

Pamela Davies Oral History Interview

Interview Conducted by
Pamela Grundy
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Description: As the first female board chair of the Charlotte YMCA, and as a recent board chair of the national YMCA, Pamela Davies brought a broad perspective to this interview. Unlike many other people interviewed, she did not grow up involved in YMCA activities. Her first contact with YMCA work came when she was asked to join the Charlotte Y board soon after she arrived in Charlotte to serve as president of Queens University. She eloquently discussed her experience as one of the first women on the board, and the process by which she learned about the Y's social mission, as well as its approach to equity. She talked in detail about the challenges the Y faces from alternative fitness providers and underscores the significance of building and maintaining community relationships, as well as looking to YMCA's around the nation and the world for ideas about equity work.

Biography: Dr. Pamela Davies was a 64 year-old woman at the time of the interview, which took place at the Stratford Richardson YMCA in Charlotte, North Carolina. She was born in Kansas City, Kansas in 1957. She was educated at the University of Florida in Gainesville, and continued her education in Tennessee to obtain her Ph.D. Dr. Davies was employed as a professor at the University of Central Florida and the dean of Drexel University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She was most recently employed as the president of Queens University of Charlotte while also holding the title of board chair for the national and local Charlotte YMCA.

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Transcript Notes: PG: Pamela Grundy
PD: Pamela Davies

Pamela Davies Oral History Interview Transcript

PG: So, I want to start by saying my name is Pamela Grundy and I am here interviewing Dr. Pamela Davies of Queens University. And it is the 22nd of September 2021. And we're going to talk about the Charlotte YMCA and related subjects. I actually just want to start, I'm interested in the broader history of the YMCA, so I want to actually start by asking you: When did you first encounter or participate with a YMCA of any kind?

PD: So the Charlotte YMCA... In fact, I was raised in Missouri. I have no recollection of having a Y there. I went to school at the University of Florida. Then subsequently eventually got my PhD in Tennessee. I was not in a... Universities have fitness centers and stuff, so you're probably not even looking for that. Then I lived in Orlando as a professor for 10 years at the University of Central Florida, and, again, plenty of fitness facilities available. Ten years into my career, I went to be dean at the business school at Drexel University, fitness centers available. I was somewhat aware of the Y in Philadelphia, just aware of it. There was one on my travel path. But it wasn't until I came to Charlotte that I really began to learn about the Y.

PG: And how did that come about?

PD: Well, it's interesting, Pamela, because I was the president of Queens and I was a woman. In Charlotte, North Carolina, having a woman in a fairly prominent position was unusual. And so this was a time when everybody was trying to diversify their boards and whatnot. So, being a woman caught their attention. And then secondly, it was written in a lot of articles and stuff that I had a strong faith commitment, a Christian faith commitment. My kids were enrolled at Charlotte Christian, and we went to a relatively reformed Presbyterian church. So, it also got around that I was a Christian. So I was a woman, I was a Christian, and the Y wanted those kinds of people on their board. So Frank Harrison, if you know Frank, and Andy Calhoun came to see me one day and asked me to join the Metro Y board. And this was really kind of unusual. Most people, at that time in particular, they went through a – you got your Metro Y board leaders from branch boards. That's not so much the case anymore, because they really have really strong leaders in the community who might not have served at a branch on the board now. So yeah, that was 21 years ago maybe.

PG: Okay.

PD: 20 to 21 years ago, I went on the Charlotte Y board.

PG: And you became president of Queens in...

PD: In 2002, but I was here as dean of the McColl school and president in waiting. So it might have been 2002.

PG: Okay.

PD: Or right, I think it was 2001.

PG: Okay.

PD: I was president-elect.

PG: Okay.

PD: Yeah. So, yeah. So I remember the very first board meeting I went to, I guess they just wanted everybody to go around and introduce themselves. I think I was the only woman on the board, if I'm not mistaken. And so all these older white males, frankly, in their 60s – I would have been 45 at the time and they would have been in their early 60s at the time, would go around and introduce themselves and they would say, they said: "Introduce yourself, and tell us what you do for a living or whatever, and then tell us your Y story. What's your Y story?" At five out of fourteen of them said they learned how to swim at the Y. And in fact, they learned to swim at the Y, when you swam "nekked." And I didn't even know what nekked meant, hardly. I was like, nekked? And when they got to me, I remember saying, I don't remember where I learned to swim, but I am certain I was wearing a bathing suit. Of that I am certain. So, anyway, that was my first introduction to the Y. But I will say, that in that time of my life, it was not unusual to be the only woman in a room of 60-year-old men. That was kind of my life.

PG: Right.

PD: In the business school at Drexel, I was the only woman administrator in the entire university when I was dean of the business school, and one of the very few female, even, faculty at that time. So we've come a long way in 25 years.

PG: So why did you join the Y board? Why did you agree to do it? What were your goals?

