

Interviewee: Marcia Dobson (Retained first husband's name...heavy regrets)

Interviewer: Erik Laitos

[Intro, consent] *Through your entire life, how have you arrived at the last name Dobson, and why have you kept it?* It was the name of my first husband. And my single name was somewhat complicated and often mispronounced, so I was grateful to take on an easier one. We have one child that we also, obviously, named Dobson. And I kept my name Dobson after I divorced, or my husband and I got divorced, so I could be related to my daughter. When she herself got married, then I was left with the name Dobson...wanting to actually change back to my single name, but it was just too complicated to do it in terms of income taxes and the government and all of that.

*Do you think that there's any particular relationship binding you to your last name and the broader practice of feminism?* That's a hard one because my mother was an ardent feminist. She did not take my father's name, and so my original last name was hyphenated, first with her name and then with his name. And because of that, it was difficult to decide what I wanted for my middle initials when I became Dobson. And so I chose all of my middle initials: so they are Marcia W. D-S. Dobson. And I don't know if you're going to ask me this...when I remarried, I then had the option to hyphenate my new last name, which would have made me: Marcia W. D-S D-R [Dobson-Riker]. Given the fact that Dobson was in so many of the records, I decided that I would just keep it. And my husband [John Riker], laughingly, and actually he wasn't quite that laughingly at the time, said 'Well, why don't I just take the name Dobson?' and I said 'That would be fine if that were my single name, but I don't want you to have the name of my first husband!' So it got more and more complicated. And if I had my druthers today, I would probably go back to my single name and then I would add my husband's name, which I still do these days, but only for social occasions. *So broadly speaking, then, you retained the name Dobson for just administrative simplicity?* Mmm hmm.

*I know you mentioned your daughter, and you kept the name to stay related to her. How has that choice related to her or impacted her, or has it? Now that she's no longer Dobson, she's married.* She actually dropped the name Dobson entirely, and went to her first middle name, which was my mother's mother's single name. So she became Sophia Flanders Mendoza. And she was very insistent that she take the name of her husband. But she did definitely drop the Dobson.

*Is there anything about the aesthetic or history of your name that binds you to it?* No! As a matter of fact, in the world of Colorado Springs, I would just assume not have this name because I'm often connected with the Reverend Dobson. *James Dobson*. And sometimes I almost get guffawed to in safe ways. *That's very funny, I had never even considered that!* 'Oh, you must be related,' or 'Are you related to James Dobson?' And my students over the years have teased me by putting up James Dobson's quotations all over their wall and putting down my name instead [laughter]. It's become a source of amusement actually! [laughter]

[Intro to pros and cons] *What did you hope for in retaining this name? What did you hope for in retaining this name? Obviously, there's a certain administrative simplicity there, but what did you hope for and has that worked for you?* Everybody knows how to pronounce it! When I was Dunbar-Soule, I could be Soulay, I could be Dunbarso, that good Italian name! I found lots of different pronunciations, I was constantly having to spell it. I chose Dobson for simplicity's sake.

But I'm not particularly happy to be a Dobson. I don't particularly like the name, and that part of my life is now over. I have always considered myself a feminist, and so I often my name is Dobson but it's an alias. I see, let's flush that out. *What do you mean alias?* It doesn't really belong to me. It belongs to a certain part of my history, and that's part of why I keep it. But I've always much more related to both my mother's and my father's name. *What about the name Riker? Do you relate to that moreso? Less so?* Indifferently. I would be fine to be Riker, because we move in a fairly conservative crowd outside of the college, particularly with ballroom dancing, we meet lots of military and lots of Christian fundamentalists. I'm happy to be known as either Dobson-Riker or Riker in those circles, but I would not like to have Riker as my professional name here at Colorado College. *Did you begin your professional career [under the name Dobson]?* I did.

