

[SLICE OF MIT THEME MUSIC]

ANNOUNCER: You're listening to the Slice of MIT Podcast, a production of the MIT Alumni Association.

JOE This is the MIT Alumni Books Podcast. I'm Joe McGonegal, Director of Alumni Education.

MCGONEGAL: Much of what we take for granted now in terms of gender equality-- the notion that most occupations, except for wet nurse, are gender neutral.

The abundance of research on women in the workforce, women in management studies, and faculties and student bodies with 50% or more women were all being put to the test in the 1960s and 1970s when our guest, Myra Strober, began her career in academia. Strober earned a PhD from MIT in 1969 and is Professor Emerita at the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University and Professor Emerita of Economics at Stanford's Graduate School of Business. The book is *Sharing the Work. What my Family and Career Taught Me About Breaking Through and Holding the Door Open for Others*, published in June 2016 by MIT Press.

Myra Strober, what inspired the occasion for writing this book now?

MYRA STROBER: I have been telling my stories to students for years. And one of the things I noticed as time went on is that they have become more and more wide-eyed over the years. And I realized that students today have not heard stories like this before, unless they happen to be the children of mothers who themselves went through similar experiences. And I thought, I really need to write these stories down so people understand, as you said in your introduction, that what we take for granted today really is the result of struggles over the years by women and men to gain gender equality.

So I started writing. And it took me 10 years to write because I had to stop writing like an academic and start writing like a fiction writer. I took courses on how to do that. And then I thought, OK. Here we go.

MCGONEGAL: One of the best stories for me-- and in the early part of the book-- is pitching the class to the department head on women and work, to have the first class at Berkeley on women and work. Before you were at Stanford, you were at Berkeley. Could you tell that story of coming in to that class on the very first day of it?

STROBER: Yes. I came into the class on women and work after convincing the department that there was enough material on women to actually have a quote, "whole course," unquote. And before I said a word, before I even sat down, the class applauded.

And I had been at MIT with Paul Samuelson and Bob Solow, who were star professors. And nobody ever applauded either of them before they ever said a word on the first day of class. Of course, we all applauded mightily on the last day of class.

But these students were so excited to be in a class on women and work. I felt that I was like Joseph in Egypt, meting out grain to starving people. And one of them said to me, it's just amazing that you were able to get the Economics Department to agree that you would teach a course on women and work.

MCGONEGAL: But also some disappointment from some students in the first couple classes there.

STROBER: Yes, indeed. Because I was what we now call a "liberal feminist." And many of the students in that class were radical feminists. And they were not happy or satisfied with the fact that I was going to have the course be about women and work, and work and family. They wanted to have topics that they thought were more radical. And indeed they are more radical.

Now I had assigned a book by Robin Morgan called *Sisterhood is Powerful*. And several of the-- it was an anthology-- several of the articles in that book were about radical feminism. And I had just not assigned those articles. And students said they particularly wanted to read and discuss those articles.

One was called "SCUM-- the Society for Cutting Up Men." I was horrified when I read the article and then horrified that one of the students wanted that in the syllabus. So I had to learn that even if I were opposed to cutting up men, I had to agree that that belonged in the class. And we had to talk about why I was opposed to that kind of radical change and what kinds of changes I was proposing.

It was very educational for me to teach that first course.

MCGONEGAL: You started the Center for Research on Women at Stanford, which is still going strong. It's been renamed.

STROBER: Yes, yes. It's now the Clayman Institute for Gender Research.

MCGONEGAL: But you joked that you would close it down once sexism is dead.

STROBER: Yes.

MCGONEGAL: It has not closed down.

STROBER: When the center came up for permanent status at Stanford, one of the men who was making the decision told me he was very nervous about having a center like this with no closing date. And would I agree that when these problems were solved that the center should be sunsetted?

And I smiled to myself and said, oh yes, indeed. As soon as the problems are solved, we will sunset the institute.

MCGONEGAL: You came to MIT. It was 7% female in 1969. You cite that Stanford was 2% female when you came in 1972. Today MIT is 22% female faculty. The Sloan Business School is 41% female in its student body. Still work to be done?

STROBER: Yes, still work to be done. It's interesting that medical schools and law schools are now 50% women. But business schools, like the Sloan School and Stanford Graduate School of Business, are not 50%.

I've thought about that a lot. I think part of it is because you can't be a lawyer or a physician without going to law school or business school. But you can be a business person, and indeed a very successful business person, without getting an MBA. And so I think that's part of the reason.

I also think that law school and medical school allow people to apply directly from undergraduate school. And business schools by and large don't. And so by the time women are ready to apply to business school, they are already coming close to their childbearing years.

And I don't know how many of them actually do a serious economic calculation. But they may feel that they have fewer years in which to get their career launched before they have children. Perhaps for some of them, it doesn't seem like such a good investment.

MCGONEGAL: Talk about women in academia in these 50 years. Nowadays, we hear about faculty being wooed to a university with promises of \$1 million packages for salary and benefits, and

graduate students, and so forth. Give us a sense of the starkness of the paycheck for the take-home pay for a young PhD single woman the '60s when you were starting.

STROBER:

I believe that there was not much difference between men's and women's starting salaries. I say in the book that the year that I was on the job market, Bob Solow in the economics department was the faculty member who was shepherding us through the job market process. And I don't think that he would have condoned big salary differences between men and the very few women that were there. And I don't think the salary differences at the beginning were very great.

