

Interviewer:

Great. Could you state your name, please?

Pat Locke:

Priscilla Walker Locke.

Interviewer:

And could you spell your name, please?

Pat Locke:

P-R-I-S-C-I-L-L-A, Walker, W-A-L-K-E-R, Locke, L-O-C-K-E.

Interviewer:

Great. And your age?

Pat Locke:

58.

Interviewer:

And your date of birth?

Pat Locke:

28 November 1956.

Interviewer:

And today is May 5, 2015. First of all, thank you very much for agreeing to sit down with us today and talk about your experience at West Point. Just so the viewers know why youâ€™re here today, youâ€™re a member of the class of 1980, West Point class of â€™80.

Pat Locke:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

The first - in the first class of women to graduate from West Point.

Pat Locke:

Yes.

Interviewer:

You were one of two African-American women in that class to graduate, and weâ€™re here to talk about your experience today at West Point, and what it was like a long time ago. Oh, oh, and I just want to point out that itâ€™s a very hot and stuffy day early in May, and that you do have a little fan on your lap just to keep yourself cool, so people walking this should not think thereâ€™s a malfunction or buzz in their computer system.

Pat Locke:

Okay.

Interviewer:

What brought you to - you were born in Detroit, you said; are you from -

Pat Locke:

I was raised in Detroit. My grandfather had a job that was kind of migratory, and he had to take a hop down to Indianapolis to do some work and then come back, and thatâ€™s where I was born. But their home - like my mom and all of my other relatives were born in Detroit. I just happened to be born in Rushville, Indiana, because thatâ€™s where my grandfather was at the time, so. And we grew up mostly with our grandparents.

Interviewer:

Was there any sort of military service in your familyâ€™s background? Did any of your parents or grandparents serve?

Pat Locke:

I think my grandfather served, but it was just very, very briefly, but no military background to mention.

Interviewer:

And he wouldâ€™ve been probably old enough to around the time of World War I, right, or?

Pat Locke:

World War II, probably.

Interviewer:

World War II? Okay.

Pat Locke:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

What put the idea of attending West Point in your mind back then?

Pat Locke:

My Battalion Commander. I had never met my Battalion Commander before. I was a Private down in Fort Polk, Louisiana.

Interviewer:

So you actually joined the Army before; you joined the military before coming to West Point.

Pat Locke:

I did. I was enlisted before I came to West Point. I joined the Army in 1974.

Interviewer:

Right out of high school?

Pat Locke:

Nope, wasn't right out of high school. It was one of those saving incidences when, you know - it's a long story why I happened to go into the Army. It had to do with some violence that was going on in Detroit, and I saw a sign that says, "Join the people who join the Army," and I ran over there right away, and I said, "Can I join the Army?" And he says, "Well, I think so. Let's talk about it." So I looked at my watch and I said, "How long do we have to talk about this?" And so basically he had me on the ship to go to basic training, and then back to Fort Polk, Louisiana, so.

Interviewer:

So you served how many years in the Army before you -

Pat Locke:

About two years before I came to West Point.

Interviewer:

And what were you doing?

Pat Locke:

I was a Communications Specialist. That was an amazing thing, because you just wouldn't think that that would've been something that I could do. But once they trained you and showed you and things like that, that's what I ended up doing.

Interviewer:

At which base, now, was that?

Pat Locke:

This is at Fort Polk, Louisiana, and I worked at the Communications Center for the Post while I was there.

Interviewer:

And what's that involve?

Pat Locke:

I don't know if you're old enough to remember, but -

Interviewer:

Oh, trying to get on my good side.

Pat Locke:

Yeah. That's back in the days when they had the teletype typewriters, and the ticker tape things that, you know, you had to punch-key all of that, so that's where I worked. Very secure facility. You had to have a top secret crypto-whatever classification or whatever to do that, so that's what I did while I was down at Fort Polk, Louisiana.

Interviewer:

And so I guess obviously you took to the Army. You wanted to be, you were looking to get out of Detroit.

Pat Locke:

Let me tell you, from the day I got on the bus from the airport to go to training, I just had a great time. I mean I said, "I am never going back to Detroit." I was getting three meals a day. I had my own bed to sleep in. Had my own weapon. So I was - I said, "Why would I ever want to go back there?" So I had kind of made up my mind that this is what I was going to do. I wasn't going to ever go back. And one of the reasons that I kind of looked at the Army when I was kind of destitute, trying to find what am I going to do? How am I going to take the next step of my life? When I saw the sign, what prompted me to go over there right away was that the 82nd Airborne jumped into Detroit during the riots in -

Interviewer:

In '67.

Pat Locke:

In '67, and they were literally three blocks from my house, "cause they bivouacked on the Central High School campus. And the Central High School had three schools; they had the High School, the Middle School, and the Elementary School, Roosevelt Elementary School, which is the school that I went to. So we were just walking back and forth, and they were escorting us because that was near where they were burning everything down. And we just didn't think anything about it, but we just remembered how awesome-looking the 82nd Airborne guys were, with their aviator sunglasses and their starched uniforms and all of that. So I just remember how friendly, and how courteous, and they were just - I was just awestruck, because I don't think I'd ever seen anybody in uniform up to that day. I think I was ten years old, and so that's what drew me to the Army. That's what when I saw the sign said, "Hey, those guys from the 82nd, they were in the Army. You know, maybe this Army thing is not so bad." So that's when I went over.

Interviewer:

How'd you like - I mean you're also coming from the big northern city like Detroit. What was it like living in Fort Polk? What was it like living in rural Louisiana? Was that a shock?

Pat Locke:

Well, yes. Louisiana was quite different than anyplace that I'd ever been, so I'm trying to decide if I should tell you any of the stories down there. I'd never seen mosquitoes quite as big. They had alligators there, they had snakes. I just remember us making these jokes, sitting outside of the barracks, you know, when you'd try to smash a mosquito. Anybody - have you ever been to Louisiana?

Interviewer:

No, I haven't.

