

JULIE STOLZBERG: [00:00] My name is Julie Stolzberg. I'm 43 years old. Today is February 26, 2016. And we're at Mount Sinai Hospital, and I'm with my friend Abby Pogrebin.

ABBY POGREBIN: I'm Abby Pogrebin. I'm 50. It is February 26, 2016, and I'm at Mount Sinai with my friend Julie Stolzberg. So let's start with some of your earliest memories: where you grew up, what the house was like, what the neighborhood was like, siblings, kind of the basics of your childhood.

JS: Well, actually Craig, Emi, and I, and Tai and I still live in the apartment that I grew up in. We live on 98th Street and West End Avenue. It's the apartment that I was born into. My parents lived there for their whole lives until they both passed away, and then Jenny and I both inherited the apartment. So we've lived there, between the two of us, ever since.

AP: Does it look the way it did?

JS: It's had a few different formations, because there are four of us living in a one-bedroom apartment, so we've had to be creative. The back master bedroom had been separated at one point by bunk beds. So my sister had the top bunk, and had her sort of loft room. And I had the bottom bunk, and I had a little cave set up. We took that down when Craig and I got married, but we're considering putting it back up for Emi and Tai.

AP: Tell me about your sister. So how close were you? What's your age difference? And what was your relationship growing up?

JS: Jenny and I are five years apart. So growing up we weren't super, super close. We obviously became much closer when my parents passed away, and as we became older, and right now obviously I think we're at the closest we've ever been. But we both were

at different development stages in the five-year difference, so we were never in the same elementary school together. We were always a little bit one off.

AP: What about her interests and your interests as kids? What was your focus? What was hers?

JS: I was really into dance, and art, and creative arts. My parents were sort of pseudo-hippies. They would have these dinner parties in our apartment, and they would have a different theme each week. It would be Moroccan night, and their friends would come over, and later on I learned that they were all getting high, which I didn't realize was going on. (laughter) But so my parents definitely were supportive of the arts. I remember definitely taking a creative movement class that I loved.

AP: Where was that?

JS: It was on 83rd right off Broadway I want to say. I think.

AP: But kind of a random place? It wasn't part of a school?

JS: No, it was just like -- it was in the brochure. I remember distinctly there was a picture of me on the cover of the brochure, and you can see my underwear. And I was thinking, "What kind of place puts a girl on the cover of the brochure with her underwear sticking out?" I was a little girl, but still I was like --

AP: Impressive that you were on the cover, Julie.

JS: -- but I was very creative, so I was [one out?] of the wardrobe.

AP: And Jenny's interests were more...

JS: She was into dance for a little bit. She definitely sort of found her niche with her school friends more so at Dalton than she did in our public school. So she definitely got into

whatever her friends were doing. So if there was theater, she would do theater. But she was more social, I would say.

AP: What were you like as a child? How would you describe your personality?

JS: I was pretty shy.

AP: That's kind of hard to believe.

JS: I know, especially knowing Craig was the same way. I definitely was always described by my parents as being shy, and on the quiet side, and being more sort of --

AP: Reflective?

JS: Yeah, I think so. I would do a lot of journal writing. I have tons and tons of journals. I had two very close girlfriends, and we would take our journals out to the 79th Street boat basin, and we would sit there for hours. I don't know what we were doing with a box of Stella D'ro, and we would be very serious, and we would be writing. So I'm sure there were some boys involved, or something.

AP: Do you have those?

JS: I do.

AP: Oh, that's wonderful. I mean, you are a great writer. Was that something that was a strength of yours when you were younger, or a focus, other than the journals?

JS: Not that I was aware of, but it was something I enjoyed doing. No one ever read, obviously, my journals, that I know of. So it was just more for myself. I think I just enjoyed the process of it, and feeling like it was my special place. And even doing it parallel to my friends, we all had our own separate journals, so nobody knew what anybody else was writing, but it was sort of this ritual that we would do together.

AP: That's wonderful. And you would sit on the boat basin on a bench looking out the water?

JS: We were actually very naughty. We would climb over the --

AP: The barrier.

JS: -- the barrier. And there was this concrete -- I mean, I wasn't going anywhere, because I'm pretty chicken -- but it was a concrete outshoot very close to the water.

AP: I'm sure that still is there.

JS: Probably, yeah. I think when my best friend's father found out that's where we were going; we were definitely told that was not a good idea.

AP: You were at school. Just give me your kind of grade school trajectory. You started in public school?

