

Kailyn McCord

Transcript #2951

Air Date: December 10th, 1998

Run Time: 17:35

Note: Emphasis indicated in dialogue added by the transcriber.

*Voice Over: Bringing you the before-untold story, in her own words, on this episode of 20/15: Katherine Minola reflects on the Padua Speech, her success with Pet Centers around the country, and what's next for the newly-widowed entrepreneur.*

**Sharon Walters:** Ms. Minola -

**Katherine Minola:** Just Katherine actually. And I haven't been Katherine Minola since before I was married... and I don't think I'll go back. Kate is fine.

**SW:** Of course, Kate. Welcome to 20/15, it's a pleasure to have you. I want to start with a rather obvious, but important, question. You have, for the last thirty years, declined to interview with any major news source, or any news source at all, on any subject. Why now? Why us?

**Katherine:** Well, I enjoy your style, your interview style, and I was a great admirer of your mother. I'm very sorry for your loss.

**SW:** Thank you.

**K:** And, your network gave me editing veto privileges, in my contract [*laughter*]. So that's important.

**SW:** Wouldn't have it any other way.

**K:** [*laughter*]. Exactly. As for the 'why now,' I assume that's more obvious, but with my husband's recent passing, I thought it would be an appropriate time to step up, more formally, into the public eye, as it were.

**SW:** There has been speculation that his passing - and not be indelicate, but - that his passing was what actually *allowed* you to step forward. That previously, he hadn't let you to speak publicly.

**K:** In a way, that's true. Sure. In a way.

**SW:** Can you elaborate?

**K:** Well, like at the Pet Centers - and I'm sure we'll get into more of this later, but - like at the Pet centers, it was his decision, one I disagreed with, yes, when he was alive, for many years. After he passed... I considered for a long time what would honor him, and honor us, best. I think it was hard for me to decide to do it - it was a hard decision, I mean - but with the recent controversies, I tried to imagine what he would have done. And I think he would have at least entertained the idea of speaking up for ourselves. It might not have been me, but there's only me now, so... so it had to be me. I trusted what he had taught me, and what I knew of him - which was a lot! [*laughter*]. Thirty years married to someone is a long time. And I thought, at this time, that it would be the right thing to do.

**SW:** Well, we're glad to have you.

**K:** Thank you.

**SW:** I wonder if you could take us back to the beginning, to what most people would say was the start of your career. The Padua Speech, as it's been called.

**K:** It's funny, I've never much thought of it as a speech. But sure, yes. It was a... It was an early iteration of the beliefs I still hold today.

**SW:** At the time, many saw it as a shift. It's been characterized since as a fairly drastic shift, from the beliefs you held prior to giving the speech.

**K:** It was. And that was mostly Petruchio. My relationship with him, I mean. I was young when I met him, and he taught me a lot, in those first few weeks together. We were married quickly, which I don't regret, although at the time it was... it was something I was... well, I was fairly adamantly against it.

**SW:** What changed your mind?

**K:** He did. Or rather, he showed me that... that I had a choice in how I found my happiness. Up until that point, I had been very... People have used the word "bitchy," although I prefer headstrong, or independent. And those are things I still think are at the core of the who I am. But it was exhausting. I was exhausted, all the time, and it was... such a fight, to be that way, in relationships, romantic or friendships, or even my family. Because a lot of what I believed was contrary to what other people believed, my whole life just felt like this endless fight. Even remembering it now, I get tired! [*laughter*].

**SW:** And it wasn't a fight with Petruchio?

**K:** [*laughter*] Oh no, it was, at first. And then... well, I think it was when I figured out really how tired I was. It was when we were married, and he just... wouldn't go away. That's what a marriage is, really, somebody who is present in most of your life, and who will be there for your whole future, indefinitely. I couldn't run away anymore, and I couldn't take a break. I was constantly fighting, constantly contrary, constantly raging against him.

**SW:** Until the Padua Speech.

**K:** Well, it was actually a little before that. I hit a wall, on the way to the conference in Padua. I hit a wall of exhaustion, and - to be perfectly honest, I think I might have been a little mad. I was pretty sleep deprived, and I wasn't eating. And I just thought "what if I humored him? What if I just... went along with it?" I don't even think the thoughts were that coherent at the time. I think I just... didn't have any more fight in me. I didn't really have any other choice - not because of him, really, not because of anything he did - it just seemed that way, inside myself.

**SW:** And so you did humor him?

**K:** Yeah. Yup, yes, I did. I just... something gave way in me. People have said that I 'gave up,' they use those words a lot, but I think that's wrong. I think I gave *in*, and that I gave in to something I had been waiting to give in to for a long time. And I remember - that night, the first night we got to Padua, the night before the speech - I remember sleeping that night better than I'd ever slept. Like, in my life. Yes, there were things that we did, places we stopped or things he ordered for dinner that I would have chosen differently, had it just been me. But choosing not to fight about it was... it was easier. And happier. *So* much happier. And he really turned around, then, and all the pieces started to fall into place. I saw who he really was, on that trip, and I remember this feeling of... excitement. Of possibility. Of what we could do together, how we could change the world.