Pat Locke:

Fort Polk, Louisiana, had huge mosquitoes, and so you try to - the mosquito would land on your chest, and you would go and you would try to smash it, and it would go uhh-uhh-uhh. So that was a new experience. And the alligators there, and the snakes, and I'm like, "Okay, this is kind of different," and you get kind of used to it. You know they don't have those things in Detroit. And I said, "Fort Polk, Louisiana," but I was home. That was back in the days when they had the barracks up on the stilts, and they had the big open bays, and so there was like I think 30, maybe more, of women living on the second and first floor, and things like that, so.

Interviewer:

And you were enlisted. What was your rank while you were doing Communications?

Pat Locke:

I was a PFC, so. And belonged to Fifth Signal Battalion of the Fifth Mech Infantry Division, Red Devils. It's since been I guess inactivated, or maybe they're someplace else, but that's what I remember.

Interviewer:

And did you have any trouble sort of adjusting to Army discipline or anything like that?

Pat Locke:

Not at all. That was kind of surprising, because I hadn't really had any like what you would call formal discipline at home, or nobody really kind of kept tabs on me, and I was just growing up, so.

Interviewer:

What was your biggest shock or surprise about Army, that surrounded your introduction to Army life?

Pat Locke:

What was the biggest?

Interviewer:

Biggest surprise. You know, you've come from this previous no exposure to the military. Was there any big sort of surprise?

Pat Locke:

Let me think about this. What was the big surprise? Well, one of the big surprises is that the guy that used to supervise us when we were ten, in the 82nd Airborne, he was one of my Drill Sergeants when I got off the bus.

Interviewer:

What are the odds of that?

Pat Locke:

What are the odds of that, and he had -

Interviewer:

Do you recall his name?

Pat Locke:

He had turned into the Antichrist. So I got off the bus - 'cause I was ten the last time he saw me, and now I was 17, and I probably looked different, but he looked exactly the same to me.

Interviewer:

And you remembered him instantly.

Pat Locke:

I remembered him instantly. I mean you know, this is, I was awestruck when I thought of him, so -

Interviewer:

Do you recall his name?

Pat Locke:

I do not recall his name, but I got off the bus, and I was like I had known I'd made the right choice, because like, 'There's somebody I know here, all the way down here.' I was at Fort Jackson, Fort Jackson, South Carolina, doing basic training. So of course, I got off the bus and go, 'Hi, Sergeant, dah-dah-dah-dah-dah,' you know, and of course I immediately was introduced to push-ups, so he was, you know. And I just - he didn't know me, and I didn't - I got to explain to him later that, you know, 'You were with the 82nd, and you jumped in during the race riots,' and all the other stuff. And he said, 'Yeah, I think I remember that.' But it was not a huge deal, and so -

Interviewer:

It left a larger impression upon you than upon him.

Pat Locke:

Exactly. Exactly; it left a larger impression on me than him. But I loved basic training, so that was kind of the thing that jumped out immediately.

Interviewer:

Why did you love basic training?

Pat Locke:

Because. I had a bed to myself. I had food every single day. I had - again, they assigned you your own weapon, and they were showing you how to use it, and that's where I guess I - you know, you feel secure once you know how to do that, 'cause I - we grew up in a house where we had guns under every mattress. I'm thinking that was normal,

because that's what we had. We had a gun under every seat of the car. And so we grew up with guns, and we grew up with lots of violence and things like that. So I felt that this is a place that I could feel secure, because there was a lot of order there, so.

Interviewer:

What was your family's response when you said, "Hey, I'm joining the Army. See you later?"

Pat Locke:

They didn't know initially, 'cause I think my mom had to sign the paper 'cause I was underaged, and so the paper got signed. So. And I think she was okay with it, didn't - we didn't have a lot of interaction. My mom was 14 when she got pregnant with me, and so my grandmother did most of the raising, and so my grandmother died when I was 12, and so that's kind of where things fell apart -

Interviewer:

Gotcha.

Pat Locke:

For the, and that fell apart for the whole family when she died, because then the kids scattered, the grandkids scattered, and it was a very interesting time for me for that next five years, until I joined the Army.

Interviewer:

Would it be fair for me to say that things went to hell?

Pat Locke:

Yeah, I think so. That would be a good assessment.

Interviewer:

Okay. So you're out of Detroit. You're at Fort Polk, Louisiana. Was it - this was also I imagine the first time that you'd lived with a lot of non-black people, too; your first exposure to living with white people. What was that like?

Pat Locke:

Well, that would've been more accurate if you talked about our day coming into West Point.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Pat Locke:

So when I came there, I said to myself, "Where are all the black people?" I did go to the prep school.

Interviewer:

I mean in the - when you were at Fort Polk, was it primarily an African-American community, or unit?

Pat Locke:

I would say it was about half and half, maybe, at Fort Polk, during that time. This was the early '70s. You know, Vietnam was just ending. Everybody was kind of coming back. So everybody at Fort Polk, they were coming back from Korea, and they were building up a new unit there. And so they all kind of had us all in one place, so I just found that interesting, so.

Interviewer:

So you said it was your Battalion Commander that suggested you apply to West Point.

Pat Locke:

Right.

Interviewer:

How'd that come about?

Pat Locke:

Well, I thought that, you know, because I loved the Army so much, I thought that I was probably one of his best soldiers in his Battalion, and they were looking for women to go. And so he brought me in and said, "How would you like to go to West Point?"

Interviewer:

And this was 1970 -

Pat Locke:

This was 1970 -

Interviewer:

8, maybe?

Pat Locke:

6.

Interviewer:

â€˜76, okay.

Pat Locke:

1. And so of course I asked him like, â€œWhat is West Point?â€ Had no idea what it is, which is the trouble today is that no oneâ€™s heard of West Point. I donâ€™t want to say no one, but very few people have heard of West Point. So he explained to me. He tried to explain to me about the leadership at West Point and all this other stuff, and Iâ€™m like, â€œIâ€™m not feeling it.â€ So he finally gets down to, you know, how great leaders have come out, and Iâ€™m like, â€œOh, still not feeling it,â€ â€˜cause my Sergeant, you know, is saying, â€œYou can be a great leader,â€ you know, and he was trying to get me to the courses that enlisted people go to to go to leadership courses. And I said, â€œI could do that right here, and not leave my friends, and leave my Battalion,â€ â€˜cause I really loved my Battalion and my friends. We ended up playing Bid Whist all night every time we got off work, so I didnâ€™t want to leave that.

