

Chatterbox #95 – Interviewing Pamela

Transcript

Maura: Hello everyone! This is Maura. And today I'm here with my good friend Pamela. Say hi.

Pam: Hi!

Maura: Now, don't forget to go to our website, Culips.com—that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com—because there you can find all of our past episodes. On our website, you can also become a member. And when you're a Culips member, you also have access to the transcripts, more detailed explanations, and quizzes for every episode. If you're on Facebook, you can come on over and say hi to Harp and me too.

Now, today's episode is a Chatterbox episode and that is where we get to chat. Harp and I chat about all different kinds of topics and sometimes we interview people. You might have already noticed that Harp doesn't seem to be here. It's just me. And the reason for that is I'm going to interview **my dear friend** Pam. Say hi again.

Pam: Hi.

Maura: So first I'll start by introducing Pam a little bit. Right now, she's currently doing **a master's** in Media Studies at **Concordia University** in Montreal and she's also a teaching assistant there in some language courses. She likes hiking and the outdoors, like me, so often we go camping in the summer together. Another thing is that she's from Montreal. We interview a lot of people and they're very rarely actually from the city, so I thought I would start by asking you, Pam, why are you still here? What do you like about this city?

- Pam: Well, that's a great question. Especially being back in school now and having the pleasure of meeting people from all around the world, really, and thinking about possibly continuing my studies after this year and where I might go for that. And, so yeah, I guess it's just been a time where I've been reflecting on that too. Where I want to be, why I've actually even stuck around here for another degree. But I think, for me, it remains a really charming city to live in. Umm... I think also because it's a very vibrant student city. You have four, five universities. Uh, people coming and going all the time. It's very dynamic. Um, so I love that. I love the cultural events in this city. It's fantastic for festivals and people talk about Montreal in the summer being very different from Montreal in the winter. And I mean, of course, the weather accounts for a lot of that but just the festival season throughout the summer is just, um, a great attraction for people from all over the place. That's a lot of fun. And I like biking in the city and it's a good kind of place **to bike year round**, even if there's a lot of snow. **If the streets are clean, you can still bike**. And so there are a lot of fun things to do here.
- Maura: That is definitely one thing about Montreal. People love it. The people who live here, most of the time, really love the city and all the things that it has to offer. So, you're from Montreal, you spent most of your childhood here, but at a certain age, your family moved to another country.
- Pam: Yeah. When I was six years old, my father had a contract in Saudi Arabia. And originally, it was only supposed to be for two years. And I was six years old, and so I started school in Saudi Arabia. I went to kindergarten there. And I have one younger brother and one older sister, so my younger brother also started school there. And I think after two years, things were still exciting for my family. Things were going good there so we stayed on for another year and then another year after that. So I did the first four years of my studies in Saudi Arabia and it was at an American Embassy and there were kids from all around the world.
- Maura: And what do you remember from that time? I know it was a long time ago now, but what are some of the things that you remember as being different or foreign to you, even at a really young age? Can you remember anything?
- Pam: Well, to think back, some memories that I have from Saudi Arabia, keeping in mind that they are childhood memories... I was there from six to ten, so maybe the things I am still fond of in my mind now would probably be different if I went back. But one of the things I remember being very different was **the flora**—the trees and plants—because it's a desert region, so there certainly isn't the same kind of vegetation that we have here in Canada. But one thing that was very prevalent around **the compound** that we were living in was date trees, which are very, very tall trees, very abundant trees, where you could just go every day and pick dates up off the ground.

- Maura: Wow! **That does sound really cool.** I don't think I have ever seen a date tree. They **musta** been really good directly from the tree.
- Pam: They were. We get dates here in Canada, but of course they're shipped from elsewhere, so I'm sure they had a better taste—being able to eat them fresh like that—than eating them two weeks after they were picked from the trees.
- Maura: Mmhmm.
- Pam: And another thing I remember, we did a lot of sports when we were kids. I think because we were living in **a compound**, which is a kind of a closed community, maybe 20 or 30 houses encircled by a very high wall and so we would see a lot of other kids at school every day during the week, but otherwise, just to keep busy, we did a lot of sports. So we did a lot of swimming and playing **squash**. And I remember even doing a lot of running, even though it was very, very hot.
- Maura: Hmm. It sounds so interesting and I think it's such an amazing experience to go live in another culture in another country at a young age. I think it **leaves an impression on you** for sure.
- Pam: I think it did. It was a very, very stimulating experience.
- Maura: So it was only when you came back from Saudi Arabia that you started to learn French, because in the province of Quebec, where we are, it's mostly Francophone. So when you came back, that's when you started to learn French, right?
- Pam: That's right. Unfortunately, we didn't have French courses in Saudi Arabia. It was an American academy so the language of instruction was English. But we did take Arabic lessons and I think I still remember how to sing the national anthem. But I won't do that for you today.
- Maura: Aw. Too bad. What **a tease**.
- Pam: I started learning French in French immersion at an English school in Canada. I think it's a good way to learn, gradually, but perhaps ideally would be in a French school, because when we would go out and play at recess and talk to our friends, then inevitably we would end up speaking English. So it was a good way to start to learn but I think I really only became more proficient when I had to use it, when I had to practice it outside of school, when I started working.