PD: Well, I did know that it had a strong kind of Christian mission. And that was in alignment with my personal beliefs, so that made it a fit. I just adored Andy Calhoun. I just came to admire and adore Andy at such a high level. I would have done anything for him. He taught me a lot. Andy's probably 10 years older than I am, I'm going to guess. The way he managed the board and the relationships with donors contributed greatly to my personal success, because I had a board and I had donors and I learned from Andy. He, as a leader with such great humility and kindness.

PG: What kinds of things did you learn from him?

PD: I learned that you've got to listen. Listen to understand. Not to come to the table with a position to press, but rather to better understand other people's thinking and beliefs. I learned that, if you want someone to love your organization, you have to let them sample it in lots of different ways. So I got assigned to a young man named Robby Armstrong who was – Andy had two kind of chief people underneath him, and I always laughed, I didn't realize I was... I did realize I was assigned, but nobody told me I was assigned, but Robby was always like, "Oh, Dr. Davies, come on out to Lake Norman. We have this ski program for disabled children and people. I'd love to show it to you." Over the course of two years, they took me to every branch, and there were like 18 branches. And they found some reason to get me to all these 18 branches. By doing so, I kind of fell in love with the work and the mission of what they were doing. Frankly, they were training me up to be the first woman chair, and with such intentionality.

PG: I bet.

PD: Unbeknownst to me, but in looking back, I totally understand what that was all about. So I learned that you got to get people, if you want to get them to fall in love with your organization, you've got to expose them to the mission in interesting and different ways. And at a university, how easy is that? I mean, young people seeking education and growing and developing and achieving, it's really easy to do that. So I learned a lot from Andy on that. But I will say that it took me a long time to really get it, to get the Y. And I'm a little surprised by that, because I'm not usually a terribly slow study, but I really focused a lot of my work and effort on the business model of the Y, like how do we drive membership, what's the pricing strategy, what services and programs should we be developing. And all of those things are important. But I was like, success is measured by growth in revenue, growth in membership units, plans, et cetera, without fully comprehending the whole reason we do that is to generate resources to serve underserved communities, communities that need support and resources. It took me like five years to figure that out, and again, I'm not that slow of a study, but I'm a business person, my PhD's in business, my focus is on strategy, and so I just, that was my focus. And then I really started to get it. So that was interesting.

PG: Was there a moment of revelation when you all of sudden got it, or how did that happen?

PD: I can't remember if it was a moment of revelation, but all of a sudden I had clarity. I will say, I think the reason I didn't get it... Okay, I'm going to go back, Pamela, and say, I don't think they told the story very well. I think, while I became enlightened here, I became more enlightened about that when I joined the national Y board. So I spent, in 2007-2009, I believe, I was chair of the Charlotte Y board, and I would have been the first woman chair of the Charlotte Y board. And that happened to be during the Great Recession. Being in a banking town, having a lot of young professional members, I mean, our members were at the Gateway Y, standing in line to stop their automatic payments. We had to cut our budget by \$10 million in six weeks. It was a very difficult time. Now, I should have gotten a clue then, maybe I already had a clue, when Andy said, "We'll stop your payments, but you keep coming." When would you need the Y more

than now, when you're either out of a job or scared you're going to lose your job or suffering from anxiety. You just keep coming, and when your financial situation... He told the whole, hundreds and maybe a thousand people, they could just keep coming without paying their dues because that's what the Y's here for, is to support you during time of need. That was pretty cool. That was a pretty interesting perspective. So anyway, I was chair from 2007-2009. Then I went on the national Y board, maybe in 2011, '10 or '11. And I'm currently the chair of the national board. And so, when did I become chair? In February of 2020. Right before the global pandemic. So, I've often said I was chair of the Charlotte Y during the Great Recession, chair of the national Y board during the global pandemic. I am either bad luck or Esther. One of the two. So I've had some interesting times in leadership.

PG: Absolutely.

PD: Well, to answer your question, it was a long roundabout, but I became even more aware of the social mission of the Y when I went on the national Y board. The leader of the YUSA, the national Y board, was very focused on rebranding the Y as a charitable cause. So he developed the platforms of youth development, healthy living, social responsibility. He brought in really incredible talent in healthy living and youth development, in particular, to develop programs that could be disseminated to the Ys. And healthy living, it was about chronic disease prevention, diabetes prevention work, disease prevention and treatment. In the youth development category, it was a lot about literacy and the achievement gap and summer learning loss and how we could... That's the first time I heard that the percentage of children who can't read in the 3rd grade is a predictor of the number of prison beds you're going to need. It was really stunning kind of statistics. And so, I think, a) the Y doubled down on its social mission during that time, and b) there was a lot of communication and branding around that work. And so I finally got it. But I watch, even in the Charlotte Y now, that new board members still don't get it. They think it's about membership units and revenue. And it is. I mean, that's a very important part of what we do. But a large part of what we do is generate revenues and surplus to serve underserved communities.