**SW:** The ideas for the Pet Centers happened that early on?

**K:** Oh no, no. No, the first time we talked about Pet, or what would become Pet, was much later. About a year later, I think. But the feeling behind it - that feeling of being on a team, of having a leader, and mostly this... this incredible rightness - that feeling was there, instantly. It was such a relief, so comforting. I mean yes, things would be hard - there are hard parts in every relationship - but I knew they never had to be *that* hard again. And I was right. They weren't. It was incredible.

**SW:** A lot of people at Padua were expecting something very different from you.

**K:** I disappointed a lot of people, it's true.

**SW/K:** [*laughter*]

**SW:** Jezebel covered the speech, as did many other feminist outlets. Many characterized you as both a villain and a victim. My favorite quote from that week described you as a "traitor brainwashed by the patriarchy." How would you characterize yourself?

**K:** I find that so interesting. I found it interesting that day, too. I made a choice, for myself, and for my relationship. I tried to **iterate** that choice as best I could. And if that's not what feminism is about, I don't know what is.

**SW:** One of the major criticisms of the speech was the generalizations you made about gender - that it was all women, as opposed to just you as an individual, who should make these kinds of choices. You have not, in the thirty years since the speech, responded to those criticisms. Do you have anything to say to them now?

**K:** I think they were... unnecessarily gendered, yes, I'll give you that. I think my work with the Pet Centers, and the way our literature has changed over the years - I think that's a big reflection on what I would change about what I said.

**SW:** What would you change?

**K:** I would put in a clause, I think. That in most relationships, the way the roles naturally break down is the same way they did for me and Petruchio. But not all. And that's central to the first few weeks of any couple's experience at a Pet center, too. We don't assume what a given couple will choose for themselves, at all. It's very important, for the longevity of the work we do, for it's functionality over time within the relationship, for it to be absolutely, 100% the couple's choice.

**SW:** Recent statistics indicate that 90% of couples who emerge from Pet centers have chosen the male partner as the 'head' or 'lead' of the relationship. Many media outlets have speculated that this is reflective of socially ingrained concepts of gender, as opposed to an independent, individual choice. Do you have anything to say to them?

**K:** I can't tell you where the choices for individual couples come from. But I can tell you that the Programs are very careful about egalitarianism until the couples have made their choice. I assume most of your viewers have read our literature -

**SW:** I think most of the country has read your literature.

**K:** [*laughter*] Yes, well. You can find more details on what we do and how we do it at our website, but basically, in the first few weeks at the Centers, each member of a couple is treated exactly the same. They wear the same clothes, they're treated the same by the staff members, they have the same schedule, everything. We try to strip away anything that might cloud the natural dynamics of their relationship, or anything that might confuse their analyses of the relationship. Really get to the core of how they operate as a couple, independent of gender. And after the two weeks - during which they do almost everything together, from meals to games to counseling to reflective meditative practices - they get to decide who should take the lead, and who should take the follow. And it has to be a joint decision.

**SW:** What do you mean by "has to?"

**K:** I mean we don't allow them to continue unless the decision is mutual, from both parties. If they choose, they can repeat the initial two-week breakdown portion as many times as they like. I've known couples who've done it three, four, five times before they've come to a decision.

**SW:** What happens after the decision is made?

**K:** Well, they're allowed more freedom in what they choose to do, then, what they choose to wear. We try to mirror a more real-world environment, to give the couples a chance to tackle problems that might come up after they leave us, within the new dynamic.

**SW:** And what kind of problems are those?

**K:** Oh, just, everyday things. Like, the follow partner wants to do something different for an evening date than the lead partner. Or the follow partner doesn't want to complete a task that the lead partner has asked them to complete. Dishes, mostly, is what we run into with that one. Dishes and cleaning. *[laughter]*

**SW:** Those would be considered traditionally female duties, by some.

**K:** Sure. But we run into that with what we call 'converse couples' also. It's more a question of learning how to deal with the new philosophies, the new practices, in a general sense, through the specifics of everyday interactions. I like to think of it - and I've used this in talks I've given at the Centers before, so it's no secret... well, no secret to our graduates, anyway - I like to think of it as practice fishing, as opposed to dolling out fish, so that when they do leave us, they have the skills, and have practiced those skills, to be able to deal with whatever might come their way.