- Maura: That I think is a common story as well, that we really start to use a language more and feel comfortable when we're forced to, when we don't have a choice. Because sometimes if we know we don't have to use it, especially when we're kids, we can get kind of lazy with it. Now I also know that you spent some time trying to learn German. How did you find that, especially compared to French? Did you find it easy or more difficult?
- Pam: Well, to comment on what you just said about the ease with which we learn a language when we want to versus when we have to, this is very true. I guess the difference between learning French as a kid and maybe wanting to go more with something that was easy, like continuing to speak English amongst my friends, was when I started to learn German a few years ago as an adult, I had a few friends who were from Germany and it was exciting to be able to practice with them. And then learn that there's quite a large German community in Montreal and they organize different cultural events. So you can go and see a movie at the Goethe Institute and then go after for a conversation. And what I realized learning a new language as an adult is that it's a very humbling experience, because you start right at the basics. You start to count, you learn the days of the week, you learn very simple sentences and it can be frustrating because once you're able to do that, then you want to be able to converse more and it's difficult not being able to express what it is you want to express and have a more complicated conversation with someone.
- Maura: I think what you said is definitely true, that when you learn another language as an adult, it's very humbling. Because often, you sound, like, a bit crazy, maybe, like you don't know how to speak and you can't express yourself very well. So it really is a humbling experience. Now, another thing I wanted to ask you about was going back to school. Because I know that you went to school, you were working for a little bit, and then you decided to go back. So what made you decide that you wanted to go to university a little bit later in life?
- Pam: Well, I was working full time when I decided to go back to school. And there were a few reasons for that. I wanted to explore different options for work, I wanted to challenge myself in a new way, and I was curious about subjects that I hadn't had the opportunity to learn much about in the past. So when I first went back to school, I registered at the university as an independent student, and I was able to take courses in many different disciplines, which is what I ended up doing. I took courses in geography and music and communication studies. And I was trying to find something that I would be happy with studying full time. And now I just find it continues to be a very stimulating experience, getting to meet people from all over the world, people who are really engaged in the research that they're doing. And you can learn a lot from the people around you.

- Maura: Yeah. I would agree with you again, that going back to school later is a really interesting experience because you can find what you're looking for. You can take these courses that you're really just interested in discussing. So now that you're doing your **master's**, often people have to do a thesis or they do a major project. Can you tell us a little bit about what you're working on at school?
- Pam: Yeah. In my program—in Media Studies—it's in the Communications Department. And we're very fortunate in this department to have a very creative option. Rather than doing a traditional written thesis, we can also do a project. We can produce a sound work or a video piece or even build a website. And so for my project, I'm doing a research creation. And as my methodology, the way I go about researching my subject is through oral history, which is a kind of research technique that uses interviews. So I'm looking at the history of feminist pedagogy at the **Simone de Beauvoir Institute** at **Concordia University**. And because they were the first program offering Women's Studies in Canada, in 1978, when they began, it was very experimental. And over the years it has changed a lot. But I was really interested in finding out about what people's experiences were in the classroom at that time when the program was first instituted.
- Maura: That's interesting, because we're doing an interview right now and we're talking a little bit about your own history and what has happened to you in your life. So it really is an exciting way to get different perspectives on things that have happened in this world.
- Pam: I think it's a way to get a very unique perspective and we sometimes have the idea that we are very individual and that we have a certain perspective on a situation. And then when we start to talk about our experiences with others, we may find these differences present and we may find very important parallels. And that's what I find the most fascinating about this project, is to get that kind of shared, collective memory of an experience.
- Maura: So I'm gonna ask you one more question today and that is, from your experience learning French and learning German, do you have any advice on learning a second language? Or maybe something that worked for you that you liked?

- Pam: Well, for me, I think what helps the most is when it's fun. And so when I started to learn French outside of school, when I started working and having to use French in the workplace, where I found I started to improve most was when I started to form friendships with Francophone coworkers. And this became very interesting, to start to have conversations with people outside of work about subjects that we were interested in. And so I think what's important when you're learning a new language is that it's fun and there are always gonna be challenges to learning anything new, and aspects that we don't find so fun, or that it's just more difficult. But as much as possible, if you can find somebody, for example, who speaks the language, that you get along, with that could be a good opportunity to practice and have fun while you're doing it.
- Maura: Hey! I know a fun way to learn English. Listen to podcasts, especially this one! All right, so, I want to thank you so much for letting us interview you today and I hope that you listening out there enjoyed learning about my friend Pam and a little bit more about what life in Montreal is like for some people. Now, I'm going to remind you again, as we usually do, to go to our website, Culips.com. That's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. And when you become a member, remember, you help support us as Culips, which allows us to keep making these episodes for you. So, we will talk to you again soon and next time Harp will be back with me. I'll talk to you soon. Bye!
- Pam: Bye!

