

Margaret Dillon

Interviewer: Liana Haddad

Interviewee: Margaret (Peggy) Dillon

What: Oral History Interview

Where: Peggy's home in Gloucester, MA

When: March 15, 2014 at 1:18 PM EDT

Why: "Women of the White Mountains" Collection

Liana Haddad: I am Liana Haddad recording an interview with Peggy Dillon about the "Women of the White Mountains" on March 15, 2014 at 1:18 PM at her home in Gloucester, MA. So, I am going to start with: When were you born?

Margaret Dillon: I was born December 21, 1959, in Salem Hospital in Salem, Mass.

LH: What are your parents' names?

MD: James and Lorraine Dillon.

LH: What ethnic backgrounds are you from?

MD: Generally northern and western European. My maternal grandfather came over from Ireland and all the other parts of the family are from northern and western Europe.

LH: Are there any family members that kind of stick out to you or are very important to you? And if so, what are his or her name and why are they important to you?

MD: My parents are important to me. Uh, my mother passed away about a year ago. Both she and my dad exposed us, [myself and] three sisters, they exposed us to lots of different experiences. Actually, not so much hiking and backwoods experiences but a lot of urban experiences [such as] music [and] theatre. They used to take us skiing up in North Conway. So, they just made sure we saw a lot of different things.

LH: That's very cool. Now do you have, you have siblings so you already answered that question. What are the names?

MD: Edie is a year older than me, Katie is a year and a half younger than me, and Julie is the youngest and she is eight years younger.

LH: Did you have any special relationship with any of them?

MD: We all get along. My older and younger sisters, Edie and Katie, [and I] were born pretty close together. So, we used to play a lot together on this, this kind of 1960s childhood stuff. We lived on a quiet street in Swampscott, Mass. and we and the other kids on the street, you know, would play together for hours, running around until dark and so... Yeah, we have done a lot together over the years.

LH: So, where did you grow up? Did you grow up in the same house or did you move often?

MD: We, I grew up on the same street. My parents started out raising their family in the house next door to the house I grew up in. So they started at 52 King Street and then when I was three, they moved to 56 King Street and that is where I lived until I went to college, when I was seventeen.

LH: Now, did you... Well, what... What were you interested in when you were a child? Did you play any certain games? Did you collect stuff? What did you like to do?

MD: I was pretty shy, actually, until I went to college. I always had one or two friends that I hung out with, in addition to playing with my sisters and the kids on the street. I read a lot. I did very well in school. I was just generally active all the time. My sisters and I rode our bikes around the neighborhood. We did cartwheels in the yard. And I guess, you know, watched a tiny little bit of TV in the pre-cable years.

LH: Did you have any best friend when you were a child?

MD: I did. I had several best friends. An early best friend was Robin O'Keefe. She and I would actually pretend to be spies and wear trench coats and walk around the neighborhood and take notes on what was going on in the neighborhood. I modeled myself after Harriet the Spy, after the book of the same name; and another friend, Joan Eckert, she and I, again we would walk around, she lived in Lynn, and so we would just take like adventures on foot all of the time. We'd go to downtown Lynn, we'd walk out [along] the Lynnway and go bowling. I did a lot on foot with those two friends.

LH: Are you still in contact with them?

MD: I'm in occasional contact with Joan. I haven't talked with Robin in a long time.

LH: Okay. So, did you keep you close? Did you have a certain relationship that developed over the years?

MD: Well, they were kind of, of different eras. You know, I would say that with Robin, we hung out a lot until, say, junior high and then with Joan was more through my junior high school years, my junior and high school years and into college somewhat.

LH: Do you have a current best friend or a very close friend?

MD: I do. He's an ex-boyfriend, actually. His name is David and he lives in Virginia, near where I lived when I was in D.C., and we have been good friends for ten years.

LH: Keeping phone... Like contact with phone, you know.

MD: Oh yeah, we [also] visit each other. I went down to D.C. in December. He's come up here. We've stayed in touch.

LH: Okay. How would you, you described yourself earlier as being shy. Is there any other way you would describe yourself as a child and did it affect your school at all like...

MD: I was serious about school. I could be goofy and adventurous as well as serious and but I always took schoolwork very seriously. So, I don't know if that answers the question.

LH: Yeah. That's... Yeah, did you enjoy school?

MD: I loved school. I went to a Catholic school, K-6. The nuns could be pretty fierce there. But I will tell you, I got a really good education while I was there. So, it prepared me well for the rest of my educational career from junior high through high school and college and grad school even.

LH: Did you have like a subject or topic that was most interesting to you and...

MD: I actually did pretty well at everything. I was one of those students who just did her homework, followed the assignments, stayed up with whatever was assigned to me. But I always loved to read and to write. So, that was pretty much a constant. I was sort of uncertain as to how good a writer I was but I like to do it so...

LH: Is there any memories from, you know, childhood that you still hold with you today?

MD: Oh yeah.

LH: Specifically?

MD: I should have thought more about specifics. Well, when I was, I think, when I was about five, my parents started taking my sisters and me up to Lake Pawtuckaway, which is in southern New Hampshire, and we would rent cabins at the edge of the lake and we went there every summer. We just swam all the time. You know, kind of played around the woods and we would go get water from a pump nearby. When [I was] thirteen, my parents bought a cabin on the edge of the lake. And so that became a real fixture in our summers. And we also, growing up in Swampscott, we were only a few blocks from the ocean so we went to the beach a lot. And then, you know, there were holiday trips to visit relatives in New Jersey. And my [paternal] grandmother lived in Florida, so we would take the train [on a] two-day train ride to Clearwater, Florida to visit my grandmother so...

LH: That must have been a long train ride.

MD: It was but, you know, I just stuck my nose in a book and looked out the window.

LH: Yeah, that sounds like so much fun.

MD: It was, it was.

LH: Now, moving on to adolescence. How did you describe yourself as a person during your, you know, middle school and high school? Did you change you like change? Did you develop differently like, how... Would you describe yourself less shy or....