I also know that that was true for graduates of Stanford's Business School. Because I did a study in 1974, which was the first year that had enough women in the graduating class to do a study comparing women and men. And their starting salaries in 1964 were identical. And just to give you a sense of the numbers, those starting salaries were about \$16,000 per year.

Then I followed up and did a study at the business school four years later. And the difference in salaries was quite pronounced. I believe it was about a 20%. The reasons for that were that some women had taken time out of the labor market. And when they came back, they faced a huge salary penalty. Now I don't know whether that's because of the kinds of jobs they sought, or the kinds of jobs they were offered, or both.

And then also there were no women in the two fields that were the highest paid, real estate development and investment banking. We see this pattern today. Starting salaries for college graduates-- men and women-- are very similar, particularly if you hold constant their field. But once 4, 5, 6 years elapse, then you begin to see large salary differentials.

MCGONEGAL:

You didn't give an introductory lecture in your job interview at Stanford. But shortly thereafter you did. And this is a climactic moment in the book, you could say, where you're encouraged not to pursue research, essentially, and publish on child care, and the effects of women's earnings on their families.

You write, "I think to myself, you people are not pay me enough to sell my soul. I'm not going to be able to do research on the questions I care about. I'm going to go get a better-paying job. I'll work for Wells Fargo or Bank of America." It definitely required some courageous terrain for you at moments of your life, no?

STROBER:

Yes. And I look back on those moments and I think, what was it that motivated me to be so

persistent? And I think that I was so fired up about doing research on child care and also on what I call "occupational segregation"-- why men seem to monopolize the high-paying jobs and women were left with the other jobs-- that I was willing to take whatever risks I needed to take in order to do that research.

And I didn't really care that I might be penalized for doing that research. Because I felt that if I were penalized, then my MIT PhD would stand me in good stead. And I would go find a job in a corporation that paid me more than double what Stanford was paying me.

MCGONEGAL: Nick Kristof, after Hillary Clinton's acceptance of the Democratic nomination last week, wrote a headline. The headline was, "When Women Win, Men Win, Too". That the spending on child care, and on health care, and so forth-- Congress has traditionally approved those measures once women got the right to vote, and then once women were in Congress, and so forth.

STROBER: Well, I think that it is true what Nick Kristof says. I see the men in my class now. I'm still teaching at the business school at Stanford, one course a year on work and family. And I now have 40% of my students are men.

And I see those men and compare them to the men I knew when I first started teaching at the business school. And these men have a much fuller life. They are excited about becoming active fathers. Not tomorrow, but eventually.

They're excited about marrying women who also will have demanding careers. I think many of them remember their own childhoods where their father was virtually absent because he was working so hard. And they don't want to be those kinds of dads.

The challenge for this election year is to allow men to be partners with women in these enormous social changes that are taking place. And I think Hillary Clinton's proposals for reforming the child care system and paying child care workers good wages so that we can get people into that field who know how to take care of children and raise the quality in childcare. That's going to benefit everybody-- men, women, children.

I think that having men benefit from a world where they are not the sole breadwinners, where they share that burden with their wives, assuming they're married or in single-parent families where women are assured that they can provide for that family.

That benefits everybody. Because of course, a lot of the children that single women are raising are boys. So we don't have this strange divide where only girls and women are going to

benefit from that.

MCGONEGAL: You write towards the end of the book, "the gender revolution has stalled." And one can imagine the stalling continuing.

STROBER: We are stalled. But at the same time, I think we are poised to take off again. And so I hope we do because there would be so much benefit from having a world where children are well cared for while their parents are working. And their intellectual growth is taken care of. And their emotional growth is taken care of. And at the same time, parents are able to pursue careers and make contributions in the workplace.

MCGONEGAL: Issue a call to action to MIT alumni, your fellow alumni to rethink their positions on women and work.

STROBER: In the evaluations of my class, year after year, some of the men say that the most important part of my class for them was their realization that if they're already married, or when they become married, that they shouldn't allow their wives to make decisions about leaving the labor force by themselves, that those decisions really are family decisions, and that men have a role to play in encouraging their wives and others they know to stay in the workforce and to help them to do that by sharing the work at home.

I'm delighted that my book is called *Sharing the Work*. And that figuring out together how to make it possible to have two careers so that their wives are not-- I say wives but also sisters and friends-- are not in the position of basically allowing the human capital that they've appreciated over the years to now languish.

So my call to MIT men is to discuss this with the women in your life. Talk about how you might help them to both raise children and remain in the workforce. And to the women my call is, do it. Figure out how to do it. It can be done.

MCGONEGAL: Tell me what else you're reading right now.

STROBER: I'm reading *All the Light We Cannot See*. Yes. I thought that was an extraordinary book from the point of view both of the woman and the man, and France and Germany, and setting it all in World War II.

And as I say, I'm contemplating writing a novel. And that was an inspiration to me. And I'm reading some poetry to become inspired. And I just finished a 1974 book by a journalist called

Breast Cancer. Because I think there's going to be something about breast cancer in my novel.

MCGONEGAL: Myra Strober's new book is *Sharing the Work. What My Family and Career Taught Me About Breaking Through and Holding the Door Open for Others*. You can find it in your favorite local bookstore or online. Myra Strober, thanks for joining me.

STROBER: You're welcome.

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