Detailed Explanation

My dear friend

To describe something or someone as **dear** means that it is something or someone that you love or like and is special to you. Someone or something that is **dear** is highly valuable to you, which could refer to its price, but more likely means that you have a special connection to it.

The word **dear** can be used in a few different ways. As in the phrase **my dear friend**, you can use this word to talk about a person, as in **dear Sarah** or **your dear grandmother**. But you can also describe an object as **dear**, for example, you could say, "This necklace is very **dear** to me."

Using **dear** as an adjective is not as common nowadays among younger people. This is an expression used more often by elderly people. You are most likely to hear **dear** when one person is introducing another, like in this episode when Maura introduces her friend Pam.

Here's one more example with **dear**:

Lana: My **dear** Uncle John is coming to visit this weekend. He's such a kind man.

Walter: Yeah, he's great. I remember meeting him before. Have a nice visit.

A master's (degree)

A couple of times during this episode, Maura and Pam talk about Pam doing **a master's**. This is a short way to say that someone is working on **a master's degree** at a university. Obtaining **a master's degree** usually takes 1 or 2 years of study, typically done after completing a bachelor's degree.

When writing about academic degrees in general, the words **master's**, **bachelor's**, and **doctorate** should not be written with a capital letter. But these words are often written with a capital letter when speaking about a specific degree. For example, Pam will receive **a Master's Degree** in Media Studies from Concordia University. But many English speakers don't know or can't tell the difference, and so you will likely see these words capitalized and not capitalized without following the rule. Native English speakers also sometimes forget to use an apostrophe before the s, like **masters**, but this is not correct.

Winter biking

In this episode, Pam mentions **biking in Montreal all year round**, even when there is snow on the roads. This is not a very common practice in Montreal, or in Canada in general, but there are some people, like Pam, who continue **to bike during the winter**. Most people who do this take extra time to prepare their bikes, especially by using special tires. People who **bike during the winter** also need to maintain their bikes carefully, because salt and slush can cause damage to bikes.

Flora

The flora of an area is all the plant life that grows there. In this episode, after Pam uses the word **flora**, she clarifies that she's talking about the trees and plants of the desert in Saudi Arabia. Since Saudi Arabia and Canada have such different climates, their **floras** are completely different.

Similarly, the word *fauna* refers to all of the animals that are present in an area. These words are often used together. **The flora** and fauna in Saudi Arabia are much different than what we have in Canada!

A compound

The word **compound** has many definitions and many different uses, but for now we'll just focus on the way it's used in this episode. Pam actually explains quite well what **a compound** is. It is a building or a group of buildings, normally where people live, that are surrounded by a wall or some kind of barrier. In this episode, Pam talks about **a compound** that houses a group of people who were not originally from the country where **the compound** was located.

In Pam's case, she was living in Saudi Arabia, which is not where her family is originally from. The people living in **a compound** often have similarities, like language or culture. In Pam's case, the people living in her **compound** were all native English speakers.

Compounds of this sort exist in many countries around the world. One reason that **compounds** exist is to create safe or comfortable spaces for people who live in a country that is dangerous or very different from the country they are from. Many international politicians and diplomats live in **compounds** with their families. That way, they can continue the kind of life that they might have had in their home countries.

Squash

Squash is a lesser-known sport that Pam mentions in this episode. **Squash** is a fast-paced game with two or four players, who use rackets to bounce a ball against a wall. The game was originally called *squash racquets* and the word **squash** refers to the ball, which flattens (gets **squashed**) when hit and then reshapes itself.

The verb **to squash** means to crush or flatten, just like the ball gets flattened in the sport **squash**.

Another kind of **squash** is the one we eat! Popular **squashes** include pumpkin and zucchini. It's always funny when we have one word for different things that seem completely unrelated!

That does sound really cool

In English, we sometimes use the verb **to do** just to emphasize a statement. For example, in this episode, Maura says, “**That does sound really cool.**” She could have said, “That sounds really cool,” but instead she adds **does** for emphasis.

Pam talks about the date trees in Saudi Arabia right before Maura says how cool that sounds. Pam says it was nice to pick up fresh dates all the time, and Maura shows her agreement with Pam by using **does** to emphasize her statement.

Here’s another example using the verb **to do** just to emphasize agreement:

Sheena: I love going to eat at Bernie’s restaurant. Their burgers are great.

Justin: They **do** have the best burgers.

