

Interviewee: Mary Jane McKenna
Interviewers: Andrew Whitmore and Mark Thomas
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Abstract: Mary Jane McKenna was born in Worcester and currently lives in Holden with her husband. A graduate of Worcester's Classical High School, Mary Jane regrets not having the opportunity to go to college as a result of financial hardship. Deciding against a career as a nurse, she took courses at the Salter Secretarial School and began her career doing administrative work for a local insurance company. After working nights as a secretary for various local boards, Mary Jane became the first woman elected to the Board of Selectmen in the Town of Holden. Throughout this interview, Mary Jane reflects upon her successes, influences, and regrets with a wry and witty sense of humor. She focuses much of her discussion on her many years working in politics at the local, state, and federal level. She discusses her experiences working with Governor Dukakis and Governor Bill Weld, and shares stories of international travel as both a State Representative and the Executive Director of the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism. Looking back very fondly on the joys of her accomplished career, Mary Jane discusses her difficulty transitioning into retirement in 2002. She also briefly touches upon her participation in the Worcester Institute for Senior Education (W.I.S.E.) program and her current activities with other Worcester-area organizations.

AW: We are completing a citywide oral history of the lives of Worcester women aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences. Based on the goals of the 1850 National Women's Rights convention in Worcester, we are focusing on the areas of women's education health, work, and politics, community involvement. We want to focus today on your experiences with education and the W.I.S.E program. Thank you for your help with this important project. Now we just ask for your permission for us to record your oral history and submit it to the Worcester Women's Association.

MJ: Permission granted.

AW: Alright, thank you.

MT: Thank you.

MT: We would like to start with your full name and, if applicable, your married name.

MJ: Mary Jane, two words, first name, not middle. My name was ... , and now it's McKenna.

MT: Ok. Where were you born?

MJ: I was born in Worcester.

MT: You were born in Worcester?

MJ: I was born in Worcester.

MT: Have you lived here your whole life?

MJ: I have.

MT: Wow.

MJ: [laughter] I have.

MT: Oh, very nice.

AW: You like the city?

MJ: No.

AW/MT: No? [laughter]

MJ: Actually, I don't. [laughter]

MT: You have managed to live here your whole life without liking it?

MJ: Well, I mean I like where I live in Holden now and I like what my life has been, but as far as, if I were to choose a city, I don't think it would be Worcester. [laughter] I don't think Worcester has kept up with the way it should have, but that's ok.

AW: So do you think that Worcester was better years ago and it's gone amiss?

MJ: Of course, of course.

AW: It was a lot better? Yeah.

MJ: Yeah, it was. Well, when we had downtown, you know. It was—we didn't realize how nice it was, but it was very nice. And, you know, there were all stores all down Main Street, and there people were on the sidewalks all the time; you run into people you knew all the time. And then they built the Worcester Center, and it just changed the atmosphere of the city, and nothing seemed to... take off. You know, everything has been—the Worcester Common was changed. And then it became the Outlets. And now it's all going to be torn down and they're going to put Front Street back the way it used to be. Back when things were good. You know, it's just—I'd say Worcester takes one step forward and two back.

AW/MT: Yeah.

MJ: Unfortunately, and, you know, I really think it's a shame with all the colleges that we have in the city, that there hasn't been a better job done with the Consortium, to get, you know, the students more integrated with one another. You know, like Harvard Square. I mean, I know that's a smaller area but it seems like we missed a big opportunity there.

MT: I can understand that being a college student.

MJ: Mmm... Yeah.

MT: It's kind of hard to interact.

MJ: It is.

MT: Do you know when the Worcester Center was constructed?

MJ: Yeah...

MT: Just a general time period.

MJ: Um... I think it was in the seventies.

MT: Oh, ok.

MJ: Yeah... Early seventies.

AW: Was there any debate about constructing it or... Was it a unanimous—everybody wanted it, and then regretted it latter?

