

Interviewee: Annette Dudek
Interviewee: Katie Clark
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Abstract: Annette Dudek was born in Worcester, MA in 1981. She attended Catholic schools, graduated from St. Joseph's College with a degree in Sociology, and is currently completing her master's degree in Social Work at Boston College. In this interview, she discusses her Polish upbringing and the culture's influence on her life as well as growing up in her neighborhood. She also talks about her love of working with the elderly and how she tries to balance her personal and professional life. Annette's role model is her grandmother who came to the United States from Poland to start a new life and had to learn a new language and culture. Today, Annette helps the family care for her grandmother who suffers from dementia.

KC: Is it ok that I'm recording this interview?

AD: sure.

KC: Okay, thank you. What is your full name?

AD: Annette Jane Dudek

KC: Beautiful!

AD: Thank You! (laughs)

KC: And where were you born?

AD: In Worcester MA

KC: Ok, have you lived her all your life?

AD: Mhm

KC: Do you have any children

AD: I do not

KC: Umm do you have any type of culture you identify your self with?

AD: Yeah I do, I am 2nd generation Polish, so I'm 100% Polish, so growing up my parents instilled a lot of tradition in our family, so I um, recognize myself as being ya know Polish.

KC: Do you feel that that's really influenced you life, outside of family traditions like in other realms of your life, in everything you do?

AD: I think it has a strong influence like for example for my work experience I was a bilingual case manager so I was able to communicate with a lot of Polish people in to Worcester area, and in meeting other Polish people outside my family and in my friends circle I seem to always be talking about it as a specific part of who I am, so I think it has a influence outside of this family defiantly.

KC: That's cool, Have you ever been married?

AD: No I have not, I'm still looking for Mr. Right.

KC: Ooh, any potential Mr. Rights?

AD: Not at the moment, no. (laughs)

KC: Um alright, would you mind telling me a little bit about your parents?

AD: Sure, my mom is 1 of 8 children and she came to America actually on a boat with her parents and all her siblings, she was a teenager, and my dad came to America in his 20's also from Poland, and I describe both of them as very hard working, ya know they had to overcome a lot of cultural barriers, not knowing the language when they first came to America, so for them and any family that comes form outside the US I have a lot of respect 'cause it take a lot to leave your country and come. So yeah they are both different in their own ways but yeah its been interesting listening to different stories back from Poland and kinda see who they are, yeah its interesting.

KC: And you said you've always lived in Worcester, what was your neighborhood like if you had to describe it.

AD: My neighborhood growing up, it was full of a lot of neighborhood kids, I remember going to each other's houses to play, kind of the neighborhood parents looked out for each other and I felt it was very safe, and at the time it was very, not a lot of diversity, it was a lot of Polish people, and yeah just a lot of Polish people and American too but at the time when I was younger it was fine. But I remember being very safe, and there were a lot of kids my age to play with.

KC: Do you feel your neighborhood as you've grown up has changed in any ways. Like the dynamics of the people who live there or the surroundings at all has it changed or is it the same neighborhood?

AD: I think it's changed a lot in a couple ways, One I don't really feel like I know who the neighbors are any more, people aren't as friendly and kids aren't playing like they used to, people don't know each other close, and also its more diverse, its not just Polish culture , there are a lot of different nationalities, which is good, I think that's a good thing, but unfortunately, I feel like there is more, I may not have noticed cause I was younger, but there is more violence, I still feel safe cause its my neighborhood, but I know its not like it used to be in that aspect.

KC: Right, Do you have a lot of family members in this area in Worcester that you stay in touch with?

AD: I do I , growing up my grandparents lived across they street from me, and so that was really nice to be able to have that close contact, 'cause I was close with both of them, and my grandmother is the only one who is living, my grandfather passed away, so she's close by, and I have a aunt I am close with and a uncle who used to live in the neighborhood so there are always family members around.

KC: So Worcester has always been a big part of you life since you have always lived here?