MD: I was a little less shy. I started to maybe hang out with slightly larger groups of people. I got involved in formal athletics. I ran track and cross-country in high school which I loved. I had tried field hockey and didn't like it and I realized I just did not enjoy team sports so much as

sports where you could succeed as an individual, which you do in track and cross country even though you're on a team and you want to do well for the team. It's sort of your performance, you know, on your own. So, that was a big change. I also had a brief dalliance with being a cheerleader. I really wanted to be a cheerleader. I tried out for several years in a row and didn't get on the squad and was crushed. And then I did get on the squad my junior year; I was a basketball cheerleader. It was [a] two-year commitment, and after the first year I realized that it just took too much time away from homework and, you know, just running and just other things I wanted to do. So I left the squad after a year.

LH: Between the ages of twelve and nineteen, what types of jobs did you hold? Like...

MD: Ah, good question. I've worked a lot. I've, I started babysitting, I think when I was around twelve. So I always was making some kind of money. You know, before then I was, I would make loaves of bread and sell them to neighbors and... But then I was babysitting from the time I was twelve. And then when I was fourteen, actually, I got hired at a hospital in Lynn, working in the kitchen and my mom also worked there and... So, I worked there weekends through high school and, you know, made my own money for my various adventures.

LH: How would you describe your relationship with your parents at the time because as being a teenager, some are rebellious and stuff. So, how would you describe your relationship with your parents?

MD: I, we got along. I was not rebellious. I was rebellious later, in terms of just having certain things I wanted to do with my life, like changing majors in college, which we will talk about later, or, you know, to travel on my own. But no, in high school, my sisters and I were pretty good kids. We did our homework. We were pretty good kids.

LH: So, your relationship with your siblings never changed or did it kind of develop in differently like... You used to play with them as a child.

MD: Oh, yeah, you know, there was, I don't know if it was sibling rivalry. We would annoy each other, you know, like taking clothes from the other one's closet and wearing them without asking first. That kind of thing. So, I mean, yeah. I guess there was your typical, like, teen, annoying behavior like that.

LH: Did you have like any academic challenges? Like were you kind of... That in certain classes, did you, you know, strive to be, you know, get better grades than the other or something like that?

MD: I, I really don't remember that. I really loved English. I took languages. I studied French and Spanish and I really liked doing that. But I... I mean the sciences were work for me. Math, not so much. But, I did pretty well in all of them. I will tell you this. There was a point where my older sister Edie and my younger sister Katie and I were all taking Spanish at the same time in high school and so, we would start speaking Spanish at the dinner table. And talk about our various misadventures over the weekend in Spanish. And we annoyed my parents to no end. To this day, we still greet each other in Spanish. This is like 40 years later.

LH: That's so cool. Having secret conversations with your siblings where your parents can't understand.

MD: Yeah, right in front of my parents. Oh, and also, I don't know if I mentioned but my [maternal] grandmother lived with us for sixteen years. She came to live with us when I was five and she passed away in her 80s when I was twenty one. So, we got to know her as just a regular member of the family.

LH: That's really cool. Did you travel... your family like travel, well beyond what you have mentioned so far? Did you go, like, further than Massachusetts? Did you travel to different places?

MD: So... So, we would go to Florida...

LH: Yeah

MD: ...periodically to visit my paternal grandmother. They [my parents] would take us to New Jersey to visit relatives over the holidays. They took us to New York on a number of vacations to see Broadway shows, spend time in the city, and I will credit my parents even though they didn't really take me – hiking wasn't their thing. They gave us daughters a lot of latitude in terms of exploring cities. So, in New York, sometimes we were free to roam, you know, together. From probably my early teens on, we would take the commuter train or the bus into Boston and Cambridge and be in there all day with friends, unescorted, and we would just come home on our own; we would like get off the train in Swampscott, walk home, and, you know, go to concerts and come home late. They gave us a lot of latitude. So, I think my sense of adventure stems in part from having urban adventures.

LH: Cool. Now, was there any significant events during this, like, time period, you know between the ages of twelve and nineteen that kind of put you on a specific career path or a path towards, you know, when you went to college or what job you were interested in? Anything that caused that interest.

MD: Good question. So, in terms of a career, I really didn't know what I wanted to do. I just wasn't – I know some people who know since the age of eight that they wanted to be a veterinarian or something. I didn't have that kind of direction. I started out studying nursing in college for two years before leaving that because my parents really stressed practical degrees and nursing was a practical degree and so I choose that and it ended up not being a good fit. So, no. During that time, I was not really professionally focused, but I had a very important experience which led to my later love of the White Mountains. And I would say in my mid-teens there was a school trip. They took a couple of busloads of us up to the White Mountains and we went to two of the Appalachian Mountain huts, Mizpah and Zealand Falls huts. And it was a life-changer because actually none of my friends went on the trip ... I mean, you know, I hung out with other kids but, you know, none of my pals were there. But I remember thinking after that trip: *I am going back. I don't know how I am going to make this happen, I don't know how I am going to learn more about the White Mountains but I am going back.* So, that was a real game-changer for me.

LH: That's, that's awesome. Uh, okay. So, next question; they're about college. So, you, you talked about college so you applied to college. Where did you apply and where were you accepted?

MD: I applied, oh gosh, to five or six colleges, University of Rhode Island, which is where I went for two years, University of Connecticut, a few others I am blanking on, all for their nursing programs. And I went to URI for two years and realized by the second year when we were actually already doing rotations in hospitals, that caring for the sick in a hospital setting was not my calling. And so I dropped out of school then. So that's what happened. Well, that's what happened with college then. I had gotten hired to work at the Pinkham Notch Camp at the Appalachian Club starting in May 1979, which coincided with my dropping out of nursing school. And I worked there for a year and a half. I did end up finishing college at the University of Massachusetts, but by that time I'd changed my major to geography and that's the degree I graduated with.

LH: Alright. So... Alright, so, I am assuming then you did live on campus.

MD: I did.

LH: Did you live in a dorm when you were at school for those first two years at URI?

MD: I did. I lived in a dorm then and then when I went to UMass, I lived off campus and I also spent an exchange year at the University of Oregon while at UMass.

