. I had several friends who were themselves disabled and who ran for profits and not-for-profits, and in my--I think it was the late 70’s or early ’80’s I was asked to join a board that was going to become the first independent living center in the state of Maine, and I was one of, I think five of us who actually helped create that movement. In part, it stemmed from

my skill set, my knowledge of disability issues, my belief in opportunity and exposure to other social issues that other people participated in. Why is it that if you want to go to a library and you're a disabled person in a chair you can't get up the library steps? So why is it that you have to have steps? Why can't you have a ramp? Why can't there be an elevator? There are other means of access, but so many of the architects and builders of yesteryear didn't think of disabled people in the world. They thought of disabled people as being cloistered and shuttered, shutted, which I just didn't want to believe and it never dawned on me that I was being part of a civil rights movement. What I thought was I was being part of helping individuals and myself be able to have--quote--normal--unquote lives.

KJL In the '80's, I think it was, there was an organization called the Maine Association of Handicapped Persons.

PP There was.

KJL Were you part of that?

PP Well, I was a member, and I did a few events with the Maine Association, but about the same time that that was evolving, so too was the first independent living center. And I truthfully was more focused on that. I'd just seen too many individuals cooped in their houses, and while others were--such as the Maine Handicapped Association--they were out doing things here in southern Maine, but I saw from northern and central Maine, a lack of socialization opportunities. And so I carried that with me to this board that created this independent living center because I really believed that people with disabilities, no matter how disabled can live independently. They may need assistance. I have a PCA, a personal care attendant, because I need help dressing; I need help bathing. But within that, I was able to get a job that paid me enough to live on; I was a contributing taxpayer in the world, and I was able to live in my home--or then in an apartment. But I saw too many people who were being protected, if you will, by their families, fearing the worst for their disabled child. The eighteen year old who was in the family who was able bodied went off to college, but the nineteen year old who was disabled was still sitting at home with Mom and Dad, unable to explore their own life's desires. And it wasn't done out of a sense of vengeance, it was done out of a sense of love; that families were protecting their young adults or children by keeping them close at hand so no one would hurt them, no one would pick on them, no one would laugh at them. And the truth is I think we all have to have some of those experiences to give us, the individual the energy to buck the system.

KJL In 1984 there was a court case that involved busses in Portland and South Portland. Do you remember that?

PP I came to work and live in Augusta in 1978. I went to work for the department of transportation, and because the Maine Department of Transportation was associated with transit issues, although the department was not responsible for implementing transit issues like a bus or a cab, the department still carried an interest in making sure that if the busses were purchased, they were purchased with an accessibility modal in them. So as an observer and as an interested person I watched very closely when the Maine Handicapped Association chained themselves to the busses and stopped the busses in Portland from moving. Because they were inaccessible and they were not reachable by many disabled people, there might be curb cuts--a curb, rather, not a curb cut. There might not be signage that was very clear that would say to a

hard of hearing or Deaf individual this is where the bus runs; this is where it stops; this is where it goes to. There was no literature. And if you were blind or visually impaired, there were very few opportunities except around the center on blindness in Portland that were places where people with visual disabilities could figure out where they were if they took public transit. So I guess what I'm saying is that the lack of awareness and the lack of commitment to making the environment accessible, including busses, including curb cuts, including access was just a way of doing business. People didn't think that there were other people who wanted to access those services, too. It's sort of like if you're drank whole milk all your life, and then you go to skim milk, it's a very bad taste in your mouth. But then you get adjusted to skim milk, because you know it's healthier for you. The same thing with access issues. They're not accessible, they're not open, they're not welcoming of disabled people, but once you start breaking barriers down, you begin to see more opportunity. because people are seeing, believing and feeling that the disabled community are engaging.

KJL Can you describe for me what it was like before the ADA. You started to talk about that a little bit.