And I said, â€œWhat I really need is I need to go to college, but I donâ€™t have any money to go to college.â€ He goes, â€œWell, you can go to college at West Point.â€ I said, â€œWest Pointâ€™s a college?â€ And he says, â€œYeah, you get a bachelor of science degree.â€ â€œHah -â€ so I drew my breath in, and Iâ€™m like, â€œWow. You know, you couldâ€™ve led with that.â€ And -

Interviewer:

So thatâ€™s what sold you.

Pat Locke:

Yeah, and thatâ€™s what sold me, because I ended up going to Wayne State University for a semester, and they said, â€œWell, you know, you have to have money to come to this school,â€ and Iâ€™m like, â€œOh, really?â€ I said, â€œI donâ€™t have any money.â€ Iâ€™m thinking itâ€™s like high school. And so he - and he said, â€œBut you have to be packed up and you have to leave like tomorrow.â€ And that was back in the days when the First Sergeant could cut orders in an hour to get you to wherever you needed to go. So I threw everything I had - which was half of a duffle bag - into the trunk of my car, and drove to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. And then life became very different after that.

Interviewer:

What was at Fort Monmouth?

Pat Locke:

The prep school.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Pat Locke:

United States Military Academy Preparatory School at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey.

Interviewer:

And how long were you there for?

Pat Locke:

I was there for - it was an accelerated program for women - for about six months.

Interviewer:

What was that like?

Pat Locke:

Uh, interesting; new stuff. A lot of academics, but it was very, very condensed. They were just trying to get us qualified to go to West Point.

Interviewer:

How many women were there?

Pat Locke:

I think there were 20 women there.

Interviewer:

Were most of them also women who were already in the service, or were you -

Pat Locke:

They were already in the service.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Pat Locke:

And they drew them for - I was the only black woman there, and so the academics was a little challenging, because even though I graduated from high school, I graduated from, you know, Mumford High School in Detroit. Your dad went to Mumford. Oh, sorry. Back when it was a decent school. And so I didn't learn very much, and by the time - I stayed in the Army with no academics after high school, and so anything that I learned in high school about math I probably forgotten, and so that was an accelerated course in how much can you cram into your short-term memory to pass the tests and things. And so I did, and I got an invitation to go. I think only 6 of the 20 women were invited to go to West Point after that, and that was a big - that was a big to-do.

I think one of the women wrote to the First Lady of the United States and said, "It's unfair that Cadet Candidate Walker gets to go to the United States Military Academy when I'm better at everything." That was part of her letter - you know, academics and all that other stuff, but. So that was kind of a hit, but I got to go, so I was happy about that.

Interviewer:

So when did you actually first show up at West Point?

Pat Locke:

It was the day before R Day. I think they bussed us all up from the prep school, and they housed us somewhere, and so -

Interviewer:

This would've been in the summer -

Pat Locke:

1976.

Interviewer:

Was it summer, or?

Pat Locke:

It was summer. I want to say we started out July 7, 1976, somewhere around there, and so we were up there the night before. And so the morning of our day, they kind of pushed us out and pushed us into the ranks for R Day, so then again.

Interviewer:

What was that like? You show up on campus. You'd never been here before. What was your first impression?

Pat Locke:

Um - yeah, well, I didn't see much of the campus itself on R Day. I just saw a lot of people yelling and yelling and screaming and - it just reminded me of Dearborn. I don't know if you know about Dearborn, but there's - you've heard the rapper Eminem - you know there's a line called Eight Mile, and if you were from Detroit, you just didn't cross over in Eight Mile, because that was Dearborn. It was segregated. It had no African-Americans at all. So of course, when I got off the bus, that's what I saw. Like, "Oh my gosh, where are all the black people? This is Dearborn."

Interviewer:

How many women were there in your class, and how many African-American women were

there in your class when you showed up?

Pat Locke:

When we showed up, I think there was 119 women there when we started, and there were two African-American women of that 119, so it was Joy Dallas, and it was me. And Joy - one of the things, she did come back to work in the Admissions Office, and she calls me up one day and she says, "Hey Pat, did you know that we are the only original statistic of West Point?" Now, that was back I don't know how many years ago, and I said, "What do you mean by that?" And she says, "Well, we came in, we were 100%. There was two of us. We graduated 100%. That was two of us. We retired, which with two of us." And she kept on with the how it was an original statistic. And I'm like, "Oh, okay, so I'll just keep that in my back pocket," and so I always try to bring that up every chance I get, so.

Interviewer:

So you were looking around, and as you said, you don't see any other black faces.

Pat Locke:

I did not see many. Now, we came up with some from prep school, and I can't remember how many of us from prep school kind of lasted through the whole thing. I remember Reggie Gillis was one that lasted through the whole four years, and I can't remember the rest of my prep school buddies that graduated, so it was interesting.

Interviewer:

Being in this first class of women, were you very aware that you were breaking new territory?

Pat Locke:

Had no idea. I had no idea of the significance of what we were doing at the time. I just remember somebody, a reporter on the radio, that the Superintendent said, you know, "If women come here I'll resign," or something like that, and it just didn't mean a lot to me at the time. It meant a lot to other people. I was not politically aware as the rest of my female classmates were, and they told me, "Pat, you need to become politically aware. You need to fight this, and fight this, and dah-dah-dah-dah-dah." And I was pretty much nose to the ground, just trying to stay in and graduate, so I have since learned a lot, since I've graduated. But when I first came in, there was nothing; I was not politically aware about anything that was going on.

Interviewer:

When did you think you started to become more politically aware? When did that - was that a process, or?