LH: Okay. Then, did you have roommates during – well, I would assume you had roommates with your dormitory. Did you have roommates with you – when you lived off campus?

MD: Yeah. Yup, both times. I lived in several different locations and I had roommates all those times.

LH: So, could you tell me how you got along with them?

MD: Some better than others. You know, I know some students say, you know, they become best friends with their roommates freshman year. Freshman year, my first roommate didn't really work out. For the second half of the year, I ended up with a different roommate with whom I was friends. That was much better. Same thing happened the second year. I started out with a roommate with whom I wasn't terribly compatible, but I ended up rooming with another friend and that worked out fine. When I dropped out, [I] went back to UMass and then went on and also went on to exchange in Oregon, I had roommates that I hadn't really known before. I just, you know, ended up in these group living situations in apartments or in a big house. It was a big cooperative in Oregon where I lived and I got to know them as I went along. But it, it's funny. Back then I didn't think it was any big deal to just sort of move in with people I didn't know 'cause everybody was doing that. You just kind of got to know them as you went along.

LH: Yeah. Did you have you have any memorable roommates or did you have like any fun memories? Did you do things together?

MD: Oh, yeah. Well. So, when I went back to college, to UMass and then on exchange to the University of Oregon, it was a very remarkable year. I lived in a big cooperative with maybe 30, 35 people from all around the country. And we had a social budget. We would have bands play at this huge house that used to be an old fraternity house, this was in Eugene, Oregon. We would rent vans and go up to the hot springs in the mountains, about an hour away. We rented a van another time and went cross-country skiing around Crater Lake in Oregon. Socially, it was a very, very rich experience. There was just always, you know, we baked birthday cakes for people when it was their birthday. We sang “Happy Birthday” to them. It was a really neat way to kind of immerse yourself in other people’s lives.

LH: Yeah, so – Yeah. So, it sounds like you were involved in lots of things. Were you involved in anything on campus when you were at school?

MD: Actually, yes. I did Outdoor Club activities actually all the way along. So, I went to three different schools, undergraduate. URI, I did one or two kind of Outing Club events. We went to kind of a nature center and stayed overnight and did like, rappelling off of this little cliff and trust exercises where you fall into people’s hands while they grabbed you and stuff. And then at UMass, I went on a caving trip to West Virginia with the Outing Club. And in Oregon, we again just had these astonishing adventures where we would go whitewater rafting on a weekend. I spent a three-day period doing a really serious hike. I want to say it was 40 to 50 miles. I don’t know if it was actually that long. Starting at Mount Hood and working our way through the mountains and we ended up coming out at the Columbia River Gorge. It was a really extensive hiking and camping trip. So, yeah. I was doing Outdoor Club adventures.

LH: Did you hold any, like, positions in the club or no?

MD: No.

LH: Okay. What jobs did you have while you were in college?

MD: What jobs did I have? I—When I was in Oregon, I was a note taker. They, again, this is in the pre-computer era so I got paid to sit in on large lecture courses and take really good notes, copies of which students could buy if they missed the lecture. And I did that. My senior year at UMass, I had a job cocktail waitressing at this divey bar called “The Drake” in Amherst, Mass. It was really divey. I mean, people would get in fights over the pool table and all this stuff. All my friends would come visit me there. I was not a terribly good waitress. I would occasionally spill things on people. It’s really not my thing, but that was a very memorable job. And then, you know, I had other, like, minor jobs like dishwashing, washing dishes in a school cafeteria and stuff like that.

LH: Okay. Well, we are moving on to the White Mountains portion of the interview. The first question is: Do you remember your first trip to the White Mountains. If so, what happened and what were your earliest memories?

MD: Well, I mentioned earlier that when I was in my teens I went with my school trip to the White Mountains and we went to Mizpah and Zealand Hut. So that really put a bug in my ear about wanting to go back and I wasn’t quite sure what that venue – how that would happen because nobody in my family hiked and my friends didn’t hike. But I had found out about the

Appalachian Mountain Club just through some people I knew in high school. And I decided that I was going to apply to work for the Appalachian Mountain Club. This was in the late 1970s. It was very, very competitive and I do not know quite how I broke through but – Before I got it, before I got up to the White Mountains, with that job, I had to pass the interview. So, the AMC's main headquarters is on Joy Street in Beacon Hill in Boston. I showed up for the interview in late 1978, and everyone there was waiting outside for them to open the building, and they were all dressed like lumberjacks. The men and the women, they all had like flannel shirts and wool pants and they looked very outdoorsy. I'd showed up entirely dressed in red. Red skirt, red top, red boots. I was not dressed for an outdoors organization. And to this day, those of us who were there for the interview, we remember how I was dressed. And I had very little experience. I had not really hiked a lot. But, I think I got the interview because of sheer force of will and personality. I was very enthusiastic and interested and energetic. I had a ton of energy. And I got hired. I was about, I think one of twenty people hired to work at the base camp. It's the base lodge below Mount Washington. So, that May, in May of 1979, my mom drove me up to the White Mountains, to the base camp and dropped me off. And that was the start of my grand and ongoing adventure in the White Mountains.

LH: That, that, that's awesome. So, you – So then you heard about the interview or how'd you, how'd you find out about the job?

MD: There was somebody in high school who knew about the Appalachian Mountain Club. I – Honestly I don't remember how I did the legwork for it and again, you know, pre-Internet, I had to make phone calls. I knew the Appalachian Mountain Club existed. I found out there were entry-level jobs. I either wrote to them or called them and got an application and filled it out. I remember filling out the application and, you know, wondering if my, you know, scant hiking experience would be sufficient. It was kind of an unremarkable start.

LH: Okay. So, I am just wondering, you said you had dropped out of school because nursing wasn't for you and then you heard about it from your friends in high school. How did you decide to, like, -- I know you said you were interested in the White Mountains. How did you decide to go, like, -- How you were going to get back there and that's what you want to do.