PP Sure. In 1972, the first federal act was passed. It's called "504" and "503," which is about programming, making programming accessible 504 was about making buildings, sites, facilities accessible. Those regulations were first promulgated in the 1970's. And if a facility received federal assistance, federal dollars to do the work that they did--like a hospital or a public school, courthouses, anything where the public was intended to be part of, the 503 and 504 were designed to help get people to those spots. There was a lot of learning, a lot of teaching, and a lot of people ignored the law. So the Office of Federal Contracts and Compliance, the office of US Civil Rights, the Attorney General began to feel the pressure of disabled individuals--and Congress--let me correct myself--and Congress people, certain Congress people--saying, "This is not equitable, this is not comprehensive, and this is not compliance with the law. So let's put the rule in place, then let's put some teeth into it." Some enforcement that said if you don't comply, the theory was the feds would take your money. The reality was that didn't happen very often, unless there was some egregious thing that happened.

And one of those things was chaining people to the bus to demonstrate the lack of attention, focus and mainstreaming for people with disabilities into normal, customary, daily routine things. I'm not talking about an individual with a disability wanting to be a doctor, wanting to be a neurosurgeon, and they're in a wheelchair, or they have spastic reactions and they can't. I'm talking about people wanting to do daily living things. When that happened, and it started happening around the country. The first, I believe was in Kansas, and then there was a huge myriad of civil rights activities that happened in Berkeley, California. And things just started coming. People started being aware, people with disabilities started demanding, not asking for equality or equal access. And businesses, particularly Chambers of Commerce were not accustomed to representing the interests of businesses by encouraging them to be accessible.

KJL You were talking a moment ago about the ADAPT protests?

PP Some of those were from the ADAPT, some of those were from out in Berkeley, they started as independent living opportunities at the school because there were so many parts of the campus that were inaccessible, including housing. So many disabled people, while the ground, if you will, the infrastructure of California, it was flat, there were these pillars of educational academic buildings on the campus that were totally inaccessible. So that evolved, people

started protesting, and out of that came the first independent living environment. Again, not isolated independent living environment, but living environments where people had access to personal care attendants, supporters, people who might help grocery shop for them, people who might use guiding animals. And Berkeley became the foundation for much of the movement, and Maine jumped in on the movement very early, very early. And that was thanks to several individuals who were leaders--Tom Andrews, who became Congressman Tom Andrews, and now is a lobbyist. Steven Tremblay. Steven was the Executive Director of the independent living center in Maine--the first--and folks like him; like them.

KJL The independent living center in Maine you mentioned; that's Alpha One, is that right?

PP That's right. I'm talking about Alpha One. They also spun around to approach issues very differently than had been thought about before. When I was a disabled person, and I was in a chair, I was given, or bought--I don't remember how I got it--a wheelchair. The wheelchair was an institutional wheelchair. It was oversized, it was heavy, it couldn't be lifted into a car very easily, or on a van with a lift. There were very many hurdles that needed to be crossed, but in the equipment arena we were still back in the 1930's and '40's in terms of how we approached people with disabilities and the tools and accessories--items they needed to live by. When I got my first real wheelchair, it was customized to my size, to my height. It was freewheeling. It was a pleasure. It absolutely was a pleasure to get from the archaic thing to the new, sleek, more modern thing. It gave me access to places I'd never been before, and things I'd never done--walking trails, going out on recreation things, wheeling on grass. And I began to get that taste, and I wanted more, and I was hungry for it.

Now I'm in an electric wheelchair. My electric wheelchair gets me even farther. So many people think of disabilities as being sorrowful, bad, and would never wish it on anyone they knew. But in my case, my disability gave me opportunity to see the world and be part of the world in ways that most of the time I had not been able to do. And I think it's like that for lots of other people with disabilities. What about going to a museum. If you're a visually impaired person, and you go to a museum today, what are you going to learn from it? And then people began to pressure the arts, humanities to join on this venture, too. Create living art, create touchable art. When you have shows, make it so people can touch, and feel and understand the dynamics. And so it's an evolution for all generations of disabled consumers. But I don't think we are profoundly handicapped by our disabilities. I think others think we are, and others feel we are because what they see is the limbless body. People who can't speak sign and the rest of the world doesn't sign. But children are being encouraged at early ages whether they're abled or disabled to learn signing, because it's a communication tool that benefits everyone. So there are lots of evolutions that I think were happening then and are happening now that bring us to today. And I think the journey is going to continue for multiple lifetimes because we are not fully integrated.

KJL In the spring of 1990, did you follow that ADA as it moved through Congress?