Pat Locke:

I don't think I ever became politically aware while I was at West Point. I think my experience was different than my women classmates, because the things that they were struggling with, like oppression or something like that, like they were being oppressed by the men - and we were - I had issues just with communicating. My biggest issue was because I grew up in Detroit, so I had very broken English, if you can call it that. And so when I opened my mouth to talk, very few people understood what I was trying to say. I couldn't - I didn't have the words to express myself very well. And so consequently, I thought I was always in trouble, so that was my barrier, that was my oppression, more so than people oppressing.

So I was more at the basic level of survival, and not so much at a level where, you know, "I'm going to fight this oppression or that oppression." And I'd say, "I'm not quite there yet. Let me learn how to speak English first so I can at least express myself." So that was a challenge; that was my biggest challenge the first year I was there.

Interviewer:

Do you think somehow you got your voice at West Point?

Pat Locke:

I started to; I started to. By the time I got to - well, first of all, they kind of hammered you with English while you're here, and you did a lot of writing, you did a lot of - you had to do a lot of speaking in front of people. And so I had a lot of people that I could imitate; my roommate spoke very good English, and a lot of them were sympathetic to me. And so I listened and learned and imitated, and that was how I finally got to the point where I could express myself and people could actually understand what I was saying. So that caused me to feel very, very isolated that first year, because I remember a lot of people, including my black classmates and other African-Americans that were there, saying - I think they kind of shied away from me, because they said, "Oh yeah, Pat, you know, yeah, she's from Detroit, but she's a little too black for us."

That's the thing that I remember the most. And so not that I was trying to whiten myself up; I was just trying to find a way that I could communicate effectively with everyone. And that took an entire year, in addition to trying to learn math at West Point. It's like drinking from a fire hose.

Interviewer:

Tell me about the feelings - I mean was there a great sense of sorority between the women? Tell me about the bonds of the women in that first class. Did you feel that the women were all, that it's "We're all in this together. We've all got to help each other get through this?" Or was it a matter of, "We're all in this individually, and I'm going to do whatever I can to get through it?"

Pat Locke:

I think for the most part, everybody was in it together. We - oh my goodness, there are some stories I just - yeah. Yeah. There are some stories that the women helped me out a lot.

Interviewer:

Anything you'd care to share?

Pat Locke:

I'd have to think about it a minute. But we were at least roomed together. They kind of had us separated by Companies when we first started out so that we were concentrated a little bit, so that we got a little bit of support from each other. But I still had the same struggles with them that I had with the rest of the Corps in that I couldn't communicate very well, so we had very little in common, and so I had to build some kind of basis of commonality between us so that we would have something that we could talk about. The women at least had in common with their male counterparts they shared a race. The men that came in with me, and as bad as it was for I guess African-Americans back in those days, they at least shared the commonality of being male.

And with me, I was black and female, so I shared almost nothing in commonality with the majority, which was white male. I was neither white, and I was neither male. So consequently I think they didn't know what to do with me. You know, I couldn't communicate very well. I was different. They didn't have anything to kind of hang on to help or anything like that. So that first year was a struggle, and I can't really compare myself to those that went before me that were kind of silenced, those first African-American graduates that were silenced through all of that.

Interviewer:

Did you - certainly there was a lot of - West Point did not admit women easily, right, from my understanding.

Pat Locke:

Correct. Right.

Interviewer:

And there was a lot of - even though once it became policy, there was a lot of sort of, my understanding is, institutional resistance.

Pat Locke:

Right.

Interviewer:

Help me understand that. How did that manifest itself? You were here. You were enrolled.

How did the elements who did not want women here make that known to you?

Pat Locke:

Some of it was just physical abuse. Some - we had both the Corps Cadets and we had Instructors that didn't want us here, and they kind of made that known to us.

Interviewer:

How'd they make it known?

Pat Locke:

Just you know through hazing and things like that. So you ask did we get in fights? I don't know about the other women. I guess I'd have to ask them if they ever actually got in fights with other Cadets.

Interviewer:

Did you ever get in a fight with a Cadet?

Pat Locke:

Yes. So. But you know, I hesitate to say anything. But I'll just tell you this one little brief story - and I never saw this Cadet again, but we were - I'm sure it's a typical story. But I took - I got to stop for a minute.

Interviewer:

Okay.

We're back after a short break. You were talking about while the camera was off a little bit about the incredible, the isolation you felt as a Plebe here. Were you able to express any of these feelings with the other African-American Cadets, or the other female Cadets?

Pat Locke:

No, and I wouldn't have wanted to. I was trying to minimize anything that made me so much more different than - I mean the differences were obvious already, but I didn't want to bring up something else. It would've been almost like, you know, whining or complaining. It was something - when I was 19 years old, 18 years old, I didn't understand that as I understand it today, and that's why the problem. That's why that was one of my biggest obstacles, I thought, to just enduring what was going on. I was at a level way down here just trying to survive, which is very bad. Somebody told me, "you're in survival mode, you're in destruct mode," so I know that now, but I didn't know that back then. And so just getting to the point where I could communicate with people effectively was my number one priority.

So I listened very carefully to other people, and I tried to imitate how they talked, so that I could talk in the same way. And again, when I met Joy, I just remember how polished she was in her speech, how easily she communicated with the white classmates and Upperclassmen, and I was seeing how they responded to her and saying, "Oh my goodness, I have such a long way to go." And I didn't talk very much; I just tried to listen a lot. My goal was to try to stay there and not get kicked out, which was - I saw people getting kicked out left and right. I mean back then we were in the attrition model; I think they brought in 1,500 with our class, or some huge number, and then we graduated 938 or something like that. So I was just trying not to get kicked out, and they didn't mind kicking you out back then.

And so I was trying to keep a very low profile and just do what I had to do.

Interviewer:

Tell me a little bit about the sense of solidarity among the African-American Cadets. I mean this was 1969-1970

Pat Locke:

1976.

Interviewer:

1976, you know. I don't know what percentage of the Corps was African-American back then. It was a small number. As you said, "Where were all the black faces?" when you got off the bus.