PG: Did you get a sense of how long that had been the goals of both the Charlotte Y and the national Y?

PD: I think it's always been about... The national Y movement is full of people. Flawed people. And so, have we been on the right side of history every time? Were we on the right side of history in the Civil War? Were we on the right side of history during the Civil Rights Movement? Some of our Ys were, some of our Ys weren't. We have an historian at the national Y, and we've looked back and acknowledged that. We didn't own slaves, didn't build our Ys or anything like that. It's been a sense of omission, really. We haven't stood up and stood for the right things, that are so obviously the right things now, but maybe that was not as evident. I don't know. But, that said, having not done as much as we could have done as much as we could have done in various points in history, we've done a lot. It's a caring, loving organization. I mean, it really is.

PG: So you came on the board at the time that they were putting together the Stratford Richardson Y?

PD: Yes. Yes.

PG: Did you play any roles related to that?

PD: I really didn't. I remember Jim Morgan, I think, was maybe board chair at that time. I guess Frank must have been board chair when I came on, and then maybe Jim was the next board chair. And I remember Jim talking about it a lot and the challenges and the suspiciousness of the neighborhood. Just, like, you got a bunch of white men walking around a lot in a poverty-ridden neighborhood, and they're like, "What are you doing here? What are you doing here and what are you doing to us?" And I remember it being an awakening for me. Like, "Wow." I was really naïve. I mean, when I look back now, I was just so naïve about these issues. So I was very cognizant of the delicacy of the work and the diplomacy and the degree to which we had to enter with humility. But I'll tell you what, the people who were leading the Y right then, with Andy Calhoun and Jim Morgan, they were the people to be doing it. You couldn't have asked for... So when I say Andy led with listening, that included listening to the people at the Stratford and on East Boulevard or West Boulevard in that neighborhood and really listening for understanding. So, yeah. So that was an important step we took.

PG: How did Andy and Jim go about educating the board about these issues? Because my guess would be you might not have been the only naïve member of the board.

PD: Yeah, maybe not. Yes. I'm sure I wasn't the only naïve one. I don't recall that, Pamela. I wish I could share that with you. I just know that most of us trusted Andy and Jim implicitly. Like, if they said it was a good idea, and this is something we needed to do, we needed to serve this neighborhood, then we were like, "Must be." The thing about a board is everybody's got a full-time job, right? I've really been very fortunate to lead during times of crisis, because during times of crisis, that's when your board is much more attuned to what's going on. So during the Great Recession and the banking crisis, I was much more engaged. When we had to take out \$10 million and lay off 10% of our people and reduce our retirement, when we had to take those actions, I was very much more engaged. In a normal setting, I would have talked to Andy once a month just prior to the board meeting. But there I was talking to Andy three times a week. And the same has been true at the national Y board. I've just been much more engaged because of the pandemic and the impact that's had on our Ys. So, I think boards were, there were a few key people who were very involved, and the rest of the board would be peripherally involved.

PG: So how did it work being the only woman for a while on the board?

PD: Again, it was such the norm. I had no negative feelings about that. I do marvel that, in 135 years of existence, I was the first woman chair. However, the same was true of my own organization. The only reason we could get by with not having women chairs – we had plenty of

women board members but, we've always had, at Queens, the most powerful male leaders in the community. We had Mr. Harris, we had... Why am I blanking on people? Bill Lee. Hugh McColl. So we always picked the Vice Chairman of the Wells Fargo, the CEO of Carolinas Health Care System. And they were all men. That had always been our strategy. And so for the 17 years I was president, we got by with that with being so wrong-headed about that, because I was a woman. So you had a female president, it kind of got some leeway there. But they've got to change that. Right now our CEO is Jeff Brown from Allied Bank. And we would have had a woman, but we had a new president. We felt like we needed somebody with a lot of influence in the community. So, when you looked around at the women who love and care about Queens right now, they did not have a lot of influence in the community, and we felt that that was a really important thing for a new president transitioning to this community. So you just make decisions for funny reasons. So I don't know. I was also the first John R. Mott winner.

PG: I saw that.

PD: Servant Leader winner or John R. Mott winner, which perhaps touched me more than anything. I could actually tear up thinking about it. There was this kind of thing going around then, and I think I was on the national board then when I won, where you tell your Y story in six words. The first one I heard, which was totally inappropriate, was, "I drank the Kool-Aid, I'm in," or something like that. We wouldn't say that today, but... There was one where this little boy goes, "I think my grandma lives there." And all these kinds of things. So when I accepted my award, I did – I wish somebody had a recording of that, because it was really heartfelt, and I told them my Y story. So when I won the John R. Mott award, they surprise you when that happens. But my husband knew. And he's a very creative man, so he wrote a poem for the occasion. So he was there on the day and he wrote this poem. At the end of every stanza, he'd say, "Andy, please leave my wife alone." Like, she's gone at 6:30 in the morning, she's sitting in . . . Y, Y, Y all the time, like it was that whole thing, and he's, "Andy, please leave my wife alone. I'm alone at home with dah, dah, dah. Andy, please leave my wife alone." So that became kind of a core of my six words, of at least my story. I was like, "Andy, please don't leave me alone, because together we can make our best better." I can't remember what the six words were. But anyway, it's been a real heart issue for me, and we have worked really hard to get women involved now, and now we have lots of women leaders in the Y. So, let's be judged on that.