JS: First I went to the Morningside Montessori School on top of a synagogue on 100th Street and West End Avenue. I had also gone to a cooperative parent, again, hippie preschool where I think I sort of had these visions that we would go to different people's houses, maybe, and we were jumping off radiators, and parents would [sew?] Batman caves for you if that's what you were into. But I did that for a year, and then I went to the Morningside Montessori School, where I tortured my father every morning. He would bring me to the Montessori School every morning, and every morning he would come in, and I would cry, and cry, and cry, and didn't want him to leave. And then we sort of had this ritual where I would walk him to the elevator. And he said every morning he would stand at the elevator, and the doors would close like this, and he would see my sobbing face every day. And then he would come to pick me up, and I wouldn't want to leave. And he said this happened every day. And he would say to me at the end of the day, "I don't understand. Every day you never want to leave, and yet in the morning when I

drop you off, you're sobbing, and you don't want me to leave." He said, "I don't understand." I think there's been some payback with that with my own children.

AP: Did that help you when you became a teacher? You think just knowing that you had that 360?

JS: I think so, and I do share that story often with parents, that that sometimes happens, and that is some kids' way of letting that parent know, maybe, how much they love them, and are torturing them. But they can also as much love their school experience, and have a great day. And how kids are very resilient, and are able to compartmentalize. I just needed that ritual of the doors closing, and I was like, "OK, time to move on." I understood, he's going to work no matter what, so I might as well enjoy it. I loved school. They would describe me as being really happy at school, and they would say -- well, my dad would say, "Does she ever do this, or does she ever seem grumpy, or does she ever protest cleaning up?" And they're like, "No, she's always the first one." And he would say, "Are you sure you're talking about my daughter?" And they're like, "Yup, same girl." So I often do say to parents that kids can present very differently at school than they do at home.

AP: And so after Montessori, you go --

JS: Then I went to P.S. 75, The Emily Dickinson School, right down the street from our house, and it's on 96th and West End Avenue. It was sort of your typical, Upper West Side public school, very diverse, huge, huge classes. I think at one point I was in a class of 38 kids, and I do remember feeling, because I was tagged as one of the smarter kids, the teacher would basically hand me the box of reading assessments, and she would say, "Go up to [aqua?]." And then she would hand me the answers, and say, "Score your

thing.” And I would score my own work. So I don’t know how much I was actually getting out of that experience. I loved it.

AP: It sounds like you were teaching yourself.

JS: I think I was, looking back. But I enjoyed it. And I loved Ms. [Takagi?], so I would have done anything for her. And I understand there were a lot of other kids in that class who needed more help than I did, so I just kind of -- I never complained.

AP: But I wonder if that was the seeding of your career as a teacher.

JS: Yeah, possibly. I do remember it being significant having a Japanese-American teacher in elementary school.

AP: How come?

JS: I just think because she was such a role model for me. My mom was -- I don’t know if she became good friends with her, or if she knew her before I was in her class -- but we would talk about as a family how significant that was. So definitely race was something that my parents talked about openly, and I think wanted my sister and I to have an appreciation for.

AP: So tell me about race in your family. Who were your parents in terms of that? And tell me a little bit about them, what they were like.

JS: My dad was born in Los Angeles, California. And he had one older sister who was about 12 years older than he was. And they were interned during World War II, and they ended up on the Santa Anita race track. And my mom was born in Seattle, Washington, and her family was also interned, and they were in Minidoka in Idaho.

AP: When you say the race track, explain what that means.

JS: So my father's family literally lived on a race track for at least a year. I think it was supposed to be a temporary housing, and then it ended up being a little bit longer than expected.

AP: Do you know what the houses were like? Were they shanties?

JS: I think they were -- he said you could see on the ground there was no floor in their house. It was just the race track. But he talked about the day they had to leave their homes to the internment camps. And my dad had just been given a pair of roller skates, which he really, really loved, and really had waited a long time to get. [10:00] And his parents told him, "We can only bring what we can carry." And he was pretty young, so they said, "You have to give these away to somebody." So he said he went up to the street, and he found this Italian girl who he had a crush on, and he gave her his roller skates.

AP: And so how many in his family moved in?

JS: Well his family had owned a grocery store in California, so they had to give that up, and leave that totally behind, knowing that they would never get that back. So I think that was pretty devastating.

AP: So how old was he when he was in the internment?