Pat Locke:

I think we graduated 28 African-Americans in my class, and I think the class was 938, somewhere around there, so certainly not 10%.

Interviewer:

Was there a sense, though, of solidarity, or being of a sense? Tell me about the bonds between the African-American Cadets.

Pat Locke:

Well, we had the Gospel Choir, and I was so happy we had the Gospel Choir, because that was a place that I could go and sing, and find out what I should be doing, what I shouldn't be doing, and yeah. There were people that tried to help you out, but most of it was kind of under the radar. It was such a hostile time toward women, the help that you received was pretty much under the radar. But I remember that one of the things that really stood out with the African-American men is how many girlfriends they had. Most of them, you know, as I kind of watched this social culture at West Point, just most of them had 10 to 12 girlfriends. I think we were surrounded by ten all-female schools at the time, and you know, I just had no idea that this was even possible.

But it's not that I was not used to it, because in Detroit, I think the ratio of available black men to available women were 1 to 14 or something. It's much worse now, if you don't know. It's like across the nation I think it's like 1 to 100, so I was used to that. But when you saw it, you know, and the women that they were going out with, and here I was, you know. I must've looked awful, 'cause they did the buzz cut back then, and I had - I still have pictures of me when they cut my hair on R Day. I had whitewalls, because I had an Afro when I came in for R Day. I had a huge Afro. It was back in the early '70s, and I thought I was smokin' hot. And then they cut all of that off. They sent me back to the barber shop on R Day three times, so - until I could put my hat on and I looked like a guy. So if you can imagine trying to compete with, you know, the women from Vassar and Ladycliff and all those other places.

I'm like, "So did I date at West Point?" (Snickers) Yeah. No one would ever date me, or come near me, or anything like that. So again, when you talk about solidarity, there was that, they had this undercurrent that they needed to help us, but it wasn't kind of in an overt way. I did have some friends, but I would classify it as isolated. Again, they didn't have a lot in common with me, because the African-Americans that were here, I think most of them were from the middle to upper middle class, and again, there was the communication barrier, and I thought that most of them would be embarrassed to be seen with me, because let's face it, I was from the ghetto. And that was rare, I think, at the Academy at that time - I think. And I'm sure there were some people in prep school, but even the guys at prep school were still very polished.

Even though they were enlisted, they still seemed to come from very good backgrounds.

Interviewer:

You mentioned earlier that there was a lot of hazing of women, and a lot of institutional -

Pat Locke:

Right.

Interviewer:

Resistance to women being here. Over your four years here, did that - did you see any - did that resistance begin to decline, or was it a constant over the four years?

Pat Locke:

It did start to decline, I think after Yearling year. At least I didn't notice it. Again, I was in my own little world trying to survive, because academics were so hard. I mean I started - even though they said they taught me this in prep school, and I passed all the tests - I was good at memorizing and regurgitating what you just told me. But don't ask me a month from now what I learned. I went into the math class, and you saw some of the Professors were really trying to help us folks that came from different backgrounds, or challenging backgrounds. And I went into the first math class; they said, "If you need help, go on AI right away." And so I did. I went on Additional Instruction right away, and I remember opening my book, and I brought everything with me. So he started putting the formulas on,

and I said, "I have no idea what to do." He goes, "Well, you do this, and you do this." And I said, "Well, why would you do this and this?" And he kept backing all the way down to he got to the point where he put on the board $5 + Y = 7$. What is Y?" And of course, my response was, "Well, Y is a letter, and it doesn't belong there, because I know that's an addition problem. It doesn't belong there." And so he slammed - he literally slams his hand on his forehead, and he goes, "Okay." And then it started. But for those Professors that dealt with me in Plebe math and getting me through calculus, I mean they probably already earned their angel wings if they're still living, because I did not remember anything from high school. I didn't remember anything from the prep school. The prep school was like a fire hose. They were just trying to get us through. It was an accelerated program. We started in late January or something like that. But by the time I got to West Point, after Beast Barracks I didn't remember anything, and back in those days, they weren't testing or doing any academics in Beast Barracks. So by the time I got to my first math class at West Point, I don't even think I had the knowledge of a first-year high school student back then.

Interviewer:

Do you think your Instructors and your TACs treated you fairly, or they treated you differently because you were African-American?

Pat Locke:

I think they did. I think they had to. They had to treat me differently, because I was a little bit behind everybody else. I think I caught up by the time I got to Yearling year, though.

Interviewer:

Well, that's my question. I mean you're describing this incredible - your personal isolation. You're describing playing catch-up in so many areas here -

Pat Locke:

Right.

Interviewer:

Where you were coming from. Where was the point in your West Point experience, in the four years here, where you realized, "I can do this?"

Pat Locke:

Well -

Interviewer:

And what - tell me about that point.

Pat Locke:

I will tell you that Yearling year was kind of a turning point for me. Like first year, the Plebe year, I was just terrified because I couldn't keep up with the academics, and the Instructors - I know that we have a reputation now of being the number one staff and most accessible staff and faculty in the nation. And I would just like to say, "Well, whoever was doing it back in those days - the Professors that I did come into contact - now, there were a bunch that they were kind of hell-bent on running us out. But the ones that I did come into contact that did have mercy on me were the ones that that was the reason that I made it through. And I said, "Oh, if I could just find a couple of Professors like this every year, you know I might be able to make it through this." But by the time I got to my Yearling year in math, and somehow I had - back then, they put you according to your - they placed you in math sections according to your ability or your test scores or something like that back in those days.

And so the number 1 section were the very, very best, and the number 20 section were the very, very worst. Well, by the time I made it to Yearling year, I was able to get to the number 2 section out of the math class. And I'm like, "I'm going to make it. I'm going to make it. I'm going to make it." And I kept with that, because that was a turning point, and then one of the - the Gymnastics Coach for the Women's Gymnastics Team came and asked me to be on the Gymnastics Team. And then I found another set of people that I had something in common with, so I figured out that I was very strong, and

had a lot of upper body strength, and they said, "Oh, we can shape this into a gymnast." And so they made me into a gymnast. So with those two things, that was kind of a turning point in Yearling year where I found something that I could do, and academically I had just a twinkling that I was going to make it.

