

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Polly Palmer Smith

Transcript of an interview
conducted by

Alison Oswald

at

National Museum of American History
Smithsonian Institution

on

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with subsequent additions and corrections

Alison Oswald (00:00):

Are you ready? Okay. [inaudible 00:00:01].

Casey McAdams (00:01):

I am rolling.

Alison Oswald (00:06):

Great. I'm Alison Oswald. I'm an archivist at the National Museum of American History and I'm speaking with Polly Palmer Smith in the board room of the National Museum of American History. Today is Wednesday, March 4, 2020. Welcome, Polly.

Polly Palmer Smith (00:23):

Thank you.

Alison Oswald (00:26):

Let's start at the beginning. Where you were born and raised? Where did you grow up?

Polly Palmer Smith (00:29):

I was raised in upper Montclair, New Jersey, as was my partner Lisa with the sports bra. I went through high school there and then went off to art school in Philadelphia to study fashion design, which I got pushed into because I went to a girl's school where you had to wear uniforms. This was the swinging '60s with the Beatles and Mary Quant and I was totally fashion-oriented because I was so starved for clothes, but I could always get my mother to buy me fabric. And so I had pictures on the wall in my bedroom and I was making all my dresses and clothes. All my artistic talent got funneled into clothing at that point.

Alison Oswald (01:14):

Can you tell me a bit about your parents?

Polly Palmer Smith (01:18):

My grandfather was an artist and illustrator, and my mother went to art school. She went to the Parsons School of Design in New York. Then she got married right after World War II. And she did lots of creative stuff. Eventually, she funneled it all into quilting and ended up on the cover of a couple of quilt magazines. Made beautiful stuff. Our homes were always beautiful because she studied interior design at Parsons. But I think she saw in me that I took that same artistic talent and then didn't get married. Funneled it all into a career. I think that was fascinating for her. So yeah, I got a lot of encouragement there.

Alison Oswald (02:03):

What kind of things did you do in school?

Polly Palmer Smith (02:06):

We got into trouble.

Alison Oswald (02:10):

Are you going to elaborate on that?

Polly Palmer Smith (02:12):

Well, you can imagine a little country day girls' school where Lisa and I went. We were pranksters. She will tell you if you ask her. She got kicked out. She blames me because we were getting into so much trouble and she thinks they thought I was more salvageable. I don't think that was the case because she was ill a lot and had her epilepsy and the first session in school was called chapel, which was more of a community school meeting. Her mother thought, "I'm not waking my daughter up for chapel." That's the kind of family they were. Her tardy record was horrendous. She was late all the time. She comes strolling in when she was ready. I think that's what it was.

Polly Palmer Smith (03:07):

One time I remember... I don't know how it started. She'll tell you. We got caught. I had her pinned against the wall in the hallway rubbing a chocolate cupcake in her face and the headmistress came along and was like, "How do you think this would look to visitors from the school?" Even though I was the one rubbing the cupcake in her face somehow, she got in trouble.

Alison Oswald (03:31):

What kinds of activities did you do in school? Sports?

Polly Palmer Smith (03:37):

Well, interestingly, our school was in an old athletic club, so it had these decrepit old bowling alleys in the downstairs. It had a swimming pool. It had all this sports stuff. Because of her epilepsy, Lisa had a pass to get out of any running around gym. And they didn't want her to be all by herself so they would send us down to the bowling alley, but we didn't bowl. You had to set up the pins yourself. It was an old, I remember, heavy lacquered bowling alley and the lacquer was peeling off. We'd sit there and talk and peel the lacquer off the bowling lanes.

Alison Oswald (04:13):

Did you have any mentors growing up?

Polly Palmer Smith (04:25):

My art teacher. I was always taking either private art classes or the art teacher... and my grandfather, who was an illustrator. I would hang out with him in his studio. My parents' theory was to see what each child was good at and then really encourage them in that. My older sister... who is two and a half years older... had a genius IQ and was good at everything. She was also good at art, but she had so many other interests. Then when I went onto art they said, "Okay, here's the artistic one." I was always pushed in that direction. It helped a lot.