JS: So he was born in 1935, so he would have been seven, I think. My mom was born in 1939, so she was younger. She doesn't remember obviously as much. My dad definitely would talk about the food, and the experience of being in the camps. He was a great eater, but the only food that he would not eat as an adult was okra, because it was a food that he associated with being in the camps.

AP: And was he hungry, or is that not part of the memory?

JS: It wasn't so much the hunger. I think it was the not having any choice, that that was what you had to eat, and he did not like that. He didn't like the texture of it, or whatever. To this day I have never tried okra, because I sort of felt like out of respect, that was the one thing that my father didn't like, and I was not going to like, that I was going to stand in solidarity.

AP: So he got released. When did they get back to a life?

JS: I think in '44. So I think it was a total of two years. That's correct, maybe.

AP: And they didn't meet obviously in that time.

JS: No, but they had sort of parallel experiences. My mother's family -- my grandmother, I believe, was single when she went into the internment camps. So she had two daughters she went into the internment camps with. And while she was in the camps, she had the bright idea that she was going to marry this chef in the internment camp. And somehow he was going to be her money ticket. So she married who I came to know as my grandfather, who is not actually biologically my grandfather, this man in the internment camps.

AP: Do you remember his name?

JS: His name was Jack [Fujiwara?]. So she took on that name. It turned out he liked to bet a lot at OTB, and did not really speak any English, and was sort of the opposite of a money ticket. He was more of a money suck, which my grandmother later on revealed that she was regretful about. So that was the man that I actually grew up thinking was my grandfather. And while they were in the camps, my grandmother got pregnant once. I believe she had a still birth in the camps. And then she had another baby with this man

Jack, who is my aunt Melinda. So I have an aunt [Silvia?], who is biologically my mother's sister, and then my aunt Melinda, who is sort of I guess a half.

AP: And your mom's name?

JS: Joyce. Joyce Fujiwara.

AP: And your dad?

JS: My dad's name was [Victor K. Hiraga?].

AP: So they were four years apart, or five years apart? They were five years apart. So when did they meet?

JS: So they meet in New York City at Grand Central Terminal on a blind date. They were set up by some Japanese church youth group leaders, or something. And of course my dad recalls it. It was love at first sight. He saw her in Grand Central Terminal. And he knew that she was the one, that my mother had a slew of other boyfriends on the line, and she wasn't so sure, so she basically tortured my father for several years before they actually really went out.

AP: That's a long time.

JS: She almost married this other guy named [Sing?], who was not Japanese.

AP: I can't believe you remember his name.

JS: Well I have jewelry from him.

AP: Or is it legend? (laughter)

JS: Not for me. That I wore, that he had given her. So he had a very different approach to his trying to woo my mother than my father did. So this gentleman would buy her flowers, and send her chocolates, and send her jewelry.

AP: Kind of like Craig.

JS: Yeah. And my dad would write these long letters on giant art pads, and fold them up, and send them to her. And she would just get these letters. And she would be like, “What the hell? Who is this guy?” And he finally wore her down. And she was taking an art class, and she needed help, so she says, “Why don’t I call this guy Vick?” And then she called him finally, and then they went out, and then they started dating romantically.

AP: And do you know where they got married, where their wedding was?

JS: They got married at Riverside Church and they had their reception at Tavern on the Green.

AP: Wow.

JS: Yeah, my mom had very fancy tastes, way above her means. And she also was very specific about what she wanted. So she told my father what ring she was going to get from Tiffany, and what -- so there wasn’t a lot of choice, and in some ways I think that was probably easier for my dad, but probably a lot for him to have to live up to. But she definitely wanted to live --

AP: Well.

JS: Yeah.

AP: And they were good looking. I mean, you’re beautiful, so I imagine the genes started there. Was she known as a beauty?

JS: I think at the time they had these weird Japanese coming out parties. Or they would have these -- I remember seeing several formal photographs of these sort of dinner parties, or dances where everybody was dressed up. And to me it looked like they were all going to a wedding, but I was young. And they all had corsages, and everybody was Asian, so I

assumed they were Japanese. But I don't know. Maybe that's how she met Sing. But it was definitely a different era. And I think definitely in response to the war, of trying to sort of separate.

AP: Americanize.

JS: Yeah, and try and sort of identify as being of a different class, and maybe not being someone who would have lived on a race track.

AP: Did she work? And what was his job?

