

Interviewee: Mary Pechauer (Mary kept her last name instead of taking her husband's last name)

Interviewer: Gracie Rennecker

[Intro and consent] *What is your last name story?* Well I would say that I didn't give keeping my last name a lot of thought, but I met my husband when I was a sophomore in college and by my senior year we were talking about what our future might be like together and so we were sort of imagining things and he has a sister by the same first name Mary and so at one point he said "That'd be kind of weird to have a sister Mary Undlin and for you to be Mary Undlin," and so I said, "What makes you think I'm going to be Mary Undlin?" And it's not like I had any pre-thought about that but I think the pattern of my behavior is that I do like to challenge assumptions and so he was making an assumption and so my initial natural reaction was to challenge that assumption. And he said, "Why wouldn't it be if we got married?" and I said, "Well, would you change your name to Tom Pechauer?" and he said no and I said, "Well, there you go." And he was so...well that makes perfect sense to me! He didn't challenge me at all, had never understood it as an assumption. He comes from a smaller town in western South Dakota where it's very traditional so his response was awesome for me because he didn't push back at all.

*Awesome. And where are you from?* I'm from Madison, Wisconsin. *Oh, okay.* Which is a much more progressive city because the U and the capital as opposed to Rapid City, South Dakota. So that's actually when I first started thinking about keeping my name. We ended up getting married a year after college and I stayed with that and I think it's because I still felt like I was just beginning to understand who I was and that was really strongly connected to my name. And so I just thought, I can't be Mary Undlin. That's just not who I am. I'm still trying to figure out who Mary Pechauer is. And so I needed to stay with that and I knew he wasn't going to fight it and it wasn't going to be an issue. So that's kind of my name story.

*So, has this had any effect on your children? If so, what?* We decided early on that both of our last names are just not easy and they're not typical. No one knows how to spell either of our names or say them and so we didn't want to do hyphenated names for our kids so we decided early on that all of our children would have Pechauer as a middle name and Undlin as a last name and I do think part of that was influenced by the patriarchal culture that we're in because my husband is the only boy in his family and I only have one brother. I'm trying to think back, this was a long time ago when we were having this conversation. I think if he had had another brother we may have engaged in talking through that a little bit more but all of his sisters had been married, none of them had kept their names, he was the only one and so that was okay with me to have Pechauer as a middle name and Undlin as a last name. And so I think our kids are doing okay [laughs]. My oldest has said that she loves winning the 'who's got the weirdest middle name' competition at the lunch table. Hands down she always wins and I think my children will choose for themselves. I have two girls and two boys. They will choose for themselves and what feels right for them and that works for me. We did have some push back, maybe this is another question, from other people in our family. We thought that our kids would grow up confused about understanding the family. It's been a non-issue.

*Okay, perfect. Is there any importance of aesthetic uniqueness, ethnic history of your name, just like how it sounds, how it feels? Or is it more just linked to your feelings of your family?*

I think there's some of that. I had some great aunts that in their mid-seventies got on a plane and went over to Yugoslavia. I was probably in junior high at the time. I was very impressed by their courage to go and they didn't know exactly they just had an idea of where their parents were from in Yugoslavia so then they started to go to every church and look at, because people kept baptism records, and that's how they found our family. And we still had family there. So since that time, my parents have been back several times. I've been back a couple times and we have cousins and family that are still in that original village so the connections, that was starting to happen in those formative years for me so that was important. My husband is almost 100% Norwegian, and I think that was important for their family. That's why they were glad he didn't take Pechauer [laughs] because Undlin is such a strong Norwegian heritage.