PG: It seems like it was work to get women, and also to get African Americans-

PD: Yeah.

PG: ...to diversify the board.

PD: Yep. But I'll tell you what. Done a spectacular job on that. Stick Williams followed me as board chair. Phenomenal leader, just...

PG: I believe he was the first African American.

PD: Yes. Yes, he was. And the current board chair is a dear friend of mine, Teresa Drew, who is the managing partner of Deloitte here in Charlotte. And we just see, really, a lot of really strong leaders. But it was a little bit. It wasn't... The Y was just part of the community. The whole community was like that. It's hard to think that in 2000... I mean, think of it now. We have Kandi Deitemeyer as president of CPCC. The president of Davidson, the president of UNCC, the president of CPCC are all women. Now, you still don't see women CEOs that much, but you certainly see a lot of powerful women, C-Suite people in the community. But it's just, I don't know, I guess it takes a long time just for it to evolve.

PG: And how did you go about trying to change that?

PD: Well, I will say, one, I earned my spot on the table. Nobody thought, "Well, she's just here because she's a woman." I mean, I think I worked really hard. I was super responsible and committed and present and had good thinking skills and stuff. So people were like, "Hey, it's not so bad having a woman." But you have to keep in mind, I had been serving on public company, corporate boards for, maybe not all that long then, since maybe '97, but I had board experience... I think at the time I was on the Sunoco board, a \$5 billion packaging company, with all men. And I was a business person, and so I think that was helpful. And then I had relationships with a lot of women in Charlotte who I could kind of help introduce to the Y. I, on the board nomination committee, forced us – along with others, I wasn't the only one advocating this, to really think about diversity.

PG: Did you have a sense that women in the community sort of thought, "Well, that's just the thing the guys do"?

Pamela Davies:

PD: A little bit. I think so.

PG: There's a very deep history of that being the thing the guys...

PD: Yeah. Oh, very deep history. And much like Queens, families. It's like, the father chaired the Y and then... Like, so Frank Dowd might have been the third Dowd that chaired the Y. Is that right?

PG: Something like that. Yeah.

PD: Yeah. The Bissell family had lots of... The Bissell and Harris family had... So it wasn't even just white older men, it was like families and old Charlotte money. But I'll tell you what, don't sell it short, because it's what helped the Y be very successful in that time and place. But it wasn't for old white rich men. The Y wasn't for them. I mean, they did that to serve the broader community, but it's just, that's kind of where the wealth and the power was at that time in history.

PG: And it seems to me, when talking about that, it was also very much a social place for a lot of these men.

PD: Yeah.

PG: Particularly the ones with deep ties. I was talking to Jim [Babb one of the ones who learned to swim with no bathing suit.

PD: Nekked.

PG: And I wondered, did women, as the Y brought in more women, develop any of that kind of connection through groups of people who were heavy users that spent a lot of time at the Y and connected that way?

PD: Women?

PG: Yeah, at the...

PD: I can't really comment on that, but certainly women began going to the Y.

PG: Right.

PD: I'll tell you a family that I adore, Ned and Adelaide Davis. I was just with Adelaide this weekend. She's like 83, maybe. Ned passed away maybe three or four years ago. Adelaide went to the Y every day. So did Ned. Ned went in the morning, exercised, showered there. He never took a shower at home. He took his shower at the Y. And he ate breakfast at the Y. That was as much of a routine as brushing your teeth every day. That's what Ned did. And Adelaide, who was at the time I came maybe 62, went to the Y to exercise all the time. I mean, her generation began that.

PG: But she would just go exercise at a different time?

PD: No, she would go do yoga classes and spin classes and boxing classes. She and her friends did that. I just did this. And you could cut any of this. Gosh.

PG: Oh. What. This is just as a record. So yeah, go ahead.