MD: Well – I figured working there would expose me to other people who liked to hike. I wasn't even thinking about other activities like skiing or anything like that. And so I decided that that was a really practical way to get my foot in the door of the hiking world. I just, and this happens to this day, I get an idea in my head and that's it. And if I hadn't been hired that year, I'd like to think I would've, you know, reapplied, and I know some people who didn't get hired the first time they applied and reapplied until they did get hired. But – I don't know if I am answering your question but that's...

LH: Yeah, just – Yeah, okay. Yeah, you just kind of basically said, you know, I'll just – Yeah, I'll just look there and see if there's something I can do to get myself in there.

MD: Right. And the thing is, I suppose I could've gone up to North Conway and become a waitress and, you know, tried to get into it that way, but I knew that an important part of wanting to hike again was to do it with other people and not to just try and, you know, take off into the woods by myself. And I knew there would be other people I could do that with. And I could

make a living at it, not much of a living but they gave you room and board. So, at this juncture in my life when I realized that nursing wasn't for me and that I was probably going to leave school because the interview happened in the middle of my sophomore year and I left school at the end of my sophomore year, I – it was kind of a good jumping-off point, to kind of try something else because I didn't know what the future was going to hold for me. And so, it worked out really well because it was a summer job working in the kitchen and I knew I wasn't going back to school, so at the end of that summer I stayed on the entire next winter working at Pinkham Notch again. And that exposed me to lots of skiing, both cross-country and downhill, and winter hiking experiences. So, that really kind of cemented my year-round interest in being in the White Mountains.

LH: So, with that, did you go out with co-workers and did this...

MD: Oh, yes.

LH: ...or just anyone that came in?

MD: Yeah. So, the way it worked at Pinkham Notch was you worked eleven days on, three days off, which may seem kind of burdensome but at the time we just were – it was all playing in the mountains to us. We really didn't care and there were a lot of other people like me, you know, middle class, some of them were more upper-middle-class. Some of us dropped out of college, some of us were just doing it during summers. We were all like-minded and we all just wanted to hike around. So, we worked in the kitchen, mornings, for breakfast and dinner but we had the middle of the day off after we had to make beds in the lodge. We had hours off in between our job even when we were working. So we would take day trips. We would go... I don't know. There were some local trails around and we were all very fit, very fit. So, we would maybe run up to Tuckerman Ravine, which was a two and a half mile hike, just straight back from Pinkham Notch. There was a lot of skinny dipping, back in the day, so we found all the great swimming holes and would go explore those, you know, in various combinations. And, on our days off, we were able to stay at the, these huts, these Appalachian Mountain Club huts scattered throughout the mountains for free. So, we would just group up, whoever was happened to have days off together, would group up and go to a hut or go to other huts a lot – so many of my pictures of that time are just on trails with my AMC friends.

LH: Did you – Going kind of back, did you know – So, was your family, at all, connected to the White Mountains?

MD: No. In fact, I have a very pointed anecdote to make. So, my mother was a heavy smoker and she was, she did not embrace the outdoors, but she was game for taking me up there. And she drove me up to Pinkham Notch and she dropped me off in my room and I said, "Let's go for a hike, mom. There's this trail here that says it'll go up to this waterfall." And we got maybe a hundred yards along the trail, and there was a little side trail off of it, and she says, "Let's go down there." And we get to the end of it and there was this old dam with a place to sit, and she said, "Let's stop here." We sat down. She lit up a cigarette and that was the end of our hike. So that was – She – They were not, my parents were not really outdoorsy types, and that story illustrates how my mother really didn't know what to do with this hiking interest of mine but, you know, she kind of took it as far as she could. So, no I was developing this all on my own.

LH: Okay. So, I am assuming, since you worked there, you lived there.

MD: Right.

LH: So, you only, you only lived there when you worked in those huts.

MD: So, the way it were – it's changed since then but I will tell you how it was back then. So, the Pinkham Notch Camp, I don't know if you've been there, it's off of Route 16 between Glen, New Hampshire and Gorham, New Hampshire. There are a series of buildings and the crews stayed in two of the buildings. And we had little rooms. So, I mean, you could leave your stuff there and you could stay there the whole time on days off if you wanted to. You didn't have to be gone on days off, you know. I mean, they were like tiny dorm rooms and you got all your meals covered. So, I got room, board, and \$44 a week. Not a lot of money. But what was nice about it was that you really didn't have to worry about the logistics of living, you know. You had a roof over your head, you had meals, it was a safe place to be, and all that.

LH: So, you've talked about multiple things you enjoyed doing. You said hiking you, snow hiking? Or

MD: Winter hiking. Winter hiking.

LH: Winter hiking. Skiing, cross-country skiing. Is there anymore you enjoy doing and if so, I mean, could you say what was your favorite? Like, thing to do. Which did you enjoy the most? Hiking, skiing...

MD: Well, I love them all. It's kind of hard to pick one. I will say something that happened that winter was that my skiing focus up until then, throughout high school, had been downhill skiing. My parents had actually taken us, we'd taken lessons at Boston Hill, which no longer exists but it was this little skiing hill in North Andover. But my focus really shifted to cross-country skiing. It was free. It was great exercise. The equipment was not very expensive. Remember, I didn't make a lot of money then and so that was a big shift. But one of the really important things that happened that winter was that in the winter of 1979-80 there was very little snow. So there wasn't as much skiing as there might have been, so I did a lot more hiking, and one of the places I hiked a lot in the winter and often at night was up to Mount Washington. I know. It sounds like kind of a leap, but there had been a longstanding relationship between the Mount Washington Observatory and the Appalachian Mountain Club. Joe Dodge was the man who would really launch the huts in earnest, the development of the hut system, and he was also instrumental in starting the Mount Washington Observatory as we know it today. And so, the observers would come down to Pinkham Notch, Pinkham people would go up to the summit of Mount Washington.