JS: My dad never got his college degree. He was accepted to Columbia University, and then his father became sick. His father had I believe it was lung cancer, so he was not able to go to accept the spot. So he had to go to work. I know that he worked at the Bulova watch company for awhile. That was one of his jobs. And then eventually he landed at [Butterick and Vogue?], which was kind of a random sewing pattern company. He had no interest in either sewing or patterns, but he was a salesman for them, and he worked there until he died.

AP: And your mom didn't work, or she did?

JS: My mom became a school teacher, was a school teacher. So she taught elementary school. She taught in Parochial schools in the city, and then in public schools.

AP: So then she gets sick. Tell me about how that all happened, and how old you were.

JS: So my mom was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis when I was seven years old, but it took them, I remember it being three months, for them to actually identify that it was MS, because it was such a newer disease. So basically by process of elimination, that's how they decided what she had. But she was not feeling well one day at school, which was very unusual for her, and she called my dad at his office, and she said, "You need to

come get me.” And he went up to the Bronx somewhere to go get her, and he took her to the hospital, and they didn’t come home for many, many weeks, because she was undergoing all these tests. And then finally they decided that she had MS.

AP: And do you remember that time when she was in the hospital for weeks?

JS: I don’t remember logistically who came and took care of us, and who fed us, but I do remember feeling this kind of wondering why it was taking so long, and this disruption of our family routine for sure.

AP: And then how did it progress?

JS: It progressed much more aggressively than what had been told to me, especially as a seven-year-old. I have a very vivid memory of our family going to where I now look back and think probably was a therapist, and the therapist sitting down with my sister and I, and he had this red, cartoonish looking book, that I think was meant for children to explain what MS was. And I think on the very first page it said MS is not a fatal disease. And I was a very literal person, so I thought, “OK, good. You don’t die from MS.” So then when my mom did die seven years later, I remember being in the ICU and thinking, “Wait a minute. Didn’t that book say she wasn’t going to die?” So there was definitely kind of that disconnect.

AP: So she died when you were 14?

JS: Yup.

AP: And can you talk about that a little bit, and how you think it formed you, and what you remember of that time?

JS: Prior to her actual death, she had been in the hospital quite a bit. They said the disease progressed very aggressively, so she became paralyzed much sooner than often people

are, or if they ever become paralyzed. She was blind at the end, and then eventually the paralysis had moved to her lungs. So she had been in the hospital quite a bit. So I had sort of in a way gotten used to her not being at home. My sister was in college, so in some ways that transition wasn't physically such a shock, because she hadn't been in the house. But obviously it was a major, major loss.

AP: Do you need a break?

JS: I just need to drink something.

AP: I'm pretty interested. It's quite a story. [20:00] So you were really the one at home when all that happened, and not to dwell on it too much, but just when you look back at sort of your strength as a person, and your independence, do you see it as formed then, and how much do you feel like you had to take care of your dad?

JS: I'm amazed at how much my father was able to take care of us. I never felt neglected. I never felt that he was absent from my life, although I'm sure he did spend quite a bit of time in the hospital with my mother, but he somehow managed to raise my sister and I with humor and love in a way that we never felt. Although we were sad, and disappointed, and obviously very hurt by what was happening, we never had a feeling of woe is me, or kind of feel sorry for ourselves. It was always just this is what our life is, and let's keep on living it. So he attended church every Sunday. I think that was a place where he felt a lot of comfort. I was not a particularly religious or spiritual person, but I had a really good social network at church. Those were my girls that I would go out and write in our journals with. So that was very helpful to me I think, too, to kind of have a network of friends. We didn't ever really talk about my mom, but they knew her, and they knew about her, and I think I found that to be very comforting. Whereas when I was

at Dalton, I was new to the school, and nobody knew that my mom was even sick. And she didn't come to any school functions, because it wasn't wheelchair accessible, and I did keep that to myself. I think that was kind of my story. And I was new to the school, and trying to fit in, and I felt like maybe that wasn't going to help me fit in so much, so I don't think I was very open about sharing that my mom was sick.

AP: Did he keep your mom in the conversation of your family? Did he talk about her much, or was it more the opposite?

JS: Very much so. After she passed away, she was always at the dinner table, and in ways that were both funny and sad, but mostly as if she were still alive. So my dad would tell embarrassing stories about her. And I felt like that was giving us permission to see her as a real person, and not that she was on this pedestal. Although she was a great woman, and I certainly did look up to her, but that she was a regular human being, and that we could talk about her, and she could be with us, if she couldn't be with us physically.