*That makes sense. Perfect, okay. Did you have any role models for your decision? Family or friends?* No. I didn't have anyone who was older than me, but classmates of mine in college, we talked a lot about it and I was in a lot of feminist classes and so the conversation was always part of it and some of my friends have kept their names and some of them haven't. But that wasn't a huge--I didn't have a role model that had impacted me to make that choice. *Okay so now onto the Pros and Cons section. What did you hope for in choosing this name and has that worked out?* Yeah, it has. I ended up being in a professional field that my dad was also in and so there are connections that happen there that I love. I love stories and connections. That happens because people see my last name and so they'll come up, because I'm in a very public role at a large setting, and so people will come up and ask me about that. So I love making those connections and hearing the stories. Remind me the question again? [Repeats question] *I mean you kind of covered that earlier on so that was perfect.*

*Have there been any unforeseen consequences or problems?* Early on, and I can't remember what the incident was, but there was something where Tom and I were married and I think it was before we had Siri, our oldest, a trip to the ER or something, but remember we've been married 26 years so this is a while ago. There was some push-back from the hospital about us having different names. And so from that experience on, I carried a photocopy of our marriage certificate with me just in case. Never had to use it again, but I did carry it with me. I would say since then, by the time we had our fourth kid, which is really kind of our last hospital thing, it wasn't an issue at all. *Better be safe than sorry!* That was kind of a surprise, I didn't even think about that. I thought they would just believe me when I said we were married. Guess not.

*Are there times that you get called by a last name other than your last name? Such as Mrs. Undlin?* Yes. So I love it when solicitors call cause I don't have to lie and I can say, "No she's not here," 'cause Tom's mom is not with us. So then they say, "Well, when will she be there?" "I don't know." So then that ends the call. Sometimes I get a little frustrated that after being married for 26 years, friends, mostly when it's people who know us really well who will write to Tom and Mary Undlin. Tom's parents had a hard time making the change, but after about 5 or 6 years, they made the change. So birthday cards or Christmas cards now always come addressed to Tom Undlin and Mary Pechauer. So they made the change which is terrific, they're in their 80s and they've adjusted. So it doesn't happen often and I don't mind and I think it's having the kids, you know, the names are connected now, so I'm not as offended as when I was first making this and it wasn't the acceptable, or not acceptable, it wasn't common to do.

*We kind of already covered this but any other reactions from your family about the name changes? From your family or your husband's family?* Well, I'm the youngest of 4. My oldest sister got married about 2 years before I did and she changed her name and when I kept my

name, she was like, I'm still Joan Pechauer, I am not this person. So she went to court and changed it back, and I was one of her witnesses. So she ended up going back, which I thought was interesting 'cause she had tried it for two years and she just couldn't get her head around having her husband's last name as hers 'cause it wasn't who she was. *So you were her role model?* I guess, maybe you could say that! *That's really neat, that's very cool.*

*Now onto the future section. How affective do you think your choice is in intervening in this whole idea of women being erased, feminism as it's defined in our project? That idea?* [problems with recording device] [repeats question] I don't know. I think my approach to life is that the only way we can have an impact is what we can do in our own world. And I can't, I don't know, I'm much more one-on-one, people who know me realize that I'm not some radical feminist with this huge agenda. And maybe they can learn something from that and be more open and accepting. I also think it's really inwardly focused to think that everyone, the whole world, operates around this whole patriarchal model. It's not true. So it's really not that radical of a thing, so I haven't given it a lot of thought about the major impact but, you know, if encounters people's minds opened, you know, like I think about my in-laws, that's a good thing. *Yeah absolutely, I agree.*

*So, this question is a little confusing but I'll ask it and see if you have any response to it. So how meaningfully does a woman keeping her father's father's etc. name speak to feminist goals? 'Cause in your case you're keeping Pechauer, which is your father's name, and would that speak to sort of the feminist ideas? Or do you think it does?* Again, you know, every step no matter how small it is that helps us think differently about things is a step forward and so that's what I say with my children, you can change your name at any time. It's easiest to change it when you're getting married or going through a divorce. My children can choose what works best for them and they have been so closely connected to Pechauer and Undlin that I think they could choose either of those names or whomever they marry. And I would not be shocked by that. I did not have a close connection with my mom's maiden name. Both of her parents died when I was pretty young. She doesn't have any siblings and it wasn't a name that was part of my story so it wasn't natural for me and I wasn't going into it with an agenda. Had I thought more about it, maybe I would've. My sisters though, interestingly enough, each had children who they've used my mom's maiden name and then a maiden name from her family as middle names for their children. *Oh, interesting. Well great...that's all I have!* [end]