AD: It is mhm, yup definitely.

KC: And do you like living here?

AD: I do, I, a lot of my friends that are not from Worcester poke fun at it like "oh my gosh can't believe you live in Worcester ya know I think it has a negative view I think when you first come to the city, but I like it and I appreciate all the diversity and the different things it has to offer that not being from Worcester people may not really know about.

KC: Right, umm, if you had to pick you favorite thing about Worcester what would it be?

AD: Umm I'd have to say the diverse population of the people, because through different festivals and different church groups you see I think no matter what nationality or back round you're from, there is something you can learn from, so I'd say just diversity of the people that live here.

KC: What schools have you attended in Worcester?

AD: Actually from kindergarten through 12th grade I went to one school, St Mary's Elementary School and it continued through high school and I enjoyed it but a lot of people say oh you went to the same school for 13 years, but it's a very small school, its Polish, its run by the parish Our Lady of Czestochowa, I give you the spelling later for that (laughs)

KC: (laughs) Ok

AD: Yeah so, it was a Catholic private school so I had to wear uniforms and it's right in the neighborhood so I stayed in Worcester right till I graduated high school.

KC: And then after that?

AD: I went to school after that at a school in Maine, St Josephs College and it's about 2.5 hrs away from Worcester so it wasn't too bad it was far enough to try something new.

KC: Did that have a large impact on you, going away from your family and to a new school for the first time in 13 years.

AD: Slightly , but I think I was more excited to get away and try something new, and it wasn't really too far, but I liked it a lot and really enjoyed it, one thing I noticed when I first got there was a lot of people seemed similar, there wasn't a lot of diversity, so that was one of the things I first noticed and I missed but it was an easy transition I enjoyed it, and it was close enough so I think it was something I needed to do.

KC: And you graduated from there?

AD: Mhm

KC: And did you choose higher education or go in to the work force, do you want to address those separately?

AD: Sure, I graduated with a degree in sociology, which I enjoyed but I wasn't sure what I wanted to do with it as far as careers go, so following school graduation I got accepted to a program called Mercy Corp, it is a program for a year, and I got positioned in Philadelphia working with the homeless population doing outreach work, and it was supposed to be a year program but I was only there about two months, not that I didn't like it, but it wasn't the right fit for me , so that was an eye opening experience and I enjoyed it, and then I came back to the Worcester area and I was working in several different social services, to get in to the field of what I wanted to do, so I did that probably for a couple years 'cause I stayed at a job called Elder Services in Worcester where I was a bilingual case manager, and I stayed for about three years and after that I decided to pursue my degree in social work and I'm currently getting my masters in social work through Boston College, so now I'm working and doing that.

KC: Ah, so do you have a plan as to when you complete the program and what you'd like to do after that?

AD: Mhm, it's a 3 year program and I went part time so I'm actually graduating in may.

KC: Congratulations!

AD: Thank you! So I'm excited, I don't, I still don't know, my concentration is with older adults and families, I really love the elderly population, but I'm not sure which avenue I'll take with it just because I'm a little nervous with the job market right now, but I'll definitely work with elders I'm just not sure what exactly I'll be doing.

KC: Um, so how important and influential is your work in your day to day life?

AD: Work is very important, because I feel like no matter what field people are in, you spend a lot of time at work, more so than with your family and friends. So I feel it's very important to pick something you're passionate about and that you enjoy, but I always think it's important to have a balance and not have work kind of overtake everything. It can be difficult -- for me work is probably 75%, it's a big chunk of what I'm doing -- but I think its important to find a balance.

KC: and you described your parents as hard workers, which obviously shaped you, how much did work play a role in childhood, like were there certain chores or jobs you had to do in the house or neighborhood? What was it like doing work as a child?