In this case, Justin is agreeing with Sheena that he also loves the burgers at Bernie’s restaurant. In cases like this, you do not have to use **to do**. Justin could have simply said, “They have the best burgers,” and the meaning would have been the same.

Musta

Here’s some slang that comes up in our episodes from time to time and that comes up in everyday conversation a lot! When speaking English casually, we often change the pronunciation of verbs that have the word *have* as an auxiliary verb with a conditional, like *must have*.

In this episode, Maura says “must have been,” but because she is speaking naturally and quickly, it ends up sounding more like **musta been**.

Here is a list of some other examples of this phenomenon:

- Should have >> shoulda
- Would have >> woulda
- Could have >> coulda
- Might have >> mighta

Because these are examples of changed pronunciation that happens when speaking, it is usually not acceptable to write these words out like they sound, but in some very casual written exchanges (and sometimes in Culips transcripts!) you might see them written this way.

To leave an impression on someone

When something or someone **leaves an impression on you**, it means that it affects you in some way. It could affect you by changing your perception or by influencing the kind of person you become. For example, a person can **leave an impression on you** by influencing you to change your life in some way.

In this episode, Pam talks about when her family lived in Saudi Arabia. Maura says that this must have **left an impression on Pam**. This means that living in Saudi Arabia as a young girl must have influenced Pam and may have changed her in some way.

Here are a couple more examples with **to leave an impression on someone**:

Ryan: Wow. The movie I saw last night really **left an impression on me**. I want to start travelling the world.

Joel: You should do it then!

Kenneth: Did that talk you went to yesterday **leave any kind of impression on you**?

Oscar: Not really. I think it could have been done better. The speaker didn't seem very enthusiastic.

You might also hear **to make an impression on someone** and this has the same meaning.

You can also physically leave an impression on something. For example, you could leave an impression of your hand in wet cement. When you remove your hand, the impression of your hand is still there and has permanently changed the look of the cement.

A tease

The word **tease** has many different meanings and uses. In this episode, Maura uses the term **a tease** to mean a person who seems to offer something good or interesting, but then refuses to actually provide it. Pam says that she can sing the Saudi Arabian national anthem, which Maura thinks would be really interesting, but Pam is not willing to actually do it, so Maura calls her **a tease**, saying "What **a tease**!"

Here's example with **a tease**:

Jack: Do you want to go out for dinner on Saturday? We can try that new place on the corner.

Alice: Yeah, definitely! I'm looking forward to it.

Jack: Oh, wait. I forgot that I have to meet my friend from out of town that night.

Alice: You're such **a tease**! Next time check your schedule before you ask me to dinner!

Concordia University and the Simone de Beauvoir Institute

Concordia University is one of the English-language universities in Montreal. **The Simone de Beauvoir Institute** is a college within **Concordia University**. **The Simone de Beauvoir Institute** is for students who are studying feminism and women's studies. The institute was established in 1978 and continues to promote courses related to the study of women.

Quiz**1. Which of the following does not make sense?**

- a) my dear mother
- b) my dear friend
- c) my dear enemy
- d) my dear Mary

2. What is a master's degree?

- a) a college diploma
- b) a university degree usually completed after a bachelor's degree
- c) a university degree usually completed before a bachelor's degree
- d) a university degree usually completed after a doctorate

3. What is flora?

- a) all the plants native to a certain area
- b) all the animals native to a certain area
- c) trees that grow in Saudi Arabia
- d) animals that live in Saudi Arabia

4. What is a compound?

- a) an apartment building
- b) a neighbourhood in a foreign country
- c) a group of residences surrounded by a high wall
- d) a group of residences outside of a high wall

5. What kind of equipment do you need to play squash?

- a) a stick and a puck
- b) a helmet and a ball
- c) a ball and a racket
- d) a racket and a birdie

6. Jerry: My friend Selena is so much fun. She has so much energy, is always up for going out, and tells the funniest jokes.
Paul: She _____ sound like fun.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) really
 - b) does
 - c) is
 - d) doesn't
7. When *must have* is said quickly by native English speakers, what does it often sound like?
- a) mustard
 - b) muhave
 - c) must had
 - d) musta
8. If an experience left an impression on Tamara, what does this mean?
- a) Tamara didn't like the experience.
 - b) Tamara was changed by the experience.
 - c) Tamara was too young to remember the experience.
 - d) Tamara enjoyed the experience.
9. Which of the following is NOT an example of a tease?
- a) Tyler offers you a piece of cake that you wanted but then eats it himself instead.
 - b) You believe you got into a certain university, but then find out it was a mistake.
 - c) You are invited on a fun road trip, but then learn that there is no more room for you in the car.
 - d) Craig offers to bake you a cake and then gives it to you on your birthday.

Answers:

1.c 2.b 3.a 4.c 5.c 6.b 7.d 8.b 9.d