PD: Yeah, yeah. Well, I teach the strategy course now. So I took a year sabbatical when I stepped down as president and I'm back in the classroom teaching the capstone course in the business curriculum and it's a strategy course. We were doing competitive analysis on Monday night. I used the Y as an example. I had this slide with the Y's logo and everything. And when I got involved in the Y, it was 20 years ago, we probably thought of our major competitors being large gym facilities, that kind of thing. So Lifetime Fitness, LA Fitness, Planet Fitness, Gold's Gym, etc. So that's who we competed for, to get people to come to our facility to exercise. And 20 years ago I was leading the strategy planning effort for the Charlotte Y, and I remember under

the threat section, because you do strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, or threats, when you do a strategic plan. Under the threat section, I had listed the ubiquity of the treadmill. Which is kind of humorous to me now, because people don't use treadmills that much anymore. There're so many other more sophisticated forms of equipment. And what I meant by that is, we used to compete with LA Fitness and Planet Fitness and Gold's Gym, but all of a sudden all of the churches are building family life centers with fitness centers. The country clubs are building fitness centers in their facilities. Apartment buildings are building fitness centers. And corporate headquarters are building fitness centers. So all of a sudden, all our members have other options, many of which are less expensive and more convenient. Bob and I lived in the Ascent for six months. It's a big, tall high-rise in downtown. When we moved out of the president's house, our house wasn't ready yet. We lived up there. There is a beautiful fitness center on the 32nd floor. Why would you go anywhere else? Or, if you're in a corporate center or an office building that has it, if it's in your... So I'm like, "We've got new competitive sources here that we had not anticipated." I always say Bob and I are so over-gymed. I keep my membership at the Y, but I have a gym here on campus, we have a gym at our country club, we have a gym at our church. It's just a lot of competition. So, I was telling the students, "Here's where we thought our traditional competition was, and then all of a sudden we get this competition from non-traditional sources." And then came the specialty boutique kinds of places. So if you just do yoga, you can go to Yoga One. Or if you just want a spin class, Flywheel's a great place. Or if you want interval training, Orange Theory, or CrossFit, or whatever. So all these specialty boutique competitors came in to just nibble at our business. And now, today, accelerated by the pandemic, there's much more outdoor recreational activity, F-3 groups that just run together in the park. There's these digital trackers and Peletons and Mirrors and treadmills that have been delivered to the home. So we've lost 50% of our members, and the question is, "Will we ever get them back?" So what I would say to you now, the strategic challenge is – at 50 percent of our membership, we won't have any planned surplus to subsidize our work in underserved neighborhoods. So I think the business model may have to change dramatically, not just in Charlotte but nationally, where philanthropy becomes an increasingly important part of the business model. We've always raised money and relied on philanthropy, but when you've got \$80 million of earned revenue, it's not like you have to have philanthropy to keep your doors open, right? But if we lose 50 percent of our members, we're going to have to have philanthropy to keep Stratford's doors open. So I do think we're at a pivotal time in the history of the Y right now.

PG: It's interesting that, you probably know this, but the first time the Charlotte Y accepted any philanthropic funds was at the beginning of the Great Depression.

PD: Oh, really? I didn't know that.

PG: They did.

PD: Really?

PG: That's when they first, when they initially formed what later became the United Way, in, I think, 1931. This is in a piece I worked on because I'm interested in this. Then, initially the YW joined, but the YMCA did not, until the next year, when they lost all their dormitory revenue.

PD: Okay.

PG: Because of the Depression, and then that's when they stepped in and became part of that organization.

PD: Well, we're very fortunate that we live in a country where philanthropy is so rich. I mean, you won't find this in other parts of the world, this kind of philanthropic mindset. And we're also... There's a couple of things, of late, that I think have gone our way in a way. The pandemic has shone a really bright light on the Y as a community asset. So I always say, the Mayor didn't call Lifetime Fitness to ask them to step up and provide essential childcare during COVID. And CMS didn't call Gold's Gym or Yoga One to provide academic support, resources, when kids were learning from home. The White House called the Y to help with the vaccine distribution, not the Charlotte Y, but the national Y, to help with the vaccine education and distribution effort. So, because of COVID, and it's like, "What's so special about the Y?" – our community partnerships are so deep. The city managers sat... I don't know if Marcus is still on our board but sat on our board, so he knows the capabilities. Our relationships within the community are so deep that when there's a crisis, when there's a problem, we're prepared to step up and be a partner. So the pandemic... that's always been the case, but the pandemic shone a very bright light on that, and it justifies us as a charitable cause. So people who are interested in making sure children have food security... I mean, if you look at the statistics, I don't know what the Charlotte Ys are, because I probably focus at the national level now, but if you look at the statistics about how many kids we fed through the pandemic. I mean, it's unbelievable how many meals we served as an organization nationally. So, if we're going to have to rely on philanthropy to support our work, we've had at least an opportunity to demonstrate that work with a pretty bright light shining on it.

PG: Is that going to require big retooling, to sort of focus more on philanthropy?