AD: I as far as house goes I think we always had chores it was expected to help we never got paid, I know some kids get paid, we never got that, but at a young age, my family, my aunt and uncle owned a business an insurance company so I was able to work kind of under the table to help out when I was at a very young age, I think it was like filing and doing little odds and ends, but I started working when I was like 13, and I enjoyed it be cause I went to a office and I took it serious because it was my family's business, and something that I in high school I worked through to help pay for bills and try to be independent with that, and I tried to take it serious, like as you said with my parents, I kinda grew up with it being very important, so with any job I have I try to give it by best and not take it for granted.

KC: How many siblings do you have?

AD: I have an older brother and a younger sister.

KC: What was it like with work at home, were there age or gender differences with chores at home?

AD: Yeah, I think there were a couple differences with my brother and I, kinda stereotypical roles that the boys supposed to do yard work and the girls were expected to do cooking the cleaning of washing the dishes, which I know when I got old enough it got me upset, I was like if I have to do the dishes he has to do it, I don't believe in gender roles at all. And then my sister who is 5 years younger than me, she I think 'cause she was the baby, I love her dearly, but she didn't have I think as many chores because she was the younger one, but ya know I didn't have so many chores that it wasn't a big complaint for me I felt like I helped my mom with my younger sister 'cause I was excited to have a younger sibling that was kinda just happened it wasn't like a chore.

KC: So was it kind of understood, like a certain sense of responsibility?

AD: Yeah I would say so, because she would, she was always very, not clingy but I was her older sister so we were always together, so I wasn't really able to go out with my, when you young, your friends, so I didn't go to sleep-overs because she wanted to spend time with me.

KC: What was your role among the three of you?

AD: People joke about the middle child syndrome, sometime I think it's applicable for some people but for me I never felt alone or neglected. My brother was the responsible one and got good grades and helped me with my home work. I dunno I wasn't a trouble maker, I was kind of responsible and a caretaker for my younger sister, while my parents were working so that would probably be it.

KC: So that really carried over to what you do with work?

AD: Huh mhm yeh I didn't realize it -- that's true. (laughs)

KC: How do you balance your personal and professional life? Do you ever give one up for the other?

AD: I think most recently with my going back to school and having to take on a full class load and still work part time and have an internship I guess what compromised is just the my social aspect of hanging out with my friends and family and relaxing and just social aspect 'cause I don't really have time to, so hanging out with my friends and family is important particularly with my grandmother who is going to be 90 soon, I used to be bale to hang out with her more and I think as an adult in school I'm not able to give as much attention, so that's maybe what's compromised as a result of school.

KC: Right, Um do you consider yourself to be politically active?

AD: I think my role as a social worker especially going back to school has taught me the importance to be more active, but I wouldn't say I'm very active, I think I could use more improvement, with the recent election, it had a more personal effect on me 'cause of social services and my job and things like that so I think it sparked my interest more but in the past I really wasn't.

KC: Were you politically involved on a local level?

AD: I would say it fairly new, I never was involved -- to be honest politics never stuck my interest but a lot of times I don't trust what different people running you know are saying, but yeah with my schooling and with one of my part times jobs we talk a lot about voting and its importance and topics of educating kids and it played a more important role but before that it did not.

KC: Do you appreciate the fact you have a say and a vote, do you think it's more of a right or a privilege? Is it something you should automatically have or do you feel that it's should be earned? Like how woman fought for the vote and right to be a citizen...

AD: That's an interesting question because I can see myself responding to both, being a right and a privilege. I think everybody should be entitled to a voice and be able to voice their opinion and if you're passionate about a topic and you want to pursue it to be able to have that right, but at the same time it's a, 'cause it's a tricky one, I see it kinda as a privilege 'cause like you said there have been so many movements with women and in many other aspects of it, so I would say a little bit of both.

KC: Have you had any type of community involvement or volunteer work?