Alison Oswald (05:09):

Did you play an instrument?

Casey McAdams (05:10):

Hang on. I'm going to jump in for one second. Can I see the rings there? Can you take...

Polly Palmer Smith (05:16):

Oh, are these things...

Casey McAdams (05:18):

Because you're going like this when you put your [crosstalk 00:05:21].

Polly Palmer Smith (05:20):

Do you want to...

Casey McAdams (05:23):

Yes. Just... there you go. That's fine.

Polly Palmer Smith (05:24):

Okay.

Casey McAdams (05:25):

I appreciate that. We don't see it, but we keep hearing a little click.

Polly Palmer Smith (05:29):

Yes, I played instruments. I was terrible. I took violin lessons. I can't even imagine what that was like. Then when my sister started taking it... the good one... she was good at it. Then I took piano lessons. I would've loved to have played the piano, but I was so bad that my teacher dropped me. I have no musical talent, but I was fascinated by it. I would've loved to have done it.

Alison Oswald (05:55):

When you were in school, what kind of art did you gravitate towards?

Polly Palmer Smith (05:59):

Anything. It's a little school. They just have one art class. You cover a bit of everything. I was briefly into oil painting, I remember, because that's my grandfather did. Or watercolors. My room was always set up as something and if it wasn't an artist studio then it was a fashion design room. It's always... and knitting. I got into knitting. I did some pretty horrible stuff.

Alison Oswald (06:31):

Who taught you to sew?

Polly Palmer Smith (06:35):

It would have to have been my mother. I mean, there was Home Ec class. I remember my Home Ec class in seventh grade. It was before I went to the school where I met Lisa. My best friend and I went to the store to get a pattern, so we got our pattern. There's a picture on the front of what it

should look like. We bought that exact fabric. It was a blue and white dress. Blue here, white here, with an applique little tulip and a red bell. We both made the same dress. But I know my mother was making some of my clothes, so it's probably a combination.

Alison Oswald (07:14):

What would be some words that you'd use to describe yourself today?

Polly Palmer Smith (07:20):

I'm a maker of things. I'm always making things. I'll have to show you my Mitch McConnell voodoo doll. It's darling. I'm always creating something. I've been making my outfit that I'm going to wear to the Inventor's Hall of Fame. It's been hanging over my head like a sore because I don't like dressing up.

Alison Oswald (07:44):

[inaudible 00:07:44].

Polly Palmer Smith (07:44):

Yeah, because even when I'm working at the Muppets and I'm the designer on a big film and I've got a whole workroom full of people, I'd always keep back a couple of the cutest little costumes and make for myself, because that's what I really love doing. I don't love supervising people. I do love doing the designs and picking the fabrics and being in charge, but I also want to make things myself. Fortunately, that was the kind of setting where I could do that.

Alison Oswald (08:11):

Do you make-

Jake Klim (08:12):

Alison, I don't know if it matters, but we're hearing when you're saying... I don't know if you hear it, but...

Alison Oswald (08:18):

Let's shift gears and talk about the invention of the jog bra. We discussed this in the group interview, but I want to go over a few more things because this is your individual interview and [crosstalk 00:08:30] take. The first question: how hard is it to make a bra?

Polly Palmer Smith (08:38):

Well, there's a bra and then there's a sports bra. A bra I think is pretty hard because where do you start? I don't know how they do it in bra companies: if they have a lot of manikins with all the different boobs or a lot of models to try them on, but I had nothing. I had my dress form. I couldn't even like wrap my head around how I was going to make a bra. It just seemed like there were too many moving parts. Too many cup sizes and weird little straps and hooks and eyes. This is why Lisa had such a hard time talking me into it. I just don't know. I don't want to do it.