That summer of '79, that first summer I was there, the Observatory sponsored a volleyball game in high winds. So, a bunch of us went up in a truck and played volleyball and sometimes the ball would, you know, get taken by the wind and we wouldn't see it. We'd have to get another ball. So, there was this nice rapport between the two organizations. And so, that winter of '79-'80, I had befriended people at the Observatory and I would hike up at night. I look back and I marvel that, you know, I lived to tell about this. And I would get somebody from Pinkham Notch to go with me and we would hike up [in the] moonlight. It was a phenomenal

experience. If you've never night-hiked, if, if you start out hiking and there is enough snow on the ground to reflect the moon or a big enough moon—we would do this usually during a full moon – if your eyes adjust to the dark as it gets darker, you don't need a headlamp. It's really something. And so, we would just take hours and we would take the Tuckerman Ravine Trail and then cut off onto the Lion's Head Trail, which would take us up along the northern edge of Tuckerman Ravine and then cross the Alpine Garden onto the summit cone, and then we would get up there, drink some wine with the observers, spend the night, and then hike back down the next day. It was magical.

LH: That sounds so...

MD: And it pretty much cemented my relationship with Observatory, which I then developed later on. You were asking me which of the outdoor experiences I liked the most. I really like them all, but those night hikes to Mount Washington during that winter were... there's nothing else like them.

LH: So, you found that night hiking in the winter was better than during the summer ... you didn't have the snow on the ground?

MD: Oh. No, the night hiking in the summer was fun too. It's, again, you never did any of this in bad weather. You know, you waited for it to be a clear night and you couldn't do it when it was snowing or anything. No, the huts, once I graduated from working at Pinkham Notch to the huts and even when we were in Pinkham, there was an AMC tradition, a hut tradition, called "Raiding Other Huts." And there were these weird little props, like, one of them was a mannequin leg from a department store. Another was a propeller that had come off of a plane that had crashed in the mountains years before. And so, groups of people would go to a hut where there was a raid item, they would call it. Show up with beer and ice cream, steal the item, wake the crew, have beer and ice cream, and bring the item back to wherever you were, Pinkham Notch or another hut. And so, we used to do this at night. We would be running around the mountains at night. ALL night. And then we sometimes, we wouldn't get back till just before we had to start working. So, we were basically pulling all-nighters going on these raids.

LH: Wow.

MD: But, to your point, winter hiking, above treeline, going to Mount Washington, is in a category by itself.

LH: Seeing as it's very woodsy there, were the trails that you took mostly out of the trees or were they in the trees?

MD: Good question. Going up into Tuckerman Ravine, you're still in the forest, I mean, it's a very well-marked, wide trail. And once you branch off that, just before you get to Tuckerman Ravine, you branch off onto Lion's Head and oh, I don't know, for a good part of that you're in the trees but as you go higher, the trees get more stunted. And so, maybe the last two-thirds, half

to two-thirds of Lion's Head is above treeline. And then, of course, by that time, you're on the Alpine Garden. You're completely exposed to the elements.

LH: Okay. So, how long would you say you spent in the forest before you go out into the clearing?

MD: Maybe – Let's call it a four-hour hike total. Maybe half was in the trees and half was above treeline.

LH: That must've been interesting. Like, trying to see through the trees. I mean, I can't imagine, it's pretty dark under the canopy.

MD: You could. Well, you know, if it were a canopy covering the trail that would be true. But the Tuckerman Ravine Trail is wide enough, actually, that a snowcat can go up it. And so, it's not your average hiking trail. It was open enough above you that you could see where you were going.

LH: Well all these... Alright, well now something that I noticed that, is there, you talked a lot about the things you like about the mountains, is there something that you didn't like or is there aspect about it that you didn't enjoy? Anything?

MD: Not really. Really, it was all great and it was great on a number of levels. It was great because I had this quasi-independence from my family, which was nice. I was [in my] late teens moving into being ... I turned twenty in 1980. But I also had, you know, the basics taken care of. I had discovered this whole new world of hiking in the mountains with people I liked and [who] were a lot like me. And given that I had just left college and a major I didn't like and didn't know what else was coming, in terms of my college career and my, whatever profession I went into. It really filled that void, you know. And it filled in the best possible way. There really weren't any downsides. I mean, I will say, we worked a lot and we got paid peanuts, but none of us cared. We really didn't care. I mean, it took me two paychecks to buy my first pair of hiking boots, which were called Limmers, L-I-M-M-E-R-S. They make them in Intervale, New Hampshire. Everybody wore them. So, I mean, that was a lot of money to me back then. You know, [an] eighty-dollar pair of boots. But, it just didn't register, you know. I didn't buy a lot of new clothes. You didn't need a lot of equipment to hike. You know, a backpack and some warm clothes and a headlamp and, you know, water and snacks and off you went. So, so no. Really no downsides.

LH: Well...not, okay. Never mind. Weather. Is there any interesting weather happening or did anything happen that was very interesting while you were there?

MD: Well, the weather, I mean, it's obviously cold in the White Mountains in the winter. You know, summers were beautiful but you could also get rained on. You know, the White Mountains are tricky. They're not that high, compared to mountains in other parts of the world, but the weather could be extremely erratic, especially on Mount Washington, which has super high wind speeds. So, I experienced some high wind when I would be above treeline. Sometimes I would experience this, like, preternatural calm above treeline. When I would do these hikes, the weather was generally really good. The weather was, you know, you got all four seasons. Everything from snow to mosquitos and black flies in the spring. I mean, it was the kind of thing

where as long as you dressed for it, it didn't seem bad. But you have to be very careful. You can [get] hypothermia really easily if you get cold and you're above treeline. You can get lost in a whiteout above treeline. If you're off the trail, you can get disoriented. So, you had to prepare for the weather, but once you're prepared for it and respected it, you could do a lot. It was, again, it was an unusual winter in that it wasn't very snowy but that just opened up other avenues. One thing I didn't mention was that we went on a lot of rescues when we were up there. The AMC workers at Pinkham Notch were often called upon to help the New Hampshire Fish and Wildlife folks bring people down the mountain after they'd been injured or sometimes killed. So, I helped litter a lot of people down the mountains.

LH: Okay. Often... Sort of, semi-different topic, do you know what Title IX is?

MD: Yes.

LH: So, what did you think about it when it first passed?

MD: Well, I didn't know what it was when it first passed. I was in my teens. Did it pass in 1974, 1972?