MJ: I think so, I think so. I wasn't as attuned in to, you know, what was going on, but I think it was pretty well accepted, and... Nobody realized that it was going to mean, going to mean a demise of Main Street. I think they thought that that would still survive, and it didn't. The major stores just went kaput. So, the Civic Center, which is now the DCU Center, that was very controversial, people didn't want that, and it finally prevailed, and I think actually it was one of the better things that have happened in the city. There's been a lot of good things that have happened, but it's coming along.

MT: Two steps forward one step back.

MJ: That's right [laughter]. Maybe you're going to get one and a half steps back pretty soon [laughter].

MT: So you liked, you enjoyed your childhood here you think it was a good place to be raised?

MJ: Yeah, yeah, it was, as far as, you know, you don't know any better.

AW/MT: Yeah. [laughter]

MJ: What's the alternative? Hit me; here I am. But, yes, no it was fine. I had... yeah good childhood, good as anybody's, I guess.

MT: Your close family, could you tell us something about them?

MJ: Um... My original family?

MT: Your immediate family, your...

AW: Did you have any siblings or...?

MJ: Yeah, I was one of five. And I was the youngest, and... They all lived—some of them stayed around here and then others moved away. How many... three—two are dead, and there's three of us left so. We take our vitamins every day. [laughter]

AW: So how was it growing up with four other, five other siblings, right?

MJ: Four other siblings. Well, there was a big age—there was a lot of age differences. My sister was actually 18 years older than I was, but we were very close, and, so there was a much bigger span in years, we weren't boom boom boom. And um... So it was very good, very good. Three brothers and a sister. It was great, couldn't have asked for anything better.

MT: Who of the siblings would you say, influenced you the most? Doesn't have to be strictly one, but...

MJ: Yeah... they all did in different ways. Each one had a role in it, in one way or another. My father died when I was seven. And so my mother, she was kind of into herself and not as interested in other things. So, I really relied on my siblings for a lot and so they all contributed to steering me and keeping me on the right side of the tracks.

MT: Mmm... Did that seem like it was a big burden then for your older siblings to care for the younger ones.

MJ: No, no, no, no. I was very self-sufficient.

AW: Did you go to school with any of your siblings?

MJ: No, no. They were in my—the nearest one was five years older than me, so...

AW: Oh, ok. So they were already out of high school by the time you got in.

MJ: Yeah, Yeah.

AW: How was the school system?

MJ: School system was excellent. I, I went to a high school called Classical, and it is now, it been turned over to superintendents offices. It's an old, old building. And it was equivalent to almost college today; it was very advanced. It was everybody from the West Side of Worcester, you know this Salisbury Street area. And for the most part, and it was—education was very much stressed there and it was an excellent, excellent education there, very, very good. Not at all like some of it is today. [laughter]

MT: Do you think most of that has died down? Or has it been more focused on the colleges rather than the earlier education?

MJ: I don't know there's—I don't know. There's a lot wrong everywhere in education. But I'm not an educator, so I guess I'd better not comment on what my opinions are. [laughter]

MT: Well, you can express any opinions.

MJ: Ok.

MT: Since our focus is mainly on education.

MJ: Ok. Well, my sister, was a nurse, so I decided I was going to be a nurse, and I prepared all through high school taking all the sciences. And I went through all the tests and I was accepted at a local hospital. And I was supposed to go in in August, was the start. In July, I got a, the rules and regulations, and uniforms, and all sorts of other stuff, and I said I don't want to be a nurse; I don't want to be a nurse. And so... At that point it was too late to get into a college. And so I wrote a letter of regret to the hospital, due to cir—I remember the letter—due to circumstances beyond my control, I will be unable to attend the blah, blah, blah. And I ended up going to, what was then called Salters Secretarial School in Worcester. And I went there because a friend of mine was going there, and I said, that's good, you know, I can—I'll go there until I figure out what I want to do. And, it was a very good school and, 'cause I didn't know how to type or do any of that stuff but I took to it quite well. And, I graduated top of my class, and I took the first job that was offered with two men in the insurance business—they had their own little business. They were Pension and Gupe Insurance Experts, and they hired me, and... I think they influenced me as much as anybody. They were just the most wonderful men, and they taught me a philosophy that I held for the rest of my life, which was, "You do everything a little bit better, a little bit nicer than the next guy, and you will succeed." And I carried that, you know, we did it in the office, you know, with—we're doing a proposal we made it really nice, you know, that type of thing. I mean that was back before all these fancy machines, you know. I mean, we're running things off on copiers. And, and so I think that carried me, that philosophy carried me every place I went after that. And really, I've talked to students and explained that to them in the past, that it, you know, you just do—it doesn't mean you have to get A pluses, but you try to do everything to the best of your ability and a little bit better than the next guy, and be attentive to people. You know, if somebody says, "Will you get me a glass of water?" You don't say "Yeah, yeah, yeah," you jump up and get the glass of water or you say, "You want the water now?" You know, you tend to people, you serve them, and it comes back in very good ways.