AD: Yeah, volunteer work, is actually referring to a question you asked earlier, about stuff I wanted to do, volunteer work would be one of them, 'cause I was always involved in high school and then in college I was very involved with different opportunities that came up, one of the biggest ones was for spring break, Work Feast when I was freshman as an undergrad in Maine, we went to Kentucky to help rebuild homes for people who didn't have money, were poor, that was one of the best experiences of my life, working with people, so I've had several different opportunities to volunteer, but with school and the past three years I haven't been able to do any.

KC: You went to all Catholic schools elementary – college, so what's the role of spirituality in your life today? If you don't mind talking about that.

AD: My undergraduate at St. Joes, I didn't choose it because it was Catholic, I just happened to really like it and it was Catholic but I didn't go searching for a Catholic school, so it was nice, yeah I would say for me in college I had a really good pastor and I went to church every Sunday and I really enjoyed it and my faith increased because of him he kinda helped it where in high school I was involved with the church and I went to church but I don't think I enjoyed it or appreciated it as much as I do now um so I think it's defiantly a part of my faith, it just increased as I got older.

KC: So it was something you were supposed to do and transformed into something you wanted to do.

AD: Yeah yeah, with my parents, they were very strict with going to church and following different traditions, so we had no choice but in college I did really want to.

KC: Do you or family members have health issues which have affected your life?

AD: Personally fortunately I don't have any major health conditions in myself, which I'm thankful for, but people in my family, I mentioned my grandmother she has dementia she's had the past five years, and I've helped care for her and organize the family to help care for her, to give my aunt a break, so I guess her condition affects me on a personal level because it kinda affects you know to see someone you love go downhill. And I've had a couple of uncles who had heart conditions and one who was pretty sick, a couple of my mom's siblings who I was close to so just kinda being there for her and my family, has been tough at times, but nothing that you know can't pull through

KC: Is the one you most involved with is your grandmother?

AD: Yes

K C: Is it a day to day thing?

AD: Well you knew it varies, there are good days and bad days, so when I see her on bad days its difficult, and she's fortunately still with us so I witness it, but my,one of my uncles who was diagnosed with cancer passed away recently, so that was a big ya know it was a bad experience but it helped me advocate and more active raising money to fight cancer and promote awareness so I guess those two would be the biggest ones.

KC: Do you feel your relationship changed with your grandmother due to the disease, in comparison to what it was like as a child?

AD: Um yeah as a child I don't know if I mentioned, but she didn't speak, her English was very limited so her and my grandfather played the front role in teaching me Polish and like I learned from them, she was very talkative and liked having people over she was very welcoming and liked having company and yeah was a sweet talkative and felt love when you were a little kid, and then growing up with her disease for the past five years she, she's not talkative and she doesn't show compassion when people come over and things like that, so its really sad 'cause you see once was a women who was full of life wanted to ask you questions and this and that. You know sometimes she doesn't know you are in the room and is very flat in terms of affect. It's hard but in a way it's sad 'cause you get used to it like this is how Babcia is, but ya know it sucks....physically she's pretty with it but mentally, its sad 'cause who knows she could live ten more years in this stage but the quality of life is not good.

KC: In your opinion, do feel that adding her story to history is very important? And that we really need to work at, do think that if it's gonna happen it'll happen?

AD: Yeah I think its very important , to have your assignment, this project is very interesting, and influential for women in Worcester and all over to hear stories. I think everyone has a story to share and is unique and people can learn from it I think it's great and it's an on going thing.

KC: Do you think it's been properly portrayed or has there been misinterpretations and to what it was like for women now and through history- in history book and the media or is there a lack of reality?

AD: I think one of the things that's lacking is just the lack of not awareness, but I think the kids in school, the younger, like how it was back then and how it is now, and it's important to talk about improvements but I think it' gone a long way and you see a lot of influential women figures you know who are good role models for young women, but there is always something new can work on and improve on, and maybe it's not depicted as actually as it should be so I think its just kind of trying to increase awareness somehow would be beneficial

KC: I like what you said about role models. Do you feel you personally have had a lot of positive role models?