PD: It's a lift. It is a lift. The other thing we have that I'm really proud of – and this came after the social unrest after George Floyd's murder at the national level, but Todd and others in the Charlotte Y were very much involved, the African American CEOs came together and started this work about dismantling systemic racism. We actually had Kamala Harris speak. I mean, we've had like 10,000 people on the webinar, day and a half long webinars, unbelievable work. Kamala was not Vice President then, she was running for President, I think, or maybe she had dropped out of the race already. But we did all this work and we've created what's called a shared equitable community agenda. Equitable communities' agenda. We're dealing with Ys all over the country, right? And they have different perspectives on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and different levels of readiness to do this important work. The national Y declared themselves

an anti-racist, multicultural organization. They didn't ask me about it and I'm the board chair. I was a little surprised about that. In fact, I was in a meeting and I heard that term about three times and I'm like, "Oh, excuse me, where did that term come from." I'm like, "When did we, you know, declare this?" I'm opposed to that language, not because – because it's divisive, more divisive than productive, I think. So I know the arguments. You've got to be bold, you've got to take a stand, and we have people in the movement who don't think that's enough. But we got to meet these other people where they are if we hope to move them along, and poking them in the chest, implying they're a racist, is not the way to move them along. The reason I'm pleased about the equitable communities' agenda is I think it's something everyone can embrace. No matter where you are on the journey, that makes sense to you. So.

PG: It's interesting. You talk about the Ys being in all different places at the national level ... So where would you put the Charlotte Y on that sort of continuum?

PD: Struggling. (long pause). This is where I'll watch my words. There's a lot of desire to have a more progressive perspective on this work, but there are also more traditional thinkers around these issues that wield influence. So, there's a real tug right now about what's too much. Is being in the Pride parade too much? Some people on the board who are... and not on the board, actually, but just some influencers who are more conservative in their theology, believe that marriage is between a man and a woman and all of those things, and don't believe that as a Christian mission organization we should be in the Pride parade. And others, and this is a microcosm of the country, so others are like, "What? I'm not even going to be affiliated with an organization who holds that view." So, the divisiveness we see across the country on every level, the divisiveness we see in the YMCA nationally, it's just, there's a little microcosm of it going along in Charlotte. There's that. And in the end, we'll end up more towards embracing inclusion. That's where we'll end up, but how long will it take?

PG: And why do you feel that way, that in the end that's where it's going to go?

PD: Because I just think that the social mores will move in that direction. And that love... It's about love of mankind and others and not judgment. It's not our role to judge. So, it's really funny, Pam. I will tell you this. And you can just cut any of this out, because I feel like we're just talking and it might not be relevant to the thing, but... I was sharing with a friend the other day that I consider myself to be a pretty liberal-thinking person, and really very much committed to DEI work and that sort of thing. But when I get into the national Y and the Chicago office, these people over here were an anti-racist organization. So I find myself leaning the other way more than I feel. Leaning that way, just trying to get a little bit of balance. I find myself saying, "Now, now, now." So, it's an interesting position to be in. It's an interesting time in our world.

PG: It is that. It certainly is. Well, let me ask you a question related to that, because when you're talking about that, that just sounds so Charlotte to me.

PD: Okay.

PG: And I was wondering, to what extent do you think that being here in Charlotte, being involved in the community and all, do you think how that affects how you approach these things, or is this how you came in to Charlotte?

PD: Me personally?

PG: Yeah.

PD: And how would you describe how I approach things?

PG: Well, when you talk about wanting to bring everybody along, and if things seem like they're getting maybe a little bit too far over to one side, wanting to pull them back and that kind of thing. I mean, and I may be completely mistaken-

PD: Yeah.

PG: It just sounds like something that's very typical here in Charlotte.

PD: That's a style...

PG: That that is a way that people, and I know you may disagree-

PD: I think-

PG: I don't know.

PD: No, I think I probably came that way, and that's probably why I fit in pretty well. I think words matter. So, for example, anti-racist as a word, I would never use that word in this capacity, because it's labeling someone in a pejorative way, and I don't think there's any benefit to it. I know some racists, but I don't think there's going to be... And I'm not talking Nazi, neo-Nazi kind of racists, but I know some people who probably have a little bit of racist in them, but they don't know that. They don't aspire to be a racist. They just don't get it. Calling them a racist isn't going to help one little iota to try to bring them along the path. Billy Wireman [former Queens president] told me one time, if you're familiar with Billy, that's an historical story right there, when I became president, he was shaking his head one day and he said, "Pamela, 95% of this job is taking the fever out of things." And he says, "Everybody walks around every day with two buckets, a bucket of water and a bucket of oil. And when something flames up, far too often, they use their bucket of oil." He says, "Pamela, carry two buckets of water." That was such an enlightening thing for me, and I shared that with my management team. I'll call my CFO and say, "The provost is all whipped up about something." And I'm out of town, I'll call the CFO, I'll say, "Matt, go down to Lynn's office, take two buckets of water, and solve this problem." My daughter's a Presbyterian minister. I was listening to her sermon this morning when I went to the gym. She told the story about the buckets of water. She goes, "My mom always says, when I'm going into a conflict situation, do you have a bucket of water or a bucket of oil?" And so, I think that addressing this division is going to take a lot of water. We have some people on both sides