AP: And did he remarry?

JS: No. I always kind of wished that he would, and I encouraged him to date people. I don't even know who I had in mind. I'm sure I didn't think anyone was good enough for him, but he never showed any interest.

AP: And he died when and how?

JS: He died when he was I think 58. And he had had -- he actually suffered a massive heart attack the year before I was born. So in 1971 he had triple bypass surgery. He was the second person to ever have this surgery by the same surgeon on Arthur Ashe. So he had spent about six months recovering from that surgery, and then the following year my mom got pregnant with me. I think in some ways I was this miracle baby. I think the

stress of caring for my mom over the years, both physically, and emotionally, and mentally, I'm sure, took its toll on him. And he did not take very good care of himself. He was a smoker. And it was kind of the one thing I felt like I couldn't take away from him, so I never really chastised him, even though I felt like probably not a great idea. But he didn't drink. He didn't do anything else. He didn't have any other vices. So I kind of looked the other way, which I sometimes look back, and maybe regret. But he did have another heart attack when I was actually home on winter break from college. So I was a junior in college, and he of course was also very quiet and personal. So it turns out that he had been walking home from church one Sunday, and sort of stopped, and didn't feel well, and didn't tell anybody, including myself or my sister. And then he went to the doctor, and the doctor said, "Yes, you have some kind of a blockage." And he was scheduled to have a catheterization, and he had the procedure. He went home. I went back to college. And I remember distinctly him putting me in a taxi cab, and saying goodbye to him, and for a split moment thinking, "What if this is the last time I see him?" And then a week later I got the phone call that he had died.

AP: And so you were how old?

JS: I was 17. I was a junior in college.

AP: So you were very close to him, would you say?

JS: Very close.

AP: How would you describe that relationship looking back?

JS: I think because my sister was away at college when my mom had died, I became very, very -- I wanted to take care of him. I didn't want to go to college far away, even though he encouraged me to, so we ended up kind of compromising on Connecticut College,

which was far away enough, but I practiced the very first day walking to the train station and getting home. I didn't actually get on the train, but I wanted to make sure I could get on the train by myself and get home to my dad if I needed to.

AP: So you were in college where?

JS: In Connecticut College in New London, Connecticut.

AP: And that was after -- Dalton was just high school?

JS: Yes. Well, Dalton I went to. I came in seventh grade, and then I graduated in 12th.

AP: Tell me about Dalton for you.

JS: Can we take a break?

AP: Yes, sure. How are we on time? OK. Keep going? You good?

JS: Yeah, I just have a really dry mouth.

AP: I understand that.

JS: So I entered Dalton in seventh grade, and my sister had come to Dalton ahead of me, and she loved the school. She couldn't say enough good things about it. She had great friends. And I came in this sort of transitional year, and I could not say enough bad things about it. I did not love Dalton in any way. I was not Jewish. I was not wealthy. I did not live on the east side. I lived above 96th Street. I wore OshKosh B'Gosh overalls, and Chuck Converse high tops, and thought they were really cool. And everyone else was wearing Benetton sweaters, and Coca Cola, and zip jeans. And so I just didn't ever feel like I fit in. I found good friends, and later in high school found one particularly close friend who came in ninth grade. But that seventh grade year was kind of torture. So much so that I applied out from Dalton. My dad was sort of one of these people who kind of was sort of like, "You do whatever you want to do," even though he probably had

stronger feelings about what would have been good for me educationally. So I on my own applied to the School for Performing Arts for art, and I got in. And then I had a good friend who was going there for dance, and she wasn't the smartest person that I knew. And I would just sort of look at her homework, and we would talk about what her academic experience was, and I quickly realized that I would be really sacrificing a lot academically if I chose to go to this school, so I decided not to transfer.

AP: That's a pretty sophisticated decision, judgment to have made at that age.

JS: Looking back, I guess so. I don't know why I felt -- perhaps because education was so valued in my house, and I felt that my mom especially would have probably been disappointed if I didn't pursue Dalton. I think she took a lot of pride in the fact that her daughters went to Dalton, to this prestigious private school. I don't think my sister and I really had any idea what we were getting ourselves into. My mom definitely did, and I don't think my dad really either. He just sort of went along with whatever my mom said.

AP: And then it improved socially and a feeling there? Or did you end up not ever loving it?