*Have there been any unforeseen consequences as a result of retaining that name? Aside from what I told you? Aside from that you're not super stellar about it anymore.* And not related to James Dobson and all of that? [laughter] I don't think so. I'm interested that they come from upper New York and it is an old English name. But I am primarily Flemish and Scottish. And Soule is actually in the name...my father's name was the same name as the George Henry Soule who came over on the *Mayflower*, so I very much like that name.

*Would you make the same choice, would you retain Dobson?* I think if I had the time and I weren't such a busy person, I would do what I could to change it back to my single name. *That's interesting. Why would you want to?* Because I am an independent professional, and I associate very closely with my heritage, and that seems like the name that is home to me, and it also reflects my mother's own feminism, which I really do agree with. I agree with what she did in keeping her own name. *Do you think the degree to which your mom's feminism influenced you, do you think that's going to flow downhill to your daughter ever?* I'm not quite sure what I mean [sic] by your question. I would say that my daughter is a more fierce feminist than I am. *Really? Why do you think she then decided to take her husband's name so vociferously?* I don't think I've ever asked her that. She's a very direct and stubborn person, and when she says something, she means it. And it is not up to her mother to ask questions about it. But someday I think I might. *Someday you'll have to! Hopefully this interview will stoke those thoughts.*

*What kinds of reactions have you gotten about your name, apart from the James Dobson connection?* Negative, positive, indifferent, or have you any? Not really. It's such a rather ordinary name that I don't get much response to it. *Keeps life simple?* It keeps life simple.

[Intro to implications for feminism] *How effective do you think your choice is, in your opinion, as you not being erased as woman and a feminist?* Erased? Yes. *Your decision to retain that name.* Well, that's a very difficult question, because both of my parents, Helen Flanders Dunbar and George Soule, Jr. were very very well known. They were both famous in their own fields. And I've always associated myself with them that way. And they both had huge careers and I've always considered myself a career person, so... I don't know how to answer that question except that I have a certain amount of regret that I'm a Dobson, and I always try to put in my middle initials and sometimes my whole single name when I publish. So I've tried as much as I can to hold on to my identity and my original name which was hyphenated!

*Do you think there's any chance in hell you would ever go back? Or is it the administrative simplicity of the name Dobson that keeps you there?* I think I am probably going to just keep it the way it is, and just keep the middle name strong. *Fair enough. Do you think, then, that your*

*choice has been reflective of a shift away from the traditional patrilineal naming practice? Well, if it's still Dobson, probably not. Right? What's interesting is that you chose the name Dobson, you weren't going to immediately select the name Riker when you remarried. Right, and I chose to retain it because, as a feminist, I am very deeply connected with my daughter. And I wanted to give her a sense of her own identity for as long as she wanted it. Very interesting.*

*How meaningfully does a woman keeping her patrilineal name speak to feminist goals in your opinion? That's another difficult question, because it all seems to be patrilineal, no matter how far back you go. I've always been interested in, I believe it's a Spanish tradition, in which when somebody is named and married, they keep their single name, and it's hyphenated with their husband's last name. And when the child is born, I think the mother's name is dropped. So that comes closer to an ideal for me. On the other hand, it's ridiculous, because imagine hyphenated names! Twenty long... there's got to be a way of doing this so the maternal line is acknowledged... I think that's very important. It is interesting... we've talked at length about hyphenated practices... What do you think the generation of children with hyphenated names should do when they marry and have children? I think something depends on whether... I should take this class... but I was going to say whether it's a son or a daughter. It'd be interesting to see the son keep the patrilineal and the daughter keep the matrilineal. Right, so something out of like Scandinavia, for example, where sons become like 'Leif Ericson.' You think that'd be [better]? That'd be a way of doing it. I think also the way they do it in Russia is interesting, which is something like that [examples]... It's again, a difficult question to know what to do. I happen to be thinking right now of Susan Ashley's son. So her husband's name is Lee, so her son is Lee-Ashley. And now he has a son. Yeah, and what does he pick? One of the things we've been flirting with is what about creating an entirely new name? Either from scratch or, alternatively, when you wed, combining your names [Lucard example]. [Conclusion]*