who carry two buckets of oil. But you do have some old-school thinkers in this community who have long histories of being leaders in the community, but then you have, like, Hugh McColl, who's dedicated himself to issues of equity and homelessness. And way back in the day before I even came here, Hugh was super committed to gender equity and built daycare centers for the employees and did all these kind of things to support women coming into the workforce. Now, one could say that was self-serving, in that he needed women employees, but I don't think so. I think he really... And this is a guy raised in the really deep South. Deep South. So you've got people like that. Brian Monahan. I have seen Brian Monahan on a Zoom call tear up, talking about issues of equity. So we have some strong progressive voices in this community. And I think what we're going to find is that the corporate money isn't going to anybody that doesn't... Corporate philanthropy will not be directed to organizations who don't fully embrace and promote DEI [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion] work. That's my prediction.

PG: Well, that raises another really interesting question that I'm interested in you talking about, different people and their approaches to things. One thing that people often say to me about the Charlotte Y is that it's a "Big C" Y. Big C meaning the Christianity part is very much central. Can you talk about your experience of the Charlotte Y as a Big C Y and where you saw that manifested?

PD: Yeah. It is a Big C Y. So I've had the benefit of seeing lots of Ys all over the country, serving on the national Y board. And I can assure you that it is a Big C Y in the scheme of it. There's a lot of small C Ys. Unfortunately, some people in the Charlotte Y resent the national Y because they don't think they're promoting the Christian mission adequately. They think they've lost their way. I will tell you, – this is my third meeting of the national Y board. These people come from all over the country. They're bigwigs. They come from all over the country, and they ask me to do the devotion, or the mission moment, or something like that. I've only been to two board meetings, and I'm very distracted because I'm running a university and everything else. I have no idea what... I didn't even think about it. I thought, "Okay, devotion. This is what you do. You talk about scripture. You say a passionate prayer. And that's what you do." So I get up there, and I actually talked about Esther and this scripture from Esther. I talked about the state of our nation in terms of literacy and summer learning, the achievement gap, blah blah blah, blah blah blah, blah blah blah, and we're like Esther, we're here for a time just such as this. Nobody has the scale and the scope and the reach to make a difference in our country about this, blah blah blah. And then I finish with this really fiery, passionate prayer. And when I finished this, one guy goes [clapping sound] ... Just starts clapping really slowly. And then other people start clapping. And he said, "I rarely applaud a mission moment, but I just had to do that." Well, it took me two years to realize no one prays. No one mentions scripture. So they were just shocked. It was just like, "What is she doing?" Well, in the Charlotte Y, that would be expected. I began to realize that it was a very... And there's a lot of people of faith on the national Y board, but it doesn't play into our work very much. How would they see it played out? Certainly, they prayerfully consider issues. I mean, they've had an issue recently, about a naming gift that wasn't accepted because of

something, and they feel they acted too quickly on that, and they've actually created a policy that they have to take 36 hours and prayerfully consider these things before they take action or whatever. They always pray before meetings, pray before... And they aren't even necessarily ecumenical. We pray at Queens. We're a Presbyterian-founded institution, and our Presbyterian faith is important to us, and the Judeo-Christian faith is important to us, but we don't pray in the name of Jesus. We pray in a more ecumenical way. I don't think anybody would push back on that in the Charlotte Y. But I haven't been involved that much in the Charlotte Y in the last 10 years, so that may have changed. Certainly not back in the day. By the way, they selected board members. They wouldn't select a board member who wasn't a "believer," that's in quotes. So yeah. It's there.

PG: How did you see it play out in what the Y did?

PD: First of all, Jesus was the radical includer. He included everyone. He was a lover of all kind of things. So, I hope that's how it will play out. I saw it play out when Andy Calhoun said, to those young banking professionals, that they could keep using the Y. I mean, that was a Christian belief that you're there for your neighbor. That painting over there, that's a... Are you familiar with Ben Long's?

PG: Yes.

PD: ...painting that's in First Presbyterian Church? Well, that's the cartoon of that 28 foot by 8 foot painting. Hugh McColl gave that to me on my first day of work. He brought it in my office, and he said, "Pamela, I have the sense that you're a person that does for others. This is going to become a very busy, crazy, stressful job. I don't want you to forget that, so I'm going to give you this cartoon of the Good Samaritan." So, I've done a couple of devotions on that story. What I say is, the Levite... a priest passes by and doesn't stop, and then the Levite passes by and doesn't stop, but then the Samaritan does stop and help the man. The point of that story is, you got to get off your donkey. You got to get off your donkey to really be with your neighbor and take care of your neighbor. The Charlotte Y gets off their donkey. They go to where the pain is and the need is and the support's necessary. Yeah, I see it lived out not just in terms of praying. We have a huge prayer breakfast for the community. That's a great testimony. So I think they live out their mission well. But I think it's evolving.