Polly Palmer Smith (09:26):

But once the whole sports bra came in, my head wrapped around that almost immediately. The minute I saw it I got what it had to be, and I knew I could do that. I didn't have quite the fancy machinery. The samples that you have in your collection, which shows all the elastic zig-zagged on... because that's what I did on my sample because that's the only machine I had to do a stretch stitch. I didn't have a merrow or a serger, as we call it, that does the wonderful finished edge stretch and how you normally put on elastic now, which I do have on my dining room table [inaudible 00:10:03]. I use it all the time.

Alison Oswald (10:16):

How and where did you meet Lisa and hit it off?

Polly Palmer Smith (10:17):

How and where?

Alison Oswald (10:17):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Polly Palmer Smith (10:18):

Lisa and I met in eighth grade. She seems to have a clear memory of me walking in because I was the new girl in class. We gravitated to each other right away. We seemed to share a sense of humor. Then we spent a lot of time in each other's houses. We were mystified by each other's families. My mother was very traditional and very strict. Lisa would come over to my house and in the morning my mother would start, "Polly, Lisa! Breakfast!" Lisa would like... "What's that?!" "It's my mother." "Why is she yelling?" "Breakfast is ready." "What difference does that make?" At her house you got up and you ate when you felt like it. There was no schedule. I would go to her house and I would love that. You'd just run wild.

Polly Palmer Smith (11:03):

A story popped into my head. How lax it was... One summer we were there, and we'd leave the house in the morning and come home at night, go to the beach. It was their summer house at the shore. One day we suited up, went up to New York City. The Rolling Stones were playing at Madison Square Garden, no, Carnegie Hall, one of their first concerts in the United States. Walked up to box office. We ended up with 4th row seats because they must've been house seats that they were holding. It was a matinee. We saw the Rolling Stones and then we got back on the train and went back to Bay Head, New Jersey. Came home. Nobody had missed us.

Polly Palmer Smith (11:50):

Lisa, yes, eighth grade. And then Hinda

Alison Oswald (11:53):

Hinda.

Polly Palmer Smith (11:54):

Then I went to New York University graduate school for costume and theater design and Hinda was there. We've been trying to figure it out. I think we were in the same class except that it was a three-year program and I had managed to get it reduced to two, so I graduated a year before her.

Alison Oswald (12:18):

Did you take classes together?

Polly Palmer Smith (12:20):

We knew each other. We were talking about this. I don't know that we were in classes. I don't know. But I was very aware of her. I have one memory of her. We just talking about it yesterday: "Meryl Green. I remember you and Meryl Green," who was her best friend. The only memory I have of either one of them is them together. But I do remember she came to my apartment, or she called me and said that she knew I had a summer job in Vermont, and she was looking for a summer job and did I need an assistant. And I said sure.

Polly Palmer Smith (12:56):

So, we were friendly. We weren't friends. We didn't hang out at that point.

Alison Oswald (13:02):

What kinds of tools and materials did you use when you were first working on the jog bra?

Polly Palmer Smith (13:07):

I used my zigzag sewing machine, scissors... I have a dress form. I'm mostly a draper and not a pattern drafter, although I do both. It's easier for me to visualize in 3D rather than 2D. So, I probably draped it on the dress form. I probably had Lisa's measurements, which is not my dress form, so I probably had to pad out my dress form to her's. I started to build a Lisa and then build the bra on it. Then I was just following through on all the things that we had discussed in Vermont, which was to not have any seams or anything on the inside. Keep it as smooth as possible as the inside with any seams or attachments on the outside so there would be nothing to rub and cause any abrasion.

Polly Palmer Smith (13:58):

It was really simple. I used the zigzag because that was the only stretch stitch I had. Everything had to stretch to climb into it.

Alison Oswald (14:13):

Where did you find materials? We talked a bit about that in the group interview, but can you elaborate a bit more about where you went in New York?

