K. Elizabeth Stevens: Is your work important to your sense of, you know to your values in the world, to your sense of living a worthwhile life?

Kara Peterman: Right. I graduated college with a deep sense of, I really felt the weight of the things I'd been given. I had been given a college education, I had been given the opportunity to attend and graduate from Swarthmore. I had been given a lot of things and I began to feel even guilty because of it, if I'm being honest. How best do I make use of these things I have been given? How best do I make use of this life that I've had? It occurred to me that one of the best ways to give back is to use your education for something that helps the community, use your education for good, use it for everyone. Even this was a revelation for a 21 year old graduate. It's not too deep thinking here but as I thought about my own career choice of civil engineering and I thought about my desire to use my education to help others, I thought about what was inherent in civil engineering or structural engineering, which is my specific field, that made me want to help others.

Up until that point, I hadn't really thought about why I wanted to be a structural engineering, I had some touchstone moments that inspired me to do things that made me interested in the field but ultimately, it's about providing basic infrastructure. People need food, water, and shelter. Shelter is basic infrastructure. We need roads, we need roofs over our heads to protect us from the elements, we need work places, we need communal places. Working in a field that provided those and not only simply provided them but now that I'm a researcher and now that I'm in the academia, or in the academy I should say, how do we make our structures more equitable? How do we make sure that a structure stands up the same whether you're rich or your poor? That at this point is extremely, it's what keeps the fires lit in terms of my own passion. Just working towards the best possible building codes that we can generate, working towards the equitable distribution of safe structures, making sure that a community in the Ozarks, versus a community in New York City, versus a community in northern Virginia, or Florida, or any of these places, that they're all built to the same standard of safety.