So I was - Yearling year was - it wasn't the watershed, but it was kind of "I think I'm going to make it through. I think I'm going to graduate."

Interviewer:

Did becoming a gymnast become your other identity?

Pat Locke:

It did, because it became even - now, it was amazing. Plebe year, all I did was study. I studied from day, I mean every chance I got; I studied and studied and studied. And I still made horrible grades - horrible grades. Yearling year was a lot better, and I was studying less, because we were training gymnastics for five hours a day. You know we had two-hour workouts in the morning on the weights, and then about three hours in the afternoon, and I figured out that I was pretty strong. And I did a sport that before I came to West Point, I didn't even know what a cartwheel was. I had no idea what a cartwheel was, had no idea what a somersault was; and I just imitated what I saw people doing all through Yearling year, Yearling Gymnastics.

That's what we called it back then. I think they call it Mill Movement now; I don't know what they call it, but it's still basically Gymnastics. But that's when I thought, I said, "I'm going to make it through."

Interviewer:

Were there any African-American members of the faculty that became mentors to you, or that reached out to you? Or were there any just -

Pat Locke:

I remember my TAC, *GENERAL LINHART* - well, he was *MAJOR LINHART* at the time - and thank goodness, thank goodness for him, because I think he understood. I don't know what his background was. He was very, very sophisticated, very well-spoken. He was African-American, and there weren't a lot of African-American TACs back then, and I was just very thankful that he was our TAC in A-2. And I think without him, and without his understanding, I would've been in a lot of trouble, so. My daughter happens to be in A-2. Now, what are the chances of that? You know, kind of same chances of me meeting my Drill Sergeant when I was ten, but yeah. That was an amazing thing.

And I eventually made it up to - the Gymnastics Team voted me Co-Captain of the Gymnastics Team with Kathy Snook. That was this whole transformation about being able to communicate with people got better and better, because I was in basic conversation with these women for three hours at a time. Oops, sorry. Three hours at a time, and again, my goal was to imitate and get to the point where I could communicate effectively, and for those three years around those women - and I was around some very sophisticated women. I mean Kathy Gerard Snook, Karen Kelly Stoner. I'm looking at all the women that were, you know - did we get along all the time? No, we didn't get along all the time. We were teenagers, we were early - but the fact that we kind of had each other's back. We knew what we had to do. Gymnastics was hard. West Point was hard.

Gymnastics was very hard; a lot of broken bones, a lot of ripped palms, a lot of just stuff that I didn't know. But it gave me a chance at leadership where when I was a Co-Captain, you were expected to do certain and different things, and I was glad for that, because I don't think I got a lot of leadership opportunities in the Corps. I was the Fourth Class Systems Officer. We don't have that anymore. Back - did you have the Fourth Class Systems Officer? Nope. We tried that, so that's what I did. But I was happy for that opportunity in Gymnastics.

Interviewer:

You brought up the four-class system. Do you think that - did the Upperclass African-American Cadets reach out to you and try to sort of help you and pull you up?

Pat Locke:

I think they reached out a lot, and they tried to do it I guess in a clandestine manner -
Interviewer:

Yeah, I guess you referred to that.

Pat Locke:

â€˜Cause they didnâ€™t want - but I think they were looking out for me, but they didnâ€™t do it as openly as they could. Except for one guy, and I tell you, this was an amazing story, â€˜cause I think he was the only one that did it this overtly. His name was Tiki Traylor; heâ€™s class of â€™79. He was a football player, and he was very big. I donâ€™t know if you know him, but I was having one of those very, very rough days, and we were on our way back from class. I canâ€™t remember - I remember it being not quite dark. I remember it being not quite dark, and I was going there, and it was one of the occasions that if one person stopped a female Cadet to correct her, haze her, whatever - and it was always the goal to try to make us late for class, or try to do something to get us sluggish or demerits. And so these two had stopped me going across Central Area, and of course, every time somebody stopped, â€˜cause it was new, everybody kind of flocked around. And so instead of just two people hazing me, there was like this gaggle of eight or six people standing around yelling, and doing a whole bunch of stuff to the uniform, like, â€œWhy is this out of place?â€ And pretty soon, there was a big gaggle; it was like 20 people, and Iâ€™m like, â€œI know Iâ€™m not that interesting. But - and it was a big roar. They were just yelling, and just being - I donâ€™t know - just mean-spirited as possible. And so I was just standing there at attention, just going, â€œYes sir. No sir. Yes sir. No sir. I mean yes sir. I mean yes sir. No sir.â€ And then Tiki Traylor comes around, and big, intimidating, imposing guy.

African-American, and he was of course about six inches taller than anybody that was there. And so he came up behind the guys. I saw him coming, but the guys that were hazing me, that were facing me, didnâ€™t see him coming. And so he walked among, you know, and as the sea parted, as he was getting to the ring of people that were hazing me, he puts his hands on his hips, and he goes, â€œIs there a problem here?â€ And so the guys that were hazing me turned around and looked up, like, â€œHahâ€ So that broke up the thing, and he walked me to class. So that was the kind of support that I think people wanted to give, but couldnâ€™t do it publicly; and they were doing that, but they were doing it kind of under the radar.

Interviewer:

Why couldnâ€™t they do it publicly?

Pat Locke:

â€˜Cause they werenâ€™t as big as Tiki Traylor. I mean I donâ€™t know if people remember him. He was in the class of â€™79, and he was huge. But even those guys that were very big like that, on the football team, when they were Plebes, they were getting hazed, too. I just found out a couple stories here recently. So they had their own water to carry, and they were doing the best that they could, so could they have given more support? I donâ€™t think they could have in the environment that we were in. Tiki was just one of those rare individuals that he saw something - and it couldâ€™ve been if anybody else had saw it they wouldâ€™ve done the same thing - donâ€™t know. But he was there at the time, the incident was there in front of him, and he chose to do something about it.