LH: I think it was 1972.

MD: Okay. So, I was twelve in 1972. It meant absolutely nothing to me. I was, you know, living in my own little twelve-year-old world. But I'll tell you, I have really been a recipient of Title IX because by the time I got to high school, there were all kinds of sports teams. You know, field hockey, track, cross-country, women's basketball. You know, before Title IX, that was not required. There were a lot of times women couldn't find sports to play. So, without realizing it, I was very much the beneficiary of that. When I got to college, that remained true for.... My first year at college I ran track and cross-country, you know, at the collegiate level. And we had great uniforms. We got to travel out of state for various meets. I mean, I had a lot of opportunities, sports-wise, that I didn't appreciate until much later. Besides Title IX, one of the things that was happening in the Appalachian Mountain Club, 'cause the '70s were such a big time of social change, was that they were letting women work in the huts and that had only started in the '70s. So, again, without realizing it, I was benefiting from these social changes. So, yes. I know what Title IX is and I'm grateful for its existence.

LH: Okay. So, I was given information about, you know, your, your working at different huts and stuff. So, you've talked a lot about when you were at Pinkham Notch Camp. So, could you talk about each of your other jobs? I know you said you were a crew member at the Mizpah.

MD: Mizpah Hut, yeah.

LH: Floating Hut Caretaker. You're Assistant Hut master at Galehead, like...

MD: Talk about it a little bit?

LH: Yeah. To talk about it a little bit and then I noticed you returned to the Pinkham Notch and Galehead. And I would also know, like to know why you returned to those specifically.

MD: Okay. So –

LH: It's a lot but...

MD: So, let me think about this chronologically. So, I left nursing school at URI in the spring of 1979 and I worked at Pinkham Notch that summer. I stayed over that winter and did all the adventures I just told you about. The way it worked in the huts that was you started at Pinkham and then graduated to a hut. So then when you were in a hut, you graduated from crew member to assistant hutmaster to hutmaster. So, I was a crew member in the summer of 1980 in Mizpah Hut and there were five of us on the crew. And in any of the eight AMC huts in the White Mountains, you are doing a variety of things. You are cooking two meals a day, breakfast and dinner from scratch for the guests in the hut, and Mizpah held up to 60 guests, so that was a lot of people to cook for, for somebody who had never done much cooking. We also had to pack supplies up to the huts on our backs. Some people – this was because women were just coming into the huts – there wasn't as much of an emphasis on kind of this macho, heavy load, you know. When it was all men, the guys used to try to bring up like a hundred fifty, two hundred pounds of supplies.

So, once women were in there, that went away, but I would pack eighty to ninety pounds and I would do it two or three times a week. We all packed about that much. We had to clean the hut. So, we had to cook for the guests, we cleaned the huts after they left, we packed up supplies, and we went on rescues if we had to. So, that was kind of the essence of what you did at a hut. And again, you worked eleven days on, three days off. So, that was my summer at Mizpah. That fall, I had not yet gone back to school, I returned to college by going to UMass, starting in the spring [of] 1981. So that fall, I worked as a floating hut caretaker, which was sort of this great job where you go to just fill in for caretakers on their days off at three different huts over an eleven-day period. So I would hike to a hut, stay there for three days, hang out, check guests in. In the fall, the huts were no longer in full service so you would just check people in and they would bring their own food and stuff. And then I moved back home for like a month or two, after that, until college started.

Summer of '81, I had advanced to assistant hutmaster at Galehead, which was farther west. It was closer to the Franconia Range and there were four people in the hut. That hut holds 36 people. That fall, I went out west to go on exchange to the University of Oregon and because the school year there went into June, I was going to miss the following summer. So, I didn't come back to the huts for the summer of '82. I actually worked in a bingo parlor in Reno, Nevada that summer. Completely incongruous aside, but I had needed a job and through all kinds of circumstances, that's where I ended up working. I returned to New England for my final year at UMass of 1982-83. By now, I was a geography major. I finished that year, and that summer, I was an assistant hutmaster again. Sometimes you did that for two summers, sometimes for one, and I was an assistant hutmaster at Madison Hut, which is at the northern end of the Presidential Range. And then that fall, I worked at Pinkham again; I drove trucks that fall. So, the storehouse, Pinkham Notch, where they disgorged all their supplies to the different huts. You would drive things around to different locations. You'd pick up supplies from Pinkham Notch. So that was the fall of 1983.

And then I went out west and lived in Eugene, Oregon again until the summer of '84, when I came back to be a hutmaster at Galehead. And then that fall, that winter of '84-'85, I was a weather observer on Mount Washington. So, that's how that worked. And just to let you know, it sound kind of convoluted, but many of the people who worked for the AMC at that time, had a

similar trajectory, in terms of mixing college and the AMC and having a lot of seasonal jobs, kind of back to back. You know, many of us were not really career-bound until later. I didn't get my first journalism job until I was 28. So that was typical of a lot of us to kind of cobble together various seasonal positions with the AMC.

LH: Okay. You haven't really talked about this but when you were working, were you well integrated? Like were you accepted by your coworkers? Was it easy to work with them?

MD: Oh, good question. Yes, I mean we all lived in the same room. Like, you see the size of this living room? The hut crew rooms were a half to three-quarters of the size of this room. Four or five of us would live in them. It was very – It was basically bunks, bunk beds built into the room and a couple boxes of supplies. It was very tight. So you got to know your coworkers. Certain crews were more cohesive than others. I mean, you know, it's kind of a trick. You're all the same age but some of you are in charge. So, you know, one minute you're friends with someone else and the next minute, they're telling you what you need to do because they're the hutmaster and you're the crew person. So, in general, we got along well because we were kind of all in it together, you know. You're working a lot; you want to make sure that the guests are happy. You know, you want to give them a good experience. You want to make sure no one is getting hurt or, you know, getting hypothermia or anything. So, yeah. I'd say in general, the crews ... I think we did well. And so, yeah. I was accepted, everybody was accepted. It was – There were no outliers on crews.