JS: I don't know if I ever loved it. I began to love my teachers. I really developed very, very close relationships with my teachers. I loved the dance program there. I was involved with DTW, and [Randy Sloan?] was a huge influence in my life, and she sort of took me under her wing. And she knew the whole story about my parents. So I definitely felt nurtured and loved there. I just didn't feel like the other kids there really I could ever sort of identify with. I always felt like people would say things like, "You're so nice, but I could never bring you home." Or, "I would never bring you to the prom." It was still sort of shocking to think people felt that because I was Asian, that wasn't an option for them.

AP: So that really was active at that time, that prejudice?

JS: It was. And then five years later when we had our fifth year reunion, a whole bunch of these guys were like, "Oh, we should go out. We should..." And I was sort of like, "Wasn't it just five years ago that I couldn't meet your parents, or that I was really nice, and I could be your friend, but we could never date?" So I don't know if people having gone to college people felt more enlightened, or I don't know what changed.

AP: So you graduated what year?

JS: I graduated in 1990.

AP: And was there any doubt about going back to teach there because of your feelings about the population?

JS: Oh, I was never going to step foot in the building ever again.

AP: So what happened?

JS: And I was never going to give them any of my money. I remember saying, "I will never donate a dollar to this school." Well, I guess what really ended up happening is that I was very committed to public school education, because I had gone to public school, my mom had taught at public school, my grandmother had taught at public school. So after graduating from Connecticut College in a degree in dance therapy and education decided that I was really going to pursue teaching, but in a public school. [30:00] So I -- I need to take another drink, sorry. So after college I got my first job teaching at the West End Collegiate Preschool, which is where I think Ben and Molly went. And I taught there for a little while. And I also taught at the Lycée Français for a year. And I remember the headmistress saying, "If anybody asks you how old you are, do not tell them," because I look so young. And then I decided that I really was committed to education, and wanted

to pursue getting my master's, which now looking back I probably should have waited to have a little bit more experience under my belt, but I was just sort of like, "I'm ready. This is what I want to do." So I talked to people in Cambridge, Massachusetts, because of course I had boyfriend who lived not far from there, so that seemed like a perfect place to go. And I was deciding between applying to Lesley College and Harvard for education, and everyone said to go the Lesley, because it was a much more practical experience if I was young and wanted to teach. So I went to Lesley College. And at the same time worked at the King Open School, which was a public school, a charter school in Cambridge for a year. And I couldn't tell you anything that I learned in any of those graduate classes, because I would teach all day from 8:00 to 3:00, and then I would go to graduate courses from 4:00 to 10:00 at night. So literally I was just non-stop. But I got my master's degree in about a year and a half I guess I would say. And then I got a job teaching in the public schools in Newton, Massachusetts. And I loved it, just having my own classroom, being Ms. Hiraga. It was kind of everything that I had dreamed of.

AP: And then you end up at Dalton.

JS: Yeah. So, when I was teaching at the Burr School, my sister got pregnant, and I was so excited to become an aunt, and she had my nephew Ben. And back in the day, people still had beepers. So somehow I managed -- I didn't have a cellphone, but somehow I got my hands on a beeper, and I remember being at Drumlin Farms on a field trip with my first graders, and getting this beep that my sister is going into labor. And I think I left -- I told the principal that this is the plan, so I left the kids at the farm with whoever was there, got in my car, drove straight to New York City, got to the hospital before she had Ben, and sat with her for a few minutes, and then she was going into serious labor, and I

went into the waiting room, and then came back in, and there he was. And Ben was really my first baby.

AP: And you decided you wanted to be near them? Is that why took the job --

JS: Yeah, I ended up driving back and forth pretty much every weekend, and at some point I realized this is ridiculous. So that following year I moved back to New York City to be with him.

AP: So you are, I just have to say on the record, the most extraordinary teacher in the world. And I really mean -- I think you changed our children's lives, my children's lives. What do you think was -- be immodest for a minute. What was your gift? What is your gift as a teacher? Your approach, your --

JS: I think it's that I don't think I know everything. I try to be as transparent with parents as possible, to let them know that -- certainly before I had children I would say, "Look, I don't have my own children. So you truly are your child's first and best teacher." And I still believe that of all parents. So I can sit here and share with you my observations, or what I think might be happening, but ultimately we have to work together as partners on this. It's not my telling you, "Look, this is what's wrong with your child. This is the problem." But really looking at the whole child and saying, "These are all the things that I love about your kid." And then, "Here are some things that I think we could probably work on." So you and Dave were sort of ideal parents, because you were so open and honest about your relationship with your kids, the kinds of things you were seeing at home, and that only enhanced our relationship as teacher and parents to make your kid's experience the best it could be. Because we really could be honest and say, "Look, I'm having a hard time with this. I don't know what to make of this. Can you help me?"