Interviewer:

Was there a moment in your four years here - once again, thereâ€™s a story of going from - a transformative story. And you talk about your isolation. And was there a moment when you realized - I mean weâ€™ve talked that at one point, you already knew, okay, Yearling year, during your second year, you said, â€œOkay, I know Iâ€™m going to make it.â€ Was there a point later where you said not only are you going to make it, â€œBut I am fully a Cadet now,â€ or â€œIâ€™m fully part of this community?â€ Was there a point - you know what Iâ€™m saying - that you felt that the isolation was somehow a thing of the past; that you were fully accepted?

Pat Locke:

I never felt - the isolation got more bearable. I mean it got better as I was able to communicate better, but I always felt like I was part of the Corps. Because the Corps was my home, because I didn't really have anyplace else to go. If I had gotten kicked out, or left the Corps, where was I going to go? I just didn't have anything. And there's two things that did it for me; that made me a part of the Corps of Cadets almost instantly, and one was the Honor Code. If you saw where we came from, and where lying, cheating, and stealing was a part of everyday life, where it was a survival technique, and if you weren't trained on anything else, that's what you did. That's what you did to survive. And so you have a lot of you didn't know who to trust in your family, in your friends, in your neighborhood.

You know I can talk about my neighborhood, but that's another time. But when I came to the United States Military Academy, and they explained to us what the Honor Code was, and you actually got to experience in those next two hours that this was an honorable place. People weren't going to steal things. People weren't going to lie to you. People weren't going to cheat. And I felt like from where I came from and the trust factor to where I am now here in the Corps of Cadets, I felt like I was able to breathe for the first time. And I could actually focus on something other than staying alive.

Interviewer:

It was liberating.

Pat Locke:

It was very liberating, and I said, "Oh my goodness, I don't ever want to leave here." Because you could walk around, and it was almost like being unshackled. It was almost - as drastic as it was for me, getting off the bus and seeing no black people, it was like going to - it was like going to another planet. And as much as I felt that big distinction, the distinction between being in this environment, and being in Detroit, it was that drastic, about being free to breathe, and free to do something other than just survive.

Interviewer:

Gotcha.

Pat Locke:

So the Honor Code is always - you know, this is why I teach Ethics today. This is why I signed up for as I'm in school for Moral Theology. These are some of the things that back when I was very young, these are the things that I kind of inherited from the Corps. I mean that's the thing that was most near and dear to my heart - besides the Hellcats. No, no. Talk about being isolated. And you wonder how I survived in West Point, being so different than everybody else. Coming from a background that was so different than everybody else's. One of the things that they did in Detroit - my mom did it, my grandmother did it - they were baton twirlers. They were majorettes. And so what did we learn from the time that we were two or three years old, since we could walk, was to march - was to march. And this is what we did; from the time I was three or four years old, I was a majorette.

I did majorette competitions. I marched in every parade. And what did they have? They had military music in the background. They had the big drums, and they had all of that. And so there was one thing of comfort to me - besides the Honor Code - when I came into R Day, and that was the Hellcats. They were there on R Day, 'cause they were teaching us how to march, and so there I was trying to learn how to march like they wanted me to march, but listening to the Hellcats in the background. I was going - the drums - and so I was at home. Every morning I got up, they played Reveille, the Hellcats were there. Oh my goodness. They just made my whole day. I mean that was one of the reasons that - that's what got me through a lot of it. With all that isolation that first year, I had the Hellcats, so isn't that - that's kind of strange, how that's the one unifying thread in my "why did you stay at West Point? How were you able to survive?"

And I would say, "It's the Hellcats, and the Honor Code - H and H - H Squared - H²O for Pat."

Interviewer:

As you moved through and you sort of moved up to your third year, and then finally you were a Firstie, you saw new classes of women coming in. Did you see any changes as far as how the experiences of the women behind you you think got any easier? Or did you see the women behind you having the same rough road?

Pat Locke:

I saw them as having - it was easier, because they had adjusted everything, I thought. Now, they couldâ€™ve been the same isolation that I had. I remember Kim Topping - Kim Hall came in, and I think she had almost the same background I had, but you know what? Sheâ€™s a basketball star, so she had more in common immediately with everybody, even if she did come from a background like mine, â€™cause she could play basketball. And so she could beat almost half the men that were on the menâ€™s basketball team, because thatâ€™s how she grew up. So she had that in common, and so I thought her transition mightâ€™ve been a little bit easier than mine. People - I have to ask her. She doesnâ€™t live that far from me; she lives about a half a mile from me right now. But I think it was a little bit easier because they did bring in more athletes that second and third and fourth year.

And so women, as we start winning competitions, I think things kind of lightened up at the Academy for women, because of the group that came behind us.

Interviewer:

Do you recall that the women in your class reaching back to help the women behind them?

Pat Locke:

Well, I know I did, because Kim and I became great friends. There wasnâ€™t that many, and there was - I canâ€™t remember. I think there was two or three in the class of â€™81, I think.

Interviewer:

Behind you - African-American women behind you.

Pat Locke:

African-American women; zero, I think, in the class of â€™80. Was Nadja Grammer - I canâ€™t remember if Nadja was in the class of â€™82 or not. There was one class where they didnâ€™t have any, but I canâ€™t remember. But Nadja and I, we all got to know each other because we were all there together, and Nadja and I became great friends, â€™cause I had a accident. When I came back to Walter Reed, she was there; she lived in that area, and she took such good care of me. So yeah, I thought we were a little bit more closely bonded together, but we were so few, and so spread out, so we didnâ€™t get a chance to bond as much as I thought we would have, had we had the greater opportunity.

Interviewer:

What do you remember of Commencement, of graduation?

Pat Locke:

I remember wanting to run out as fast as I could, because I thought that they might take my diploma back. I donâ€™t know how many people have that sense, but all I wanted to do was get my diploma and get in the car and drive as fast as I could away from West Point.

Interviewer:

Away from West Point.

Pat Locke:

Yeah, mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

Why away?

Pat Locke:

Because I didnâ€™t want them to take my diploma back.