PP There were several people who were from Maine and were highly motivated by the ADA, or the passage of the ADA, and the writing of the laws, and writing of the regulations and then interpreting what the ADA was about. The ADA is a civil rights piece of--a civil rights act. It's no different than the 1963 [1964] Civil Rights Act, it's no different than other acts that are promulgated based on moving something from place "a" to place "b." I'm not sure if that's clear, but--so yes, the people who were invited to participate in the development or in

testifying before Congress were highly instrumental. And in Maine, again, Steven Tremblay, Tom Andrews were champions of their movement, and making sure that others, such as politicians--local or national--facility administrators in hospitals, others--the courts, public buildings--they were instrumental in helping to lay that foundation that then, Justin Dart, who was the heir of the Dart Clothing Company, a Texan who was very much engaged in the development of the ADA, and he got to know some of the Maine (M-A-I-N-E) players and called on them to participate and they played a supporting role in that. We weren't up front, key center to the discussion, but we were players nonetheless. We were doing our thing to help encourage, motivate the passage of the ADA.

KJL Now, at least in the Senate, there was some stiff opposition, mostly from Jesse Helms.

PP You're right. He was the chief individual who did not want the civil rights act as it related to women being passed. That was wholly be accident, that that happened, that women were included. Because many congressional people, or political leaders felt that if you included women in a civil rights movement, the rest of the country would vote it down. Because women were not considered the breadwinner, the leader. Very few women were in Congress. Margaret Chase Smith assumed the role that her husband had when he died. But they were not voted in, they just were given their seat because of the passage of someone else. So that movement really helped to define what was going to happen when the ADA was being written and when it went before many many many committees of the House and the Senate.

KJL Was there any point at which you thought, "This isn't going to happen?"

PP Absolutely

KJL Tell me about that

PP Absolutely. Keep in mind that I was a state employee and I put myself in places that were obviously questioning of people's intent or desire to include people with disabilities. I was very early on exposed to the legislative process. My father was a legislator, so I'd frequently come to Augusta with him. I saw myself as the only disabled person walking around there, or in my case wheeling around there. No one with an obvious disability was elected or served in a policy driven position. So with my interests, my extrovertedness I began to throw myself into a lot of experiences, and from those experiences I realized that not everyone wanted the ADA to pass. Not everyone supported equality for people with disabilities.

One tiny, tiny, little example: You're familiar that most towns have code enforcement officers. Code enforcement officers by mandate are supposed to inspect and either approve a facility's opening, or tell them where they have to change it to make it passable, whether it's fire alarms or in this case, access--tactile warnings above light switches; doors that were automated; elevators that had the keyboard in Braille. Most code enforcement officers didn't understand that the ADA, or access was an imperative part of their job, and so didn't force--there was no enforcement from the cities or towns, except for the good will of certain people who recognized that access needed to happen. It may not have been a perfectly built ramp; it may not have been a facility that had tactile warnings on it, but they understood that the consumer's dollars included consumer dollars from disabled people.

And then there had always been the worker's comp related aspect of accessibility. Many, many soldiers, throughout the wars, as you know, have come back with disabilities, and Senator Tom Harkin, Senator Bob Dole. And today, many women who were soldiers are now in the Congress, and they are perhaps like me--limbless or need accommodations. And their struggle still continues. But those two men saw that there was very little access for veterans; for people with mental health disabilities, or cognitive disabilities; people with physical disabilities or intellectual disabilities. And they began to lobby their peers for a national program that ended up becoming the next civil rights act--not a program, but act. Without them spearheading, I think the country would have--we'd probably be back in the 1970's era. But those two gentlemen really leant their heart, their mind, and their experiences to making certain that other people knew of the challenges, and knew how to fix them.

KJL By "the next civil rights act," you're referring to the ADA?

PP The ADA, right. And to some extent the "503" and "504," because those were promulgated based on the fact that if an entity receives federal dollars, they need to be accessible to all people. So from that launched the humble beginnings that were around in the '70's that led to the late 1980's, early 1990's work to design the civil rights act, which was the ADA.

KJL Now, you recently ran for the legislature yourself.

PP Oh, I did.

KJL What possessed you to run for the legislature?