Polly Palmer Smith (14:23):

There was a whole garment district in New York in the west 30s, 40s, maybe into the 20s. It was a grotty, big warehouse building. I can only assume... and I vaguely remember going through the Yellow Pages because there was no internet and you just looked at cotton fabric. I don't know

what the heading would be, but I found my way to this place. I hate the telephone, so I probably didn't call them ahead of time, but I might've to ask whether they carry cotton lycras, or maybe that was in their ad.

Polly Palmer Smith (15:02):

I don't know how many places I went to, but I have a clear memory of this one where I went. It was big room and it had big bolts of fabric and there was one of those little windows at the back with the guy behind it. You'd go and give him the number of the one you were interested in and you were allowed to buy a three-yard sample piece if you were a designer. Even though I had no credentials whatsoever, they sold me the three-yard piece of the one I wanted. And then Lisa remembers other samples, so I might've sampled pieces of other things that were there that I didn't think I needed for the bra at that time, but they were interested.

Polly Palmer Smith (15:42):

Then I same thing with elastic. It was an elastic dealer. That might've been the boyfriend of one of my college roommates who went into the business.

Alison Oswald (15:52):

Did you speak with anybody else while you were working on this? Did you ever consult with a fellow designer?

Polly Palmer Smith (16:02):

No. All my fellow designers were costume designers. That's all I knew. A few of my friends from college who'd gone into fashion design... but I don't think there was that much time. I got back from Vermont. I got this off Broadway show off. I ran around, got the fabrics. I made some samples. I brought them back up to Vermont. Then we made alterations mostly working from that same one. But who was there to talk to? Nobody was making this thing. Nobody would've known what I was talking about.

Alison Oswald (16:37):

You created a sketch which we've looked at. How much sketching did you do and for what purposes for the jog bra?

Polly Palmer Smith (16:48):

Well, that sketch that was there was done after it was made to send along to the manufacturer with notes of where I'd gotten the fabric if they wanted to source the same fabric that I had from the same company. So, I was just providing to Hinda and Lisa "This is what I've done, and this is as far as I'm taking it at this point." Beforehand nothing exists to jog my memory... any little scribbles, which there probably were once we had the jock strap. We talked about minimal seams, so I said one. The white elastic crossed in the back. Duh duh duh duh. It wasn't really that much to discuss. It was just a matter of getting the sizing right.

Alison Oswald (17:42):

Let's take a minute to talk about your costume career. When did you split from jog bra official? That you weren't going to stay?

Polly Palmer Smith ([17:52](#)):

I was clear from the very beginning... I don't know what point... I was working in costume design in New York. I'm a freelance costume designer in the theater at the time this all started. And then it was the summer of '78 that I started working for the Jim Henson Company. So by then that's what I wanted to do. I had no interest... I talked to them about it, I just can't do it. "I'm not moving up to Vermont. I'm making Miss Piggy clothes. Go away." I just had no interest. I was happy to help when I could help but it wasn't going to happen for me.

Alison Oswald ([18:44](#)):

Can you talk a bit about your costume career? Tell us a bit about Jim Henson and the kinds of things you do?

Polly Palmer Smith ([18:55](#)):

Yeah. First, there's a transition from fashion design, because I was going to go into fashion design. My senior year in college I had a work study and all the fashion designers were in New York and my parents said, "If you come back to New York you're going to have to live at home and commute in. We're not putting you up in the city." So, I managed to get myself up to the Dartmouth College theater department for my work study and I fell in love with costume design. The history, the paint on the fabric... it can be fantasy. It was so much more fun than fashion design. Then I was hell bent on becoming a costume designer for the theater, which I didn't even know was a thing up to that point. I'd go to period movies and theater. It just never clicked that somebody is doing that. I was so intent on fashion.