So that was, that was a big thing. And then I got married, and I stopped working and I had three children. And then I started working again.

MT: Wow. How long had you worked for those two men?

MJ: About three years, and, and then I—they used to call me back to work part-time, that type of thing, but they were terrific. One of them lived in Guilford, moved to Guilford incidentally, in fact. Yup. And uh, the other one had a place up there too, just—no, Wolfborough, Wolfborough.

MT: Oh, Wolfborough.

MJ: So anyway, then I went back to work for the town of Holden. I had—I don't know is this where you wanted me to go? Is this what you wanted me to say?

AW: Sure.

MT: Wherever you want.

MJ: Ok, I went to—I was involved in a lot of the things in the town with the kids and church, you know, all sorts of things, community activities. And I got a call one day from a fellow who was on the planning board in Holden. And they needed a part-time secretary, and would I be interested, in doing it? Well, met—I went to, I mean it was twice a month. I went an evening meeting, took the minutes, did all the poopedoop work that had to be done and it worked out fine. And I—oh, and then I would do everything at home, during the day at my own pleasure. And it worked out fine, my husband was at home with the kids at night, and so I did that, and from there I worked for I think six or eight different boards in the town. They, you know, kept calling me to work for different runs, so I did a lot of them and I really enjoyed it and found that I enjoyed town politics and what was going on, and met a lot of wonderful people. And then I decided I knew as much as anybody. So I ran for the Board of Selectmen for the town of Holden, and I was elected, and I served—and I was the first woman.

AW/MT: Wow.

MJ: And I served for six years—two three-year terms. And that was a wonderful experience; I was Chairman of the Board one year and, um, it was a five-member board and we have a full-time town manager so he does the bulk of the grinding day-to-day work, but we were his Board of Directors basically.

AW: Right.

MJ: So I did that for six years, and then I got a call one day from a fellow who was our State Representative. His name was Jim Harrington and he was a friend and he said that he was going to be resigning his seat and he decided that I was the one to succeed him. And I said, “Oh!”

AW/MT: [laughter]

MJ: “Me? Ha. I don’t know anything about that.” “Yeah, yeah, yeah, you can win” So I said hey, what have I got to lose, right? So I said okay. So I ran and I had—I was a Republican and it was a very Republican district. Actually I didn’t even know what I was; I had to go up to Town Hall and to find out what I was registered as.

AW: Oh, really?

MJ: Yeah.

AW/MT: [laughter]

MJ: And I was registered independent and I was able to switch over to Republican and I ran; I had a Democrat and an independent that I ran against and I clobbered them.

AW: Wow.

MT: [laughter]

MJ: And I had, um, s...I think it was seven towns that I represented, now only in towns that you haven’t heard of: Holden, Rutland, Princeton, Hubbardston...um...how do you forget so quickly?... Petersham...Westminster, Phillipston and Athol—there were nine.

AW: Uh-huh.

MJ: It went north. It was like 45 minutes from Holden to Athol. There were people who were serving the legislature who could walk through their district in 45 minutes; I could just about drive it in 45 minutes.

AW/MT: [laughter]

MJ: It was a great, it was a wonderful district, and I served in the legislature for five full terms, and never had opposition after that. They wouldn’t dare.