And I think that's often helpful in a relationship between parents and teachers, is for a teacher to go to a parent and say, "Look, I don't know everything. So maybe you know more than I do, or maybe we can sort of talk this through."

AP: Let's get to Craig so we don't run out of time. I remember when that was just beginning, and it had to happen secretly. But how did you kind of notice him, and when did you begin to really know this was going to be the guy?

JS: I was a little slow on the uptake. We met the very first day at orientation at Dalton, and we had our sort of technology training. And we were sitting I guess next to each other, and so we sent our first emails -- we had to send these test emails -- to each other. So he was my partner for that. And right away I thought he was this cute, hunky guy. I sensed that I was older than he was, so I sort of assumed that he would already have a girlfriend, or that he would be interested in girls who were younger than I was. And I had sort of had been in this tormented, terrible relationship that I sort of thought I was going to save this guy, so I had my own kind of responsibilities that I had to take care of. But I did always have a thing for Craig. I tried to set him up with my associate teacher one year, with a girl who I thought was very cute, and did yoga. What's not to love about her, except that she didn't shave her armpits, (laughter) which he would add was not a good choice.

AP: A huge demerit.

JS: And I remember sort of being on the outskirts of their kind of -- I remember him giving her a card. She was a Red Sox fan, and Craig is a big Yankees fan, and so I remember putting a little red sock in her mailbox, and thinking, "That's a catch. That's the kind of guy you want to have." But eventually I came to my senses, and I dropped the guy that I

was never going to save anyway, and he was dating someone else, and their relationship ended, and the timing was just kind of right.

AP: And can you talk about your first official date?

JS: There's a lot of contention about who asked who on our official date. I to this day say I invited him out on our first date, but he will say that he perfectly set up the circumstances so that I could ask him out on our first date. But I did invite him to a movie, and we were going to see Ray on a Sunday afternoon after he had done [dribble?]. And I guess he had talked to his roommate Danny who said, "That's a terribly depressing movie. Do not go see Ray. You should go see Polar Express." So I remember meeting him at the 87th Street gym, and still on the bus ride across town talking to my friend Jessica who lived in Boston and saying, "I think I'm going on a date with the P.E. teacher, but I'm not really sure." And when he came downstairs, he was wearing real pants and real shoes, and I never had seen him wearing real pants and real shoes. He always wore sweatpants and sneakers. So that was the moment that I decided we're on an official date. So we went across the street, and we went to a restaurant called Pesce Pasta. I am not a drinker. I'm allergic to any kind of alcohol. I do not have the enzyme to break down alcohol. But for some reason I ordered a glass of wine. So I take that as a sign of me feeling like I will do anything for this guy including get drunk, which I do not think I even took one sip of. But we had our first date there. And I think what sealed the deal was that I had brought Mini Peanut M&M's to the movie theater, and that was what really won him over.

AP: Can you just describe him a bit as a husband, a partner, and as a dad?

JS: (crying) Sorry, I need tissues. I couldn't ask for a better partner. He is the most loving, kind, funny, humble, caring person that I've ever met. Growing up I certainly looked up

to my father and felt like there was nobody as good as my dad, and essentially I think I married my father, which I'm sure there are few therapists out there that would like to talk to me about that. Craig is sort of my perfect person. We always say that you're perfect for me. But he is just -- as a father he always makes time for the kids. He finds ways to make them feel good about themselves. And he will get down on the floor no matter how tired he is, and play trains with Ty. He'll shoot baskets with Emi until his arms are sore, and they know how much he loves them. And I feel the same way.

There's never been a day that I ever felt that he didn't love me more than the day before.

AP: And so when you think about the future a bit, and you think about your kids, what would you want them to know that you feel about where things are, and what he's going to be carrying?

JS: I guess I would want them to know that certainly marrying their father was the best thing I ever did. And I feel very confident that he will keep me alive in the same way that my dad kept my mom alive, that he'll tell stories, and he'll make fun of me, and tell them how slow I was at eating, and all the tissues that I used to leave around the apartment.

[40:00] So I know that he will do that for me, and so I feel -- I take great comfort in that.