LH: So, it sounded like it was well-integrated.

MD: It was. Oh yeah. Male and female. Yeah.

LH: You mentioned, like, with the supplies that you had to carry, that you did similar to males, like, load wise, how much it weighed. So, was there anything else that you did the same work? Like workload as male[s].

MD: We did all the same work. I, I think some of the – Well, I think some of the guys packed more than the women did. I mean, they weighed more than us, you know, they – some of them packed more, but no. I would not say there was any kind of division of labor 'cause we all had to pack a couple times a week, we all had to take turns doing what was called "Cook Day." So, if you were cook on a given day, you were in the kitchen all day. You were responsible for the breakfast for that group of guests, for getting the food ready for dinner. And you had to have like, I think it was a six-course dinner. You had to make soup, homemade bread, the guests got a salad, a vegetable, a starch, a meat, and a dessert for however many people there were. So, Mizpah was the biggest hut I worked in, that was 60 people. Galehead had 36. You know, between that amount. And no. If a guy, you know – There really wasn't much of a distinction in terms of what men or women did.

LH: So, after working at these jobs, is there anything – Did they change how you felt about being in the White Mountains or about the White Mountains themselves?

MD: Well... I think we felt special. We really felt like these were our mountains. You get a real sense of ownership when you work in the huts 'cause you're not visiting. You are a resident of the White Mountains and, and we really felt like we were *of* the White Mountains and the White

Mountains were *ours*. It was our backyard. It was literally our backyard. And so it creates an indelible bond. My friends – You know, I was talking about my friends I'd known when I was growing up, but really, the baseline for my friendships today are the people I met in the AMC. I've seen them in the last couple weeks. It's very much a part of my life and that's true for many of us. There's an alumni group called the OH Association for Old Hutpersons and just Tuesday – so five days ago – there was a dinner and meeting of the OH Association in Portsmouth, New Hampshire and I was there.

It, it was a very bonding experience and – where you had a sense of identification, and it's a – And to this day, it's emotional. When I go up to the White Mountains, I still get kind of, not choked up, but I really feel like I belong there and I don't have that feeling anywhere else I've traveled and I've traveled to a lot of places. It's a very, very strong sense of identification.

LH: Now, seeing as you said that, what made you stop, like, not made you stop working there, but what had – Why'd you move on from the White Mountains?

MD: Well – So, I finished my stay in the White Mountains after I worked at the Observatory from fall of '84 through the spring of '85. I lived in Jackson, New Hampshire that summer and I was a groundskeeper at a local inn, and after that I worked in Antarctica, the following year. And after that, I started to pursue more professional, I mean, like, big-girl jobs. I started to move into journalism. So I guess the lure of seasonal work was starting to wear off. I know for some people, it remains.... I have some AMC friends for whom it remains a way of life. And that's great for them, but I had started to realize I wanted to write for a living and I knew I would need to shift gears in order to do that. It just ran its course. I mean, that obviously wasn't complete in the sense that I continued... I've gone back and visit there countless times. And from '91 to '97 I was on the board of trustees of the Mount Washington Observatory. So I assumed a more formal role there in the '90s. And I also edited and redesigned their magazine for a year during that time I was on the board of trustees. But, you know, growing up or entering adulthood there's, for me, it was like this moment, this wonderful moment, those AMC years. But then, it, it passes and it gives way to other things. Although, as I've said many times in this interview, you know, the legacy remains in terms of my interest in going up there, to this day, to ski and hike and whatnot and to stay friends with the people I knew from those years.

LH: So, out of curiosity, when was the last time you've visited the White Mountains?

MD: A week ago. So, I was telling you on that on Tuesday that I was in Portsmouth in this meeting, but this time last weekend I was cross-country skiing in Jackson, New Hampshire. And so here in Gloucester, I'm only a few blocks from the ocean and I'm part of a rowing club. We row pilot gigs, which are big – about 28- to 30-foot – wooden rowboats with six rowers and a cox. And a lot of those rowers are about my age and love the outdoors and a lot of them cross-country ski. So a bunch of us rented a house in Glen and went skiing up there for the weekend. And so it remains a very recent touchstone for me.

LH: Now, you talked about, you know, you went to Antarctica. What – Could you describe some of the careers you've had after you left the White Mountains?

MD: Okay. Yes. So after I got done working for the AMC, I worked at the Observatory. At the Observatory, you work a week on, a week off. You go up on a Wednesday. You go down on a

Wednesday and you go up the following Wednesday. So, you're living in one building and at the time it was all men and myself. So, one day I'm doing a weather ob, and you take weather observations, you took weather observations every three hours. You had to go outside. You had to de-ice instruments. You had to replace the precipitation can. As a meteorology student [referring to the interviewer], you're familiar with all of this stuff. So, I am sitting at the desk, doing observation stuff one day and one of my co-workers said to me out of the blue, "You know, you work really well in a confined environment with a bunch of other guys. You should go to Antarctica and make some real money doing it." Like out of nowhere. His name was Jon Lingel and he had worked in Antarctica. And it turns out that the National Science Foundation underwrites scientific research, in Antarctica, also called "Being on the Ice." And they hire support staff to feed them, provide supplies and all this.

And so I thought, I wasn't quite done with my seasonal life yet, and my desire to travel and see the world. So, I applied to work for the company that was doing meteorological work at the South Pole Station. I did not get that job. That would've been a twelve-month position in Antarctica. I had decided that I was going to go to Antarctica, so I got in touch with every person I knew who knew someone who had been there. Pulled as many strings as I could. Long story short, I got hired as a cook at a geology field camp in the Beardmore Mountains. The Transantarctic Mountains and it was the Beardmore South Field Camp. So I was a cook there, during the '85-'86 austral summer, from October of '85 to February of '86. Part of the package of being down there was that they gave you roundtrip airfare. So on my way back to the States, I stopped in New Zealand for ten weeks. I traveled around with people I'd known on the ice. And then I made my way back to Boston, which is where I was from.