Polly Palmer Smith ([19:50](#)):

Then I wanted to pursue that. That's how I ended up at NYU and [inaudible 00:19:54]. So we went onto that. Then I was doing theater in New York and that's... Off Off Broadway, Off Broadway, it's a horrible existence. No budgets. Dragging bags of stuff around, fitting people, dealing with the personalities of actors whose careers haven't gone where they hoped it would go and just jollying everybody along. Especially that last play I did right before I made the jog bra, which was a modern dress which is not my forte. I love more fantasy or period. I wasn't a strong enough personality to deal with the directors and all these actors, because with modern dress everybody thinks they know what they look best in. The director knows what he likes. The director's wife knows what she likes. All the actors know what they like and you're trying to get a cohesive look that everybody will like. And I just thought, "This is horrible."

Polly Palmer Smith ([20:54](#)):

Eventually I got called. A friend of a friend was working at the Muppets and she was the costume designer and she needed an assistant. And so, she called me. I had done a bit of work for her so she knew me. So, that's why she was hunting me down, because I worked for her and then I went off to Greece for the summer and she said, "Call me when you get back," and I didn't. And so, she tracked me down and said, "Please, please come work for me." She said, "Maybe 10

days a month to handle the overflow of all the stuff I can't cope with." I went in for my first 10 days and left 25 years later. Eventually I became the costume designer.

Polly Palmer Smith ([21:38](#)):

We worked on fabulous projects. The first fabulous thing was... [Calista 00:21:43], the woman who hired me, had a couple young children. They were shooting the Muppet Show in London then and she had been doing it for the first four years, but then her kids had to be put in school and her husband was here, so she couldn't do the final season. I went over and did the final season of the Muppet Show. That's when I first worked closely with Jim Henson. Right after the Muppet Show, he was doing a film called The Dark Crystal, so he just kept me in London to work on that. And he liked me. He kept putting me on one project after another and it just went all through the '80s and into the early '90s. Well, he died in the early '90s. I was with him for 12 years before he died.

Alison Oswald ([22:31](#)):

Do you have a favorite?

Polly Palmer Smith ([22:33](#)):

Thing that I worked on? I certainly do. It was The Dark Crystal. Well, Labyrinth was pretty good, too. But there were all these little pod people and they wore these little ethnic clothes. There were all these creatures in the movie which the designer, Brian Froud, had spent all this time doing all these drawings for them but he hadn't really gotten around to the pod people. They were little potato-headed funny little people. I went to some thrift market in London and I found this... It was like *National Geographic*, but it was a series of books. Somebody had gone around the world and photographed all these people in their ethnic clothes. I photocopied them and I had this whole wall of stuff. I would come in each day and I bought all this ethnic fabric. I dragged fabric back in my suitcase from New York when I was home for Christmas. I would say, "I'm going to do a little oriental front," and I would sew beads on and I would shred it and I would paint. I was having the absolute time of my life.

Polly Palmer Smith ([23:38](#)):

Then they asked me to do the lead character, Jen, which is a totally different costume. Very complicated. I said, "Okay, I'll make it." Then they said, "We need a duplicate for this. We need one for the mechanical Jen. And we need one for a little person. There were 15 of them I had to make. All the while, I wanted to get back to my pod people. There's a picture of me sitting at my desk because they're all hand painted and beaded. I hated it because I wanted to go back and do my little pod people.

Polly Palmer Smith ([24:12](#)):

Then they had an exhibit and it was in the Lincoln Center. It was a Jen costume in a glass case. I hate it. I was walking around, and I finally appreciated it. A lot of work went into it. A lot of work went into 15 of time, but all duplicates. But the pod people were my favorite.

Alison Oswald ([24:38](#)):

What was your most challenging?

Polly Palmer Smith (24:39):

My most challenging... There have been a number, because there's some pretty weird thing. This is [inaudible 00:24:47] I had to make a corset for a sheep dog. Was that Labyrinth? That might've been Labyrinth, not The Dark Crystal. I get them mixed up. But, the dog had to run around with a puppet on its back riding it like a horse, but sheep's dog skin is really lose. It's like this sweater: it's hanging on. Anything we put on there would just go... So, I had to do a lace-up corset for the sheep dog to get him all firm before we could put a saddle on him. And there's been monkeys. I guess live animals have been the most challenging. They're hard.