PG: Well, again, with all of this.. This will start to bring this to a close. Do you think, particularly in terms of race, where do you see the challenges ahead, maybe for the national Y as well as for the Charlotte Y?

PD: Well, I think in terms of race it's the lack of consensus around what should be done and how much should be done. I had lunch yesterday with the president of the Princeton Theological Seminary. Way before George Floyd, they did kind of a race audit, slavery audit, on their campus about... The slaves didn't build the campus, whatever. But there was a lot of complicit behavior. So part of it is just getting on the same page in terms of acknowledging. I'm serving on the Duke

Endowment board, and we had this group come in and do a presentation for us on race, the history. You would love it. I wonder if I have it here. If I do, I'll show it to you. The history of race. And it had all the legislation that had disadvantaged people of color, and all the legislation that advantaged Caucasian people, and then all the legislation that had benefited people of color. And once you see those, you say, "We have to make up. We have to do something." People of color have had... Where we are is so predictable, given what we did. Redlining. I mean, just all of that. I do think the difficulty is that people have very disparate opinions. We're all living in an echo chamber. We can choose what we hear. We can silence anyone who doesn't agree with us, by what we read and the news we watch and the places we go and the people with whom we associate. So getting a real dialogue around it is far more difficult. But it's a little bit... I mean, we just can't stop the work. I think that philanthropy, both corporate and... If you're not doing equity work, I don't know how you're going to raise money. I think that foundations and the corporations are so focused on this issue, if we can't move the needle now, I don't think we can. I just – I can't imagine...

PG: Well, one more thing again is talking about being efficacious and strategies and what not. You've mentioned the story of Esther several times, that it's important to you. Tell me a little bit more about why that particular story is important to you.

PD: Well, Stick Williams is the king of using the scripture about Esther effectively. Perhaps I less so. But I do feel like, for example, that the Y is here for just such a time as this with the COVID crisis, even though it has been devastating to the Y. I mean, we were across the country closed. We laid off nationally 80 percent of staff, and you've got people who are in the Y movement that have been CEOs and leaders. They're in this movement because they've got hearts of gold. Or they would do some other more lucrative profession. So they're about community. So anybody having to lay off 80 percent of our employees is devastating, but a whole bunch of Y leaders? I remember, just weeks into the pandemic, we had an executive committee meeting and the Chief Operating Officer of YUSA said, "We have a movement full of just demoralized leaders, just heartbroken leaders." That was a really hard thing to hear, and to know how to address. But at the end of the day, if I showed you what we did during the crisis... Here, maybe we can end with this, because... Somebody, one time I was at a Y thing, this was 10 years ago maybe, and the person who was leading whatever we were doing said, "I just want you to close your eyes for a minute and imagine your community without the Y." I take instruction well. I closed my eyes and I imagined that and when I opened my eyes I had tears in my eyes. I couldn't imagine our community without the Y. And that, sadly, that was more true 10 years ago even than now. But post-pandemic, it's more true than 10 years ago. So we have a big role to play. And unfortunately, Pamela, I would say that we're kind of seeing an existential threat with this membership model falling. We don't have 10 years to figure it out. So we just hired a new CEO for the national Y, and I was on that search committee, and I'd never taken anything more seriously in my life, because I thought, "We can't miss on this leader. We need somebody that's bold and courageous and can see the future and bring the resources to bear to get our Ys back on

track so they can be there in our communities. Because if you close your eyes and you think about this country without Ys...”

PG: Anything else about your experience with the Charlotte Y?

PD: No, I'm just real proud of it. It just needs to progress and needs to really find a way to bring the Charlotte community around the DEI work, more inclusiveness across race, identity, socioeconomic levels. There's so many... Our Seattle Y has this whole program around Muslim women being able to swim, because of their modesty values. So they've developed this whole program where, if you're a Muslim woman, you'll be there only with Muslim women... They have hijab swimming suits. I mean, they have done so much to serve that segment of the population. If you go down to Houston, Texas, they have a huge immigrant population. The work they're doing to serve immigrants is just extraordinary. So every Y... I actually served on the world board, the board for the global Y. There's 120 countries that have Ys across the world, and so they have an executive committee to govern that. There's like three Americans and 22 people from all over the world, so it's like a really super interesting thing. But the commonality is that all Ys everywhere serve the most pressing needs in their communities. So if you go to Africa, those Ys are working on malaria and AIDS. If you go to Asia, they might be working on sex trafficking of young children. If you go to Mexico, their goal may be to keep young men out of the drug trade. If you go to Scandinavia, it's about environmental issues. The richer the country, the less poignant that mission is, perhaps, but even in this country, the Ys are addressing the most pressing community needs in their community. So in Houston, it's about immigrants. In Seattle, it's the Muslim population or whatever. And I think in the South, that racial equity and progressive inclusion are going to be the issues.

PG: All right.

PD: Okay.

PG: Well, thank you very much.

PD: You're welcome.

End of Recording