**SW:** A recent study of post-Pet Center couples released some interesting data, which you mentioned before as a factor in the decision to do this interview. Can you share your thoughts on the data, or comment on the conclusions analysts have drawn from it? Do you have any conclusions of your own?

**K:** I think it's skewed. Or, I think the sample isn't put into the right context. I'm not a statistician, so I can't tell you how they do these things, but I think it's important not to compare graduates of Pet Centers to average European or American couples. I think it's important to recognize that, often, couples come to us when traditional counseling hasn't worked, or when there's an issue in their relationship that they can't solve on their own, already. Things haven't been easy for these couples, which is why they come to us. I think a more apt comparison would be to look at couples who have been in other kinds of counseling, or who cite major conflict in their relationships. I think that data would be more accurate, and I'd bet... well I'd bet that it would show very different results.

**SW:** One of the most-reported datasets of the study found that 'follow' partners were 40% more likely than 'lead' partners to be on some kind of mood regulator.

**K:** And again, I think those statistics are taken out of context. I think that, it could be said that - yes, I think it could be said that the follow role is, in some ways, more difficult to adjust to, for some people. But I think that adjustment period passes, and I think those statistics need to be studied over time.

**SW:** The survey was conducted over a three year period.

**K:** Yes, and I think for some it's more difficult than others. Sometimes adjustment *can* take years - a decade even. And I think it's shameful to publish a study that... yes, that slanders a program like this, which isn't necessarily intended to work instantaneously. How could it? We're complicated creatures! [*laughter*]. But no, I think it's unfortunate. I think the numbers - and the people who have offered analyses of those numbers - characterize the Pet Program very differently than anyone who's actually been through it. Plus, after they graduate, there is absolutely no reason a couple has to stick with the program if they find that it really, truly doesn't work for them. The bottom line - and it's in our literature, you can read it - is that we want couples to find peace. We want to do some good, and find some healing, especially looking at what has happened to marriage in the last century. And if that's with our program, as it has been for so many couples, then that's wonderful. And if that's not with our program, and something else really does work for those people, then that's wonderful too.

**SW:** Also published in the study - and this is probably the most shocking statistic -

**K:** Yes... the suicide rates.

**SW:** Yes, that graduates of the Pet Program are four times more likely to commit suicide than individuals who have not been through the program, and of the suicides reported of Pet graduates, over 90% of those were 'follow' partners. Do you have a comment on that?

**K:** Again, I think those rates need to be compared with other individuals, or couples, who have been in counseling, who have had the kinds of difficulties that couples usually have when they come to us. And also, let me be clear, there's nothing that dictates that the follow partner has to stay in the relationship. If they choose to stay, there's also nothing that says they're under any obligation continue the Pet Program. We don't make anybody sign a contract. There are no consequences for ending the program early, or dropping it after you graduate. Not even financial.

**SW:** Your programs are tuition free?

**K:** That's right. Completely free. And that's very important to us.

**SW:** Some have argued, based on the power structure of Pet, that 'follow' partners might have a more difficult time leaving an unhappy relationship than -

**K:** Yeah, I've read those articles. And really, I mean, it boils down to individual agency. Never have we advocated for the giving up of individual agency. Every step of the program is about choice - and this comes back around to the feminist critique as well, and what happened with Petruchio. I made a choice - as our members do. I made a choice for peace, and sometimes yes, that choice came at the expense of my own preference. But at the end of the day - really, at the end of the day, to be able to sleep next to my husband in peace, or to be able to walk through life knowing that we wouldn't fight with each other, that there was no... risk of that awful kind of exhaustion - that's a huge, net gain. For me. It's a different kind of gain than, say, always having to have your own way, and sacrificing

the peace in your relationship for that. But they are, at heart, the same balance, just shifted a different way. I happen to think that the way we've shifted it, and way we teach couples to shift it at our centers, is more sustainable. It results in more long-term happiness for partners, despite what results any survey might get.

**SW:** There was another study, published shortly after this one. It surveyed a random selection of couples across the country -

**K:** I believe it was 10,000 or so.

**SW:** Yes, 10,525. Sixty percent of those couples said that they had considered or would consider a Pet Center as a way to deal with 'marital strife.' The most recent figures from your institutions indicates that you've seen almost 30% of American couples to date, and almost 20% of European couples, with 95% of both those groups eventually graduating from the program. What do these numbers mean to you?

**K:** I think they're amazing. And it's comforting, you know, to see that kind of evidence behind something I've always believed in so strongly. I think it means that we really are helping people. It's magical - and little mind-boggling sometimes, really [*laughter*] to think that an idea I had, or an idea that Petruchio helped me get to, an idea we nurtured together, has really reached so many people. And I think we'll continue to do that, to offer our resources to those who need them. I think it's marvelous.

**SW:** Well, Kate, thank you very much for joining us today.

**K:** It's been a pleasure.