AD: Yeah I think so. I think at the time you don't really realize it, but you get a little older and look back but I would say I was fortunate to have good role models and kind of look forward to accomplish different things through family and friends.

KC: Is there anyone you'd like to speak about or do you generally feel you have multiple good role models?

AD: One that comes to mind is my grandmother when she first came to America, coming on a boat, and giving up her life, and selling everything, 'cause they lived on a farm with all the kids, so she was a real role model for me because for anybody to come from any country and start your life over with your kids is remarkable. It made me think, if she did it and all my aunts went to school and accomplished jobs what makes me think I can't do it. I would say she was a big one

KC: As an adolescent what were things that stood out for you on a day to day basic, like girly things like dating, make up, were there gender roles that influenced you? What was adolescence like for you?

AD: I think I guess because my school was small it was a comfortable environment so I don't think I experienced a lot of similar things as a public school with more kids either peer pressure. For me 'cause it was so small I didn't think I really had to worry about fitting in. We wore uniforms there was not a competitive level like most people to me material stuff wasn't important so I think having positive friends and role models and involved parents like mine, when I looked back I realize they helped me. By no fault of parents, but today people are so busy and come from different structures that that supervision and supervision lacks, so adolescents turn to other things and don't know what to do. It's not a weird age but there are a lot of different things going on. I think my small school and structure I wasn't overwhelmed with anything in particular.

KC: Where your parents strict? Where issues talked about, where there said /unsaid rules? Where there expectations?

AD: Yeah I think there were a lot of expectations that you went to school obviously you worked hard to get good grades and if you can get a job to help pay for different things, and at the time I didn't think that every body did that I wasn't into partying or smoking or anything like that I kinda just my parents expected me not to do it so I didn't, but comparing it to my friends, different family structures some come from single families this and that which was fine but yeah I think they just had high expectations, so I followed through but they definitely didn't, in comparison with others it slipped my mind what I meant to say was other friends their parents were more open to talk about things that went on, but with my family which I think had to do with Polish culture we kept problems with the family. You didn't talk about that with other people, keep it with the family. You know its different everyone has different challenges but still you keep things within circle-family

KC: Um and did you feel there were conflicting traditions and expectations from being in American culture but being raised by Polish parents?

AD: I think because of my mom 'cause she came at such a young age, when she was a teenager that she was kinda, we kinda celebrated both, but I think a lot of the values with going to church as a tradition that had strong influence because that's kinda just what you did, but I would, they were, I would say they were pretty open they weren't very like opposed to trying different things I think because my mom was in the country longer, but we, one big thing which was so minor but they didn't really believe in sleeping over friends' house, you can hang out during the day but don't sleep over, and so that was a little challenge because I couldn't sleep over any ones house, when everyone else did, so I don't know if that was more of a personal thing for the more cultural, but why sleep over someone else's house when you have your own.

KC: Did you feel by identifying yourself as Polish have you or your family ever experienced or witnessed any type of discrimination?

AD: I think I definitely think, like even though I went to a Polish school not everybody was obviously you know Polish. But I you know over time a lot of people have made Polish jokes you know for any culture or nationality you know people can target anything and make a joke out of it so a lot of people make Polish jokes, but I never really took it personal, I try not to let it bother me and one thing people say, that a lot of Polish men are alcoholics, I've heard that a couple times, like oh yeah all Polish like to drink, and so I would take a little not offense to that but kinda just correct them like how can you, out of any culture of nationality say anything about that, but you don't think I was ever personally discriminated just heard people make jokes but I try not to let it get to me.

KC: Considering Worcester is such a diverse city. Have you seen a time of discrimination or prejudice in action that impacted you or stood out to you, because you seem very open minded about things, do you remember seeing things or now see things that you've seen where you thought that was wrong, because its so diverse and there is a place for everyone there can me clashes by no ones fault, but have you ever witnessed discrimination here?