And at that point, I got back and I decided I was going to try to break into journalism, which I thought – I want to write for a living. I thought it was the most practical way to write for a living, as opposed to, you know, trying to write the great American novel in the attic, or something. And I moved to Burlington, Vermont to try to make that happen. [It] took a few more seasonal jobs before I could make that happen. Notably, I ended up as a road construction foreperson for almost a year. And then after that job, I got my first reporting job at a daily paper in St. Johnsbury, Vermont. I did that for two years. Then I moved to Lebanon, New Hampshire and I worked at a paper there called "The Valley News" for three years and then I went to graduate school in Ohio for five years. Then I moved to D.C. for ten years, where I did a variety of jobs as a speechwriter and a historian, [and] I taught at a charter high school for inner-city kids.

And then after those ten years, in the mid-2000s, I just really, really missed New England. I don't know what came over me, but I really felt the need to move back here. Nobody was pressuring me. I had a very nice life down there, but there was just something drawing me back. And at the same time, I'd earned this Ph.D. in graduate school and I thought, you know, I think I'd like to be a full-time academic. So I applied for close to fifty jobs and got hired at Salem State, where I started in the fall of 2007 and where I've been ever since. And so I moved back up before I had a job, got the job at Salem State, [then] moved to Gloucester in 2008, and here I am.

LH: I know you talked about your friends that you rowed with, and you go – you went cross skiing, like last weekend.

MD: Yes.

LH: So, I mean, is there – Did you – Are you involved in, like, any clubs or outdoor activities, just in general, as of right now?

MD: Oh, yeah.

LH: After the White Mountains.

MD: Yeah, yeah. So – So I belong to the Appalachian Mountain Club and they have a very, very active Boston Chapter. And I'm not that active within it, but I've gone on some local hikes with them. I belong to several, more conservation-related organizations around here, like Essex County Greenbelt, the Trustees of Reservations. They own a lot of property in the North Shore area. They bought up a lot of property that they manage, to keep in the wild, and they have lots of trails there. So, I do that. I row. So, I mean, I kind of keep my hand in outdoor-related organizations.

LH: Has there been any, any achievements that you earned? I actually, kind of looked you up and saw you were in, in Scotland.

MD: Oh.

LH: In a Skiff competition. I found it actually in the Gloucester, is it Gloucester Morning? The Gloucester newspaper essentially.

MD: Oh, that's too funny. So here's what happened there. This rowing club that I belong to, we row what are called pilot gigs, which are a certain kind of wooden boat. A related rowing club in Lake Champlain, Vermont had built a couple of St. Ayles skiffs. They're a different kind of rowing boat. They're smaller; they have four rowers and a cox and they had qualified for the first-ever World Skiff Rowing Championships, which were held last summer, in the summer of 2013, in Ullapool, Scotland. And they put out a mass email to a number of regional rowing clubs, including ours, asking if anyone wanted to join their international team. And I jumped right on it. Because even though I've gone mainstream, you know, I have a house, you know, [a] tenure-track teaching job and all this stuff, that spark of adventure is very much alive. And I thought, I want to do that. So, it was that simple. I basically wrote back and said, I want to be on the team. And that was it. So I was the only one from the Gloucester team who signed on. And so I was with the Vermont team.

They had a few other people who were relatives of people on the team. I was the only Gloucester Gig rower on that team. For a week, we raced and, against these other – there were 31 teams total, 25 from Scotland. There's a huge coastal rowing movement in Scotland. Three teams were from England. And then, from the States, there was us and a team from, I think, Portland, Oregon, and then a group from Pennsylvania. Oh and there was also a group from Australia of all things, Tasmania. So, yes, I do continue to do a certain amount of adventurous stuff but I'm not in the shape I was in thirty years ago. We were like mountain goats. I'm telling you, we could hike all day and then go to work. It was unbelievable what we could do.

LH: So, now we are going to talk about more of your romantic life, in a general form. So question: When did you start dating?

MD: I started dating in high school.

LH: Alright. So, I said, did you get married?

MD: No.

LH: Okay.

MD: I'm not married.

LH: Alright. Did you – Okay, these – Well, that would actually wrap it up for that.

MD: Oh, but I can –

LH: Would you like to talk about any specific relationships and how they've affected your life? Like, in a way.

MD: Well, I can say that in the White Mountains, when I was working for the Appalachian Mountain Club and the Observatory and in Antarctica, there were lots of seasonal romances and flings. Some people got more serious, but there was a lot of less serious amorous activity. There – Each hut has what's called a "Poop Deck," which is like a loft where you store supplies, and there's a phrase called "PDA," or "Poop Deck Action." Which is – it's where people would go to, you know, to go off and be amorous. So, there's that. And so, yeah. I, you know, dated or had short to longish relationships with a variety of different guys in the mountains. You know, none of them super serious. And that was true of a lot of us at the time because we were all young and unencumbered and it just seemed like a really good idea.

LH: Did you end up getting into any serious relationships?

MD: Not then. I wanted nothing to do with commitment at the time.

LH: Okay. So, back to family again.

MD: Yes.

LH: Today, what would your relationship with your family be now with siblings and parents?

MD: It's good. It's solid. It's one of the reasons I moved – I mean, I moved back here in 2007 for a number of reasons but, you know, my parents were getting older. They were in their seventies at the time and I wanted to spend more time with them. I had nieces and nephew that I wanted to hang out with more. There were a lot of reasons but that was among them. I see my family a fair amount. Two of my sisters live in Massachusetts. One of them lives in North Carolina. They're all married with kids. My parents were living in Salem. They moved out of Swampscott by the time I moved back; they were living in a condo in Salem. You know it's interesting that I ended up teaching in the city where my parents lived and five miles from where I grew up. It's a really small world. So, you know, I would go over there for dinner. I would just see a lot more of them than [I would if I were] just flying up once in awhile from D.C. And I am very glad I moved back because my mom passed away about a year and a half ago and it was very hard. And I am glad that I spent a lot of that time, you know, leading up to that, being around her. And now my dad, who remains very active in his eighties.

LH: That's very nice. Well, that's all I have for today. I would like to thank you for participating in this interview.

MD: Well, thank you for thanking me.