PP Again, it goes back to what I witnessed. How could I as a disabled consumer make a difference--even on a small basis to myself and for others? As I told you earlier, my father was in the legislature and he was in there during the 1970's. And I became very familiar with the legislative process; one, because of his interests and exposure; two, because it didn't take me long to figure out that if everybody looks like--doesn't look like the rest of the world. By that I mean they were generally older men, retired, and had been in their community for years, and didn't ruffle feathers. They were part of the mainstream of the community. So when they wanted to get elected, they focused on things that were not inclusive, but met what the community perceived their need to be.

And so in the course of my employment, it went from the Department of Transportation to the Department of Labor, where I was the Director of the state vocational rehabilitation unit. And I had plenty of opportunities to testify before Senate and House committees. I couldn't lobby, but I certainly could make my presence known. And within that, just being seen at the legislature caused people to stop and think. And slowly people were beginning to elect folks who had disabilities, but not a lot, and not disabled enough that desks had to be rearranged, or committee room doors had to be widened, or there needed to be interpreters. And that slowly evolved to help me to decide that I wanted to run for the Senate. The incumbent, a very nice man; well meaning; well known in the city, I felt was lacking in some areas of interest that I had. I talked to a number of people. I explored the possibility, and when I ultimately decided, it was with the encouragement and support of the party affiliation, and other individuals. I ran. I ran from my wheelchair. I couldn't do house-to-house canvassing as so many candidates do. I had to have an individual go up to the door; knock on the door; ask the homeowner to come out to visit with this candidate. Most of the time people did. Sometimes people said in not so

polite ways, and in other ways, that they weren't interested in talking to a disabled person about running for a state legislative seat, because "how was that person going to do the job?" Never once stopping to think that it wasn't about walking. It wasn't about riding, you know, in a wheelchair. It was about using your mind to help create policy that would make a difference in this state.

I didn't want to battle with people who didn't appreciate the involvement of disabled people in community life. It just wasn't worth it to me to pick a fight. I needed to find the battle that I could be supportive of, and help to change, but I wasn't going to engage with people who felt people with disabilities needed to be locked up in the house, or locked up at Pineland, or locked up at one of the state institutions. Those folks I felt were never going to change their minds. And I drew that parallel because I'd seen the result of the '63 Civil Rights Act, where individuals of color, particularly Black people hadn't really made many inroads after the act. It was always a battle. It was always approached from a negative perspective. People did not open--business owners did not open their doors and say, "Come on in, people of color, we want you. We want your diversity. So I saw from that experience the struggle for equality; the struggle for access continued. And it continues right along. I thought if I ran, and if I didn't get elected, I would be sad, but I would be part of an education format.

KJL So you actually had people say, "No, I don't want to talk to you?"

PP Oh, All the time, all the time. People do it in different ways. People turn away when they see me coming, or perhaps someone else with a disability. My experience is children are very inquisitive, and parents will grab the child and pull them away, and I oftentimes will say, "Please don't do that. Can I show them my lift?" Because it's mostly when I'm getting out of my van, or getting into my van that kids are fascinated. "There's an elevator on that vehicle!" So I try to encourage the parents to let the child be part of it. "Come, you push the toggle switch that makes my lift go up," or "You look at my wheelchair, and see the horn?" I try to make it an inclusive way of educating people, but fully knowing that the biases that others have are probably not going to go away.

KJL Ho much do you think has changed since July of 1990?

PP As a disabled consumer, or citizen, I'm very disappointed that the ADA has not made significant differences for people with disabilities. Because, like so many other laws, it's not what you do to be obviously compliant with the law, it's oftentimes how you do it. The ADA gave us a template, if you will--a bible that outlined how to make everything, if you will, as humanly accessible as possible. It gave us minimum standards; it gave us maximum standards. It gave us information about how to make a vessel accessible; how to make a train accessible; how to make a lavatory accessible; how to make a work environment accessible. But people whose eyes were trained not to see disabled people don't understand that we're not going away. We are here. We are proud and we are strong.