AD: I'm trying to think and look back but I can't really think of anything specifically but I agree yeah it's a very diverse city and it offers a lot but I think people among different groups still kinda have that depending on personal or family influences but kinda have that mentality that maybe my nationality is higher than or superior or this or that or maybe not welcome to come, but personally I cant think of a um particular incident other than growing up maybe some uncles or my grandmother at the time maybe made comments about other races or nationalities and now I think it was a little stereotypical but nothing that mean, but it think things have changed over time like my grandmother before she has dementia would say you need to marry a Polish guy -- keep it in the family,. And I'd be like, Babcia what about like, if I say shed be like ahhh, but over time she'd say as long as he treats you good but I dunno if it's her saying that or the dementia.

KC: So it's like a wish your family may have but it's not like back in the day where you must marry a Polish man.

AD: Yeah right, its more open, and a lot of my aunts and my cousins have married non Polish men that's why I think its for the older generations, like my aunts and uncles are getting more comfortable with it too

KC: Right, so then you don't feel pressure to being a friend or significant other home who wasn't Polish?

AD: Yeah no I don't I think as long as I'm comfortable with it and you know they treat me right, have respect, I think my family would respect my decision and be open minded, but I'm sure there were some family members who wont be thrilled depending on who I brought home, but I look at it as I'm an adult and it's my choice my decisions and if they can't support me the, yeah but I think the people who are closest to me would so I'm not worried.

KC: Because you so busy with work or school do you have hobbies or leisure activities you'd like to do?

AD: I love volunteering but I don't get to do, I'm pretty easy going and flexible with what I like. I could stay home and read or watch movies, or go out and hang out with family and friends and spend time, yeah just kinda I haven't had time to think about what I like doing but when its warmer I like going to the beach and I've been trying to exercise more and take some out for myself and stay active, and dancing I love dancing weather it's at home or out with friends or family.

KC: Is there any type of music you prefer for dancing or listening?

AD: I'm open to, my interest in music is pretty wide. I love to polka I'm not that great at it but I love it its very fast very high energy dancing which I'm sure you know, but I like a whole bunch of stuff and going to different concerts or if they have festivals from various things I like to go and check it out.

KC: Not to ask a pessimistic question but do you have any regrets about the choices you have made through your life, I mean in my opinion I think you made great choices but do you feel you regret anything?

AD: Thank you! I think every one has something they wish they did different but whether it was in your personal life with relation ships or with your actions but I think I don't really think I have any regrets because I think even if it's a bad experience that you, I try to look at it as a learning process or a learning experience, and sometimes you may not know why it happened or why you did it, but I try to look at it as what did I learn from this, so I don't really think there is anything I regret right now

KC: Yeah I agree with that. Obviously because you're very educated, what kind of education did your parents have and do you think it influenced you to go on to higher education?

AD: My both my parents, the highest level of education was just high school so I think my dad graduated and went into the army but not for education so I think that they influenced because if they could they would have gone on more but given the circumstances and at the time they weren't able to and a lot of people graduated high school and that was fine. So just wanting to better myself and kind of pursue my wishes definitely my parents influenced it -- they were always for higher education and financial aide and you know my dad always said that your education no one can take that away from you, and I agree with that, yeah education is important to me

KC: At this point is there anything else you'd like to talk about or add on that you think is important to your life?

AD: (laughs) I know I wonder... I think just in general, my sister teases me sometimes like how come you always so positive and happy and this and that and no one is perfect like I tell them, I'm not always happy and positive but I just think that for me I'm very thankful for what I have in my life and I try to take, it sounds corny, but I try to live each day to the fullest, 'cause you never know what will happen, so whatever it's with your personal life or school or with work, I just think: never know what will happen tomorrow.... (tape cut off)

Word List

Our Lady of Czestochowa

Bozena Dudek

Babcia (grandmother in Polish)

Dementia

Mercy Corp

Philadelphia