Alison Oswald (25:28):

When you sketched for the jog bra... Do you sketch now and how do you do that?

Polly Palmer Smith (25:34):

Yes. Actually, I have some stuff here. When I have time, costume sketches for production. The trouble with television a lot of the time is that it's fly by the seat of your pants. There's no time to a beautiful sketch, which I like to do. I did this movie Muppet Treasure Island and it kept getting postponed, so I had time. That's the only movie I got to sketch for the entire film. The reason I have copies of it here is I'm trying to fob them off on the archives here. I wanted to see if anyone was interested. But mostly, a lot of the productions I worked on are really fly by the... really fast sketches, the minimum of what you have to do to convey to whoever going to make it what you need them to make. But I do love sketching.

Polly Palmer Smith (26:38):

Nowadays, I'm doing more embroidered artwork. It's not really sketching. There's always something.

Alison Oswald (26:49):

Can you talk about that more?

Polly Palmer Smith (26:50):

Yeah. Drawing, watercolor, it's like playing the piano. If you don't practice it all the time you're not really as good. It's sad to see that your skill isn't honed up to what you know it could be. I don't have time to go into it. I keep thinking, "I'm going to take a watercolor class."

Polly Palmer Smith (27:11):

So, I've found that I can print on fabric in my inkjet printer. Then a scene of something I like: I just did one for my landlady in Italy where I go to a house and then completely embroider over it so they can't tell that there's anything under there. It's just my template. It's this beautiful scene but it's all embroidered and it's pretty. So, I do that. I do all kinds of things.

Alison Oswald (27:44):

Can you talk about some of them?

Polly Palmer Smith (27:45):

I knit. I do these... I have pictures, but I can't show them here... pillows. It's all the same thing: embroidering over pictures and incorporating it into a pillow. It's not all solid embroidery. I don't know. Yeah.

Alison Oswald (28:11):

One of the things we're interested in is a person's place of invention of where they create. Can you describe your own workshop [crosstalk 00:28:22] and what kind of things are there?

Polly Palmer Smith (28:25):

I live in a one-bedroom New York apartment, so it's my living room becomes my workshop. I bought a dog grooming table because it had legs that you could lift up, but it was still small enough to put in the closet. So, I set that up. That's my worktable. And I have my dress form. In this one-bedroom apartment I have five or six sewing machines because I keep acquiring them. I have endless tools: drawers of scissors, rulers, tape measures, buttons, threads, elastics. Every corner is full of sewing materials. My art materials are more... My sketches I ended up doing mostly pen and ink and colored pencils. I've moved away from the paints because I'm just not that fast with them. It's mostly sewing.

Polly Palmer Smith (29:26):

So, what I do mostly now, because of my career at the Muppets and a lot of my puppeteer friends have gone into business for themselves... So, they'll have little puppet shows: a TV show or something they're doing and they're doing, and they need the clothing and they'll send me the puppets and I set up a little puppet workshop and make their clothing and then ship them out.

Alison Oswald (29:48):

What are some of your current projects?

Polly Palmer Smith (29:48):

What are some of my current ones? The most recent one was Bob's Discount Furniture. You'll see some commercials. I don't know if he's down here but they're on the air in New York all the time. They're based in Connecticut. They have their own in-house commercial company and they've fallen in love with my friend Heather, who is someone I worked with at the Muppets I worked with a lot. We made that. The other thing Heather has done for years is a company called No Strings that does puppet shows for kids in disaster areas around the world. When there was the earthquake in Haiti, there was a puppet show helping them cope with their problems. We did one for Syrian refugee camps. We did one for AIDS in Africa or Ebola. I can't remember. We did a tsunami one. And it's just to help these kids cope and get back on their feet. They'll send puppeteers with the puppets and they have the video that we've done. I've done a lot of that over the years. I don't know how long they've been doing that.