I will say that the ADA caused more focus in its beginning toward making people aware of disability issues. But I would challenge you to walk up any street and stop a hundred people and ask them, "What does accessibility mean to you? What does the passage of the ADA--do you even know the ADA exists? Do you even know that people with disabilities have the right to vote? Cognitively impaired, physically impaired? and you as a community have to make that voting place accessible." There are today in this state, many, many, many inaccessible voting

places, and through the good will of our secretaries of state, all of them have played a role in trying to make voting chambers accessible. So the ADA, while a wonderful thing, has not been appreciated for the teeth that the template has in it to force compliance. Because at the end of the day, we're still building buildings that are inaccessible; we're still building environments that treat disabled people as second class citizens.

I was recently hospitalized. I was hospitalized in a brand new hospital, only a few months old. It was built in 2013 and '14. No excuse. As an inpatient, I found my experience there was horrible. The facility looked nice. It has quite a few amenities that would assist disabled people, but if you happen to be a patient, and you want to take a shower. The Hoyer lifts that are in the room do not go all the way into the bathroom where the shower is. And there's no excuse, except the excuse I kept hearing was, "It costs too much money." And I said things like, "Well, why didn't you build maybe three rooms that were accessible, or four rooms? You didn't have to make every room accessible. Everyone didn't need a full Hoyer lift. But why did you go from the thought of making all of them accessible to making none of them accessible?"

The architect signed off on the plan. The code enforcement officer signed off on the plans. The fire marshal signed off on the plans. And not one of them--not even the members of the hospital staff from the custodial worker to the President and the CEO never stopped to think about who the consumer was that was going to be using that hospital. I'm now forced as a patient to decide do I want to be the one that continuously complains about inaccessibility, or do I let it ride? Let someone else do it. So I have two options; one, file a lawsuit; two, try to work with the staff to retrofit a room. One of the answers I got was, "Well, we have a rehab unit in our facility, and it's accessible." And I said, "Not every patient is a newly injured individual who needs rehab. What about we old timers?" Never thought about it. Never thought about it.

And so those are the subtleties where the ADA has not been successful. Not because the ADA, or the act is wrong, it's because people are not interpreting it and taking it seriously. And where are the enforcers? That hospital received federal dollars, and it's overseer is the U.S. federal government, and I'm willing to bet that a lot of Medicare money goes into that hospital.

KJL So you're not seeing the teeth?

PP I'm not seeing the teeth unless it's coming from individuals with disabilities or individuals who are more in tune to it because they have a disability, or a family member does, or Dad had a stroke, and they brought him home from the hospital, and he can't get into the bathroom, his wheelchair won't fit. He can't get into the house, there's steps. They live on the second floor. If an individual becomes familiar enough with accessibility--and I haven't even talked about program services yet--but if we're talking about accessibility, many, many people still do not understand, do not want to understand, and therefore are blind to inclusion of people with disabilities. And I mean elderly people, young people, adults, children, infants. There are those who constantly put their neck out on the line to make happen compliance with the ADA. That's why when I get angry is when in spite of all that, they still build buildings that are inaccessible.

KJL Has your life been different than you imagined?

PP No. No, I didn't know any other life. I was born disabled. I know; some friends have told me that when they became disabled later in life, it was a difficult adjustment, because they didn't need to think about how were they going to get somewhere. They used to just get in their car and go. Now they have to think about, "Well, is that building accessible? Is that environment welcoming? Can I go listen to that lecture? I'm hearing impaired, will there be CART or cueing, or will there be even headsets that will enhance the volume?" Some places are doing it. Some places are getting it. Some facilities' managers and administrators are very aware and are making that difference. Not all, and not yet.

KJL So you've encountered quite a bit of resistance to disability rights.

PP I would say both overt and covert. The example I gave you about running for the legislature, and people saying to me, "Why would we vote for you, you're disabled?" didn't surprise me, didn't hurt me, didn't make me feel like a second class citizen. I thought, "Too bad for you. Too bad you aren't even willing to even hear my talks or my discussions, or my feelings about the environment, about land use, about wind power. Why are you focusing only on the disability? Focus on the individual." But they couldn't, and they wouldn't, so I won't. If a store or business is inaccessible, I will not go to it.