Interviewer:

Oh, okay.

Pat Locke:

So I was - I didn't even want to look at it. I just wanted to get in the car and go, so that was my experience on the Commencement Exercise. Even tossing my hat up, I still had a lot of anxiety because of everything that happened.

Interviewer:

There wasn't any sense of relief, or just like, "Hey, I did it, I'm here, I've arrived?"

Pat Locke:

No, because - nope, none of that, none of that. It was all those things that were said to me on Graduation Day about, you know, a lot of the people, Officers, things like that, say, "Well, you know what, if we didn't get rid of you here at the Academy, don't worry; we'll take care of you out in the Army."

Interviewer:

Wow.

Pat Locke:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

You mean like you're not safe yet.

Pat Locke:

You are not safe, no.

Interviewer:

Really.

Pat Locke:

No, you're a long way from being safe, because there's more alumni out in the -

Interviewer:

And who was saying this to you?

Pat Locke:

Oh, just other Cadets.

Interviewer:

Other Cadets.

Pat Locke:

Other Cadets.

Interviewer:

Other classmates.

Pat Locke:

Uh, yeah. They - even -

Interviewer:

And they still - and you think that was because, once again, women - because you're a woman?

Pat Locke:

Right, because we were women, and we certainly didn't belong at West Point.

Interviewer:

Even after four years, you hadn't been fully accepted.

Pat Locke:

No. Nope. I mean we're much better now than we were on Graduation Day, for sure. But we had some real winners; but I think that was kind of part of the environment. It was just part of the circumstances. They had been told that women don't belong here, and they had absorbed that. But I think we're a lot better now than we were.

Interviewer:

We have a few more minutes. First of all, I just want to say that this has been an amazing interview.

Pat Locke:

Wow.

Interviewer:

And your story is just remarkable and inspiring, and you know. And I certainly want to hear

more about your Army career in a subsequent interview. But I just want to make a few notes here as far as women not belonging at West Point - well, you certainly showed them, because youâ€™ve a daughter about to graduate -

Pat Locke:

I do.

Interviewer:

From West Point in -

Pat Locke:

Keeping my fingers crossed.

Interviewer:

In two weeks.

Pat Locke:

In two weeks.

Interviewer:

So in one sense, youâ€™ve won that argument.

Pat Locke:

Uh, yeah.

Interviewer:

For all of the difficulties you faced at West Point, but all the benefits too - I mean my God, it made you who you are today, is what I hear you saying.

Pat Locke:

I would like to make one point.

Interviewer:

Please.

Pat Locke:

Itâ€™s just I think the Armyâ€™s return on investment from me is something that they should really take into consideration, and start looking at those places that they donâ€™t recruit from. In order for the Corps to get better at being better leaders, I truly believe that they need to experience folks from backgrounds that are different than their own. So if you come from an upper middle class background, your soldiers that youâ€™re going to be leading are going to be pretty much from the middle to lower to lower lower class. I was. But if you donâ€™t know how to talk to them, if you donâ€™t understand their background, itâ€™s going to take you a while to become a good leader.

And by the time you become the leader that they need, itâ€™s time for you to go on a Battery Command or Company Command, and youâ€™re no longer leading them. I think theyâ€™re going to be better served if theyâ€™re around people that are from classes that are different than theirs, so that they can relate quicker and better to their soldiers that theyâ€™re going to lead. I think thatâ€™s something that the Academy needs to look at; they think that everybody has to be in the top tier before they come here. Got to have 800 scores on your SATs, and whatever on your SATs and ACTs. There are people that are - what do you call them, late bloomers - maybe because they havenâ€™t had the opportunity to have the best education, the best teachers, the best parents, the best counselors, the best mentors. I have seen mentors trying to mentor kids, and itâ€™s almost like the blind leading the blind, so we probably need to get out there and find those diamonds in the rough that could make a huge return on investment.

And that will probably stay with the Army through to the top ranks of leadership, so.

Interviewer:

Thereâ€™s also a lot of talk these days about the income inequality in this country, and whatâ€™s called sometimes the opportunity gap.

Pat Locke:

Right.

Interviewer:

And if you had the opportunity now to go back and speak to your former self, that teenage

girl back in Detroit, and tell her about the Army, what would you say to that - how would you assuage the concerns of that young girl back in Detroit that yes, this is the proper route for her?

Pat Locke:

You first have to - we have to meet people where they are, and we tend not to do that. Like the Battalion Commander that was trying to convince me to go to West Point because it was a great leadership, it was a great institution, it has all this historic value, all the great leaders came, blah-blah-blah-blah. And all he really had to say was, "It's a free college," you know? And that's kind of where I was in my thinking. And so people that may have huge intellectual capacity in places like St. Louis, Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, Atlanta, Miami - they don't know they have that potential until someone comes and shows them. And we don't do a good job with that, and so if I were me talking to my former self, I would take me to a place where I can experience how much potential I had. Maybe taking that former 15 or 16-year-old to someplace and having her do an exercise, so that she could see what her capacity was.

And then say, "Here is how you can make money with that capacity that I just showed you." And what they're really interested in is how can I find my place in the world, take care of myself, have a great family, make my life better for my children? That's kind of what they're looking for. And they're also looking for, "I can't leave 'cause I've got to take care of my mom." Like if you come to West Point, you're going to get a stipend. You can send your money back to your mom. You don't have anything to do with it. You can live here for free. And you have to kind of meet them where they are, and what their needs are at the time, and right now we're dealing with a lot of want. "I want this, I want that, I want a iPod, I want, you know, I want speakers -"

Interviewer:

All the things advertised.

Pat Locke:

Yeah. But what their basic needs is what we're not getting to, because we haven't addressed the issues of what they're dealing with right now. So they see media, and you have to take into account what they're seeing from the media. They will never know their potential until somebody takes them by the hand and gives them some hands-on practical experience.

Interviewer:

Well, I think we've just about run out of time, but I do want to look forward to our future conversations about the rest of your military career. I want to thank you very much for a great hour and a half.

Pat Locke:

Oh, thank you very much.