Polly Palmer Smith (31:01):

I still get called to Sesame Street, generally when they get in a bind and somebody has asked for something and they need someone to come do it in a hurry. So, I did that last week. Elmo's dad needed a Hawaiian shirt. Most of the time people say, "What did you make at Sesame Street?" I

trouble is that I go in there and I do it and I never think about it again and I can't remember what I did.

Polly Palmer Smith (31:27):

Oh, earlier this year... I think it's before Christmas... they were honored at the Kennedy Center for something, so I had to make a couple of gowns for the little girl puppets for that event. It's all over the place.

Alison Oswald (31:43):

Can you talk about some of the awards you've won?

Polly Palmer Smith (31:46):

I do have seven Emmy Awards and quite a few that I've lost. I have more nominations than awards. One BAFTA Award (British Academy of Film and Television Arts). That's in Britain. That's fun. Like I said, I don't like getting dressed up, so the only two times I went to the Emmy Awards I lost. So, I figure I'm bad luck. All the others I haven't shown up and I've gotten it. But the best one was the first one, because that was when Jim Henson was still alive and he was nominated for the same thing that I was but I was in the craft nominations which they have on a different night, but because I was going out to LA they said, "You can take Piggy and Kermit and you can go to the Emmys with Jim and Frank and be backstage with Piggy and Kermit," which is so much fun.

Polly Palmer Smith (32:45):

First time in LA and I got to go to Pasadena, where the Emmys were, and I had to get there early because I had to put Piggy and Kermit in place. Then I got to go upstairs overlooking the red carpet and watch the whole thing happen. It was so exciting. I think Ellen DeGeneres was the host. And then I'm backstage. The whole big table of Emmys is there, and I've got my box right here. This is before I'd ever won one. I just wanted to... "Can I just get one into my box?" But I couldn't. It was a fun perspective on the whole thing.

Alison Oswald (33:24):

All of this is going on. You're having this fabulous career. How much contact do you have with Hinda and Lisa back at jog bra?

Polly Palmer Smith (33:34):

Lisa and I have always kept in touch. My family has this Vermont connection as well. We had a summer house in Vermont, so I'd quite often be dropping in in the summer. I would see them at least once or twice a year. But it mostly just Lisa and little of Hinda, because they weren't hanging out together too much outside of work. So, I was aware of everything that was going on. Not envious at all, because it was trade shows... I met some of their coworkers. They're very nice and would go out to some events with them. But yeah, the connection was never lost. But I was out of the country a lot because a lot of my Henson stuff was in London and then LA. So, I was all over the place.

Alison Oswald (34:38):

What advice would you give to young women who are inventing today or maybe setting out on a costume designing path?

Polly Palmer Smith (34:48):

It's hard. I would go for it. I mean why not? Who would think there'd be a career in puppet costumes? Nobody. And it happened. So, anything can happen. If you've got a passion and you love it you should do it. But I think I also came along at a magical time when there was a place for puppet costumes. I don't know how I would've fared if I'd stayed in theater or fashion. I think with the puppets it was the whimsy of the thing that really struck a chord with me and just making funny stuff. I used to jump out of bed and go to work. I was so excited.

Polly Palmer Smith (35:43):

It's so hard to... Can people still find that? I hope they can. But people come to me all the time. They say, "I want to do what you did," and I say, "I can tell you the few people I still know that..." I can still direct them towards Henson, but I don't know if that career is still there. I hope it is.

Alison Oswald (36:11):

Is there anything you want to add or a question you think we haven't asked that you want to talk about?

Polly Palmer Smith (36:18):

I hate...

Alison Oswald (36:18):

It can be anything.

Polly Palmer Smith (36:23):

I know. I'm sorry, yeah. I always draw blanks on questions like that. I should come prepared. No. I just feel blessed to have had the life I had and to have been a small part of the whole sports bra thing was wonderful. But I'm also glad I didn't have to go to sportswear shows and got to go to London instead.

Alison Oswald (37:00):

[inaudible 00:37:00].