I think also my own experience of having lost my parents I know that you can go through great sadness and still be a very happy person. So I'm happy for them that they will have that, but it does make me sad as well to know that I'll be missing big moments in their lives, their weddings. But I know that Craig will find a way to get me there.

AP: And if there is just any lesson that you think is just a key lesson that you would want to communicate that maybe not now, but they would have it, about life, about getting through the hard moments, about loss?

JS: I think I would just want them to know that each day is a new day, and it's a chance to make mistakes. It's a chance to make mistakes. It's a chance to love. It's a chance to appreciate each other. And that none of us are perfect, and I certainly am not a perfect person. So I don't want them to try and remember me as being a hero, or somebody who fought this brave fight. There have been plenty of days where I've said to Craig, "I can't do this. I can't go on." And he's acknowledged my frustration or sadness, but he's always picked me up both physically and emotionally, and helped me to just keep going. So I would want that for them, to just know that there is great sadness, and there is great loss, but it doesn't mean that you can't have great love, and it doesn't mean that you regret any choices that you made.

AP: And I guess finally for each other, the relationship that they have, and what they'll be for each other. What would you kind of want to tell them about a sibling can be?

JS: I guess in the same way with my sister, I would want them to know that your relationship can change. So maybe in the moment if you're really annoyed by your brother or your sister, that maybe in two years you'll find a way to be closer, to not not be open to that, and to know that you can maybe later on find ways to connect, and maybe it will be over the loss of me, or maybe it will be over basketball, or something else that they share in common. But I hope that they will also use their love for each other to kind of get through sadness, and to support Craig, and to want him to be happy.

AP: Do we have time for one more? Just in terms of their birth, if you can just talk about a little bit about what those days were like so that they know.

JS: Well, Emi was born in December of 2008. She was a planned C-section, because I had had -- what do I have? I have (inaudible). So, we knew that she was going to be born on

that day. I remember both Craig and I being so excited to start our family, and really being able to be in the moment of being new parents. We just spent a lot of time both the two of us and the three of us in those early days, because we had to be in the hospital for several days. And then it turned out she had a little jaundice. We ended up staying a little bit longer. But it was just sort of this magical time of us growing as a family, and just looking forward I knew that Craig was going to be a great dad, so I just couldn't wait to see what that would be like. And then Tai was born on August 23rd, 2010. And there's sort of this game that we play with him. It's called Danny Zuko. I don't know why. And we played it just the other morning where he gets underneath the comforter of our bed, and one of us, usually it's me, narrates, and we say, "Today is August 23rd, 2010, and it's a hot day in summer, and we're waiting for our son to be born." And he kind of pops up underneath the blankets, and we say, "Oh, I see a foot," or, "I see an elbow." And then we count his 10 fingers, and count his 10 toes, and we talk about how excited we are for him to be a part of our family, and what we should name him. And so somehow he thought early on he thought Danny Zuko would be a good name. These days he wants to be called Tai. But it's this kind of very sweet ritual that the three of us have. And I guess in some ways it's obviously ironic, because five days after he was born is the day I was diagnosed.

AP: In terms of how they've dealt with your illness, what would you want them to know about their strength and their joy, frankly, the fact that there has been a lot of joy?

JS: I would say there's been more joy than sadness, and that's one thing that I feel that the closer I get to leaving them it worries me, because there hasn't been as much joy as there used to be, but I do want them to know how their resilience sort of kept me going. And I

think for Craig, too. And they have just been an amazing source of love, and in their honesty, and in their moments where Emi will say, "I miss the old mommy." And I'll say, "Yeah, I miss her, too." Or Tai will say to me, "Remember when you used to get down on the floor and play with me?" And he'll say, "That's OK, mommy. We can just play on the couch now." So just those moments of their being kids, and being totally honest, remind me that it's important to be in the moment with them, and to not try to fast forward, and try to give them these very philosophical statements about what life should be, but just to keep it at where they are at that time.

AP: I hope know also that just the outpouring you've had from friends is not -- has never been about compassion. It's been about what you've inspired in people. You know that it's been extraordinary. None of us have ever seen it. But it's because of who you are, who Craig is, and just the love that you've inspired, and how many people you've touched is kind of amazing in your 43 years. And I hope they know that. They will know it.

Anything else you want to say?

JS: No.

AP: (whispering) I love you.

JS: (whispering) I love you, too. [47:22]

END OF AUDIO FILE