Now, maybe that's my one person protest, but rest assured that I'm going to say to all my friends, and my friends will say to their friends, "Did you know that building 'X,' or office 'Y,' or agency this is inaccessible?" Why should we spend our dollars there if they're not welcoming of the community? And the community includes people with disabilities. I've been stared at. I've been laughed at. I've been disrespected. I believe it's part of every civil rights movement that people feel a certain level of victimization. But it's what we as disabled individuals do to address that, overcome it or disregard it that makes the difference. And people have free will. If they don't want to work on an issue, or people don't want to confront a business owner, that's their business.

When I moved to Augusta, and I needed an apartment, there were no accessible apartments. I met a landlord, went and looked at his building and asked if he would be willing to put in a ramp, and he said, "No problem." There wasn't a question. He said, "No problem," and he did it. Other landlords might say, "Nope. Don't have to, and I won't. The building was built this way. It's grandfathered, and I don't have to be compliant with any accessibility rule." People interpret things very, very differently, and they show their human character in many different ways.

KJL You said you followed the issue as it moved through Congress, the ADA. Can you remember the day that it passed the Senate; what that was like?

PP It was very much like another historical day--and I can talk about that in a second--but I do remember it, and it's because I was still exposed to an agency--the DOT--that wanted to make its environment more accessible, and didn't necessarily know how to engineer that. So when the ADA was going to make it through the Senate--and then it had to go through the House again--it became a great day, a great period of time, because many of us believed whole heartedly that things were going to change. And they have. I don't mean to be a downer. Things have changed; things have gotten a lot better.

KJL Tell me about that.

PP Well, you find busses through all this United States being accessible; directly related back to the protests. It changed people's minds. Administrators saw disabled consumers as spenders, and finally they got it. It's not just that you need a ride to the doctor and back; maybe you want a ride to a shopping mall. That's one example. There are examples like--there's a national organization called the Architectural Barriers Compliance Board. And it is made up of citizens, consumers, architects, designers who work every day; are part every day in the greater world. That Architectural Barriers Compliance Board is another supporter, and another opportunity for the civil rights act, called the ADA to be successful. But again, if I ask you, "Do you even know that the Architectural Barriers Compliance Board exists--or what it exists for?" most people are going to say, "No," unless they're impacted by it.

The barrier board was very helpful to the DOT when we were trying to make, or have made, some new island vessels--transportation. Highways include waterways, because they are part of the transportation to and from. So they may not be roads or highways or bridges, but they are highways. And those highways are a means to an end, and if you're disabled, or have a lesser ability to go from one place to another, and the boat isn't even accessible to you, how do you ever go or get off the island you live on? DOT got--in large measure--got it's understanding and interest

[There is an interruption here from Plourde's PCA]

KJL You were talking about the DOT got its understanding.

PP So DOT contractors are constantly being--or consistently being made aware of what they need to do to put a traffic signal at a height and place where it's accessible to all people. Not back on the end of the grassy knoll; not having utilities--lights, telephones, cable companies--come behind the actual building of the roadway or sidewalk and put their poles in the middle of the sidewalk. It happens every day. People just don't think. And so if you're in a wheelchair, or you're a visually impaired person and you're trying to get around, you're probably going to walk into the pole. You're probably not going to be able to get off the curb. You may not be able to reach the button. The lights that go from red, yellow and green, and there's a crosswalk across it, may not be timed properly, or they're timed for people who are walkers. So when the light switches and the crosswalk light comes on, you can be--and it's happened to me many times, I'm in the middle of a crosswalk, and I'm hearing, "Toot, toot toot, get out of the way!" But I started at the right time. It just takes longer than if you're running across the street. So the DOT gets that and works towards it every single day. It's an integral part of the construction process.

KJL You've been very generous with your time, and I really appreciate that. I want to ask you if there's anything I'm overlooking that you want to point out to me.

PP I think probably the only real thing is asking you to interview a code enforcement officer; asking you to take a look at the other side's perspective. I know we all know about inaccessibility. We all do, one way or another. We're all aware of it. But, you know, those doors that open automatically are just not made for disabled people. They're made to serve many purposes. And I think if you, perhaps even just for background, ask code enforcement officers, ask hospital administrators how do they make their facility accessible, I think you'll be

enlightened. And it might be helpful, again if it's only for background, that if you haven't already experienced it, experience it from an able bodied person's perspective.

KJL Thanks very much. As I said, you've been very generous with your time.