Jake Klim (37:01):

Can we have her repeat one thing for us just because we heard a bang in there and talk again like you're speaking with Alison, but tell us again how many Emmys you've won just because we heard a big bang out there as soon as you said that.

Polly Palmer Smith (37:13):

I've won seven Emmys and I have a whole pile of nominations. The ones I won are all for Sesame Street, which is a good... I have to say they were for Sesame Street, not that... What I

sometimes say is an easy category. Yeah. The other ones... the nighttime Emmy Awards... are the two I lost. In the industry those are a bigger deal. But it's very impressive. People come into my apartment and there's this whole shelf of Emmys and they go, "Holy smokes." Now I'm going to put my Inventors Hall of Fame Medal up there. That'll be very impressive.

Jake Klim ([37:56](#)):

Thank you. That was great. We can cut the things together, I just wanted to get that first clean Emmy.

Casey McAdams ([38:00](#)):

I want to get some tone [crosstalk 00:38:05].

Jake Klim ([38:05](#)):

Room tone, yeah. Room tone.

Casey McAdams ([38:05](#)):

This is maybe 15 seconds which is totally silent. Thank you.

Alison Oswald ([38:28](#)):

[inaudible 00:38:28].

Polly Palmer Smith ([38:30](#)):

Thank you. Okay. Thank you.

Casey McAdams ([38:31](#)):

I just want to know. Is Oscar the Grouch really as bad as he seems to work with?

Polly Palmer Smith ([38:38](#)):

Every day. No.

Casey McAdams ([38:42](#)):

Can I get a picture with you?

Polly Palmer Smith ([38:43](#)):

Yeah.

Casey McAdams ([38:44](#)):

All right.

Casey McAdams ([38:45](#)):

[inaudible 00:38:45].

Alison Oswald ([38:45](#)):

You know Kermit is in the collection here?

Polly Palmer Smith (38:48):

Yes.

Casey McAdams (38:56):

Awesome. Did you work on Fraggle Rock?

Polly Palmer Smith (38:58):

Yeah.

Casey McAdams (38:58):

Awesome. Thank you for giving me so much entrainment and so much inspiration growing up.

Polly Palmer Smith (39:06):

I'm so glad. I've been doing interviews about... There's a book being written about Fraggle Rock.

Casey McAdams (39:09):

About time.

Polly Palmer Smith (39:11):

It's been a crazy time in my life.

Casey McAdams (39:14):

Labyrinth too. Wow. That's a big one.

Polly Palmer Smith (39:16):

Labyrinth was good. Labyrinth and The Dark Crystal were probably my favorite. Well, no, because Treasure Island, I loved that too.

Casey McAdams (39:22):

We were just talking about Dark Crystal the other day in the office.

Casey McAdams (39:25):

I mean, my generation... So many of my friends... and with the reboot coming out, we're all geeking out together.

Polly Palmer Smith (39:35):

Good. The thing with the pod people that I was talking about... So much work went into them and I loved them. Then that scene... When I'm making them, I'm thinking they're going to be as big as Volkswagen buses up there. The camera is panning. It's filled with smoke. They're all hopping like this and I'm trying to see all the detail and you just can't see it. And I spent so much time... They have beautiful little booties. I don't know what I was thinking. They're puppets.

Casey McAdams (40:04):

That's the detail. That's the craft.

Polly Palmer Smith (40:09):

I don't know if you saw any of them. But they all ended up in the museum exhibit, so that was pretty exciting.

Casey McAdams (40:14):

Just that attention to detail gets lost now because everybody is like, "Just computer generate it," instead of like practical.

Alison Oswald (40:22):

[inaudible 00:40:22].

Polly Palmer Smith (40:28):

I've been blessed, I feel.

Alison Oswald (40:33):

You've worked on some amazing stuff, from the bra to all the costume work.

Polly Palmer Smith (40:37):

Yeah. That's what I thought I was going to be famous for, not this.

Alison Oswald (40:41):

Well, this is a part of your life. It's a part.