AW/MT: [laughter]

MJ: And, um, and then I was elected for the sixth term, and one of my friends in the legislature had just been elected to Congress—Peter Blute—and he was the first time a Republican had been elected in Massachusetts as a Congressman in eons and, um, he was a good friend. And he...I was on his transition team, you know, when they put all the people together and we were trying to find a district director ‘cause he was having three offices in his Congressional District, which went all the way from, um, Holden all the way down to Swansea, um, Fall River...Fall River and Swansea, Attleboro.

AW: Oh yeah.

MJ: Talk about gerrymandering.

AW: [laughter]

MJ: And, um, one day he walked up to me in the chamber and he says, “I’d found my district director.” And I said “Oh great! Who’d you get?” And he said, “You,” I said “Huh?”

AW/MT: [laughter]

MJ: I said, “Uh, why not?” So I resigned my seat and I ran his offices for, uh, from ninety-three until ninety...five, something like that. Two and a half years, there were three years. And it was a good experience learning Federal Government... And then he had been reelected, and I was kinda bored ‘cause I had done all the big work that had to be done.

MT: Yeah.

MJ: And, um [clears throat] uh, Governor—we had Governor Bill Weld at the time and, um, so I went to him and told him I wanted to get back into State Government because I had pensioned things, you know, like when I was with the Federal Government there was no...the pension was different. I was under social security and I’d never be able to collect from it. So he appointed me to the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism as their Executive Director. And I served there for seven years, and it was the best job I ever had...in my life, it was marvelous.

AW: Uh-huh.

MJ: And I retired in two-oh-oh-two because at the time they were offering a five year credit on your pension, giving you five more years.

MT: Uh-huh.

MJ: And there was a new Governor coming in and I didn’t know, you know, will they keep me? Will he not? Or she, whatever it was, and so it would be stupid not to take it. I mean, if I hadn’t and somebody had come in and said, you know, [clicking sound] “You’re gone kid” then I would have lost those five years. So reluctantly I retired in nine, in uh, two-oh-oh-two and that’s the story of my life.

AW: Wow.

MT/MJ: [laughter]

MJ: A lot of it is the right place at the right time. I never planned one thing.

AW: Wow, that’s convenient, wow.

MJ: I never said, “Oh, this is the path I wanna go,” never. It just happened, but I...I go back to those two men that I worked for and I think the philosophy that they set me into helped me all

the way along because I was able to achieve in each one of those menial little jobs that I had—do things better and better. So it paid off.

MT: Hmm, wow.

MJ: That's it.

AW/MT: [laughter]

MJ: There ain't no more.

MT: Um...why would you say your last job, uh, was the most successful? Or the best?

MJ: Well, I mean I loved everything I did, actually. I sold real estate in between there, too. Um...when the interest rates were seventeen and a half percent that was a little tough. But that was under Jimmy Carter. [laughter] No, this...that was difficult. But anyway, it was fun. [clears throat] I loved the legislature. That was...I mean it was a phenomenal experience being there where everything was happening. I served under Dukakis and Weld, and it was really, really good. I still have a lot of friends from it—being a Republican isn't the easiest thing in Boston. You don't—there was one bill...somebody had asked me to file a bill that had to do with having cats vaccinated.

AW: Uh-huh.

MJ: And it was—he was a vet and he thought it was important that all cats—'cause there was a lot of feline stuff happening and...[clears throat] so I, I did. I filed this bill and th...the gal who was chairman of the committee that it was going through was—it was called Counties, the...Committee on Counties—um...called me up and she said, "This is a very good bill, but I want my name on it." I said, "Fine, put your name on it; I don't care." I mean, the people who asked me to do it knew I had done it, but she wanted *her* name and she controlled the committee.

MT: [laughter]

MJ: I mean that...that's a small little example of how tough it was to, you know, stay...afloat in that so dominant...um...Democrat—and it, it would be the same vice versa, you know. There should be a better balance, absolutely should be a better balance. I mean, somebody's gotta be the majority and somebody's gotta be the minority but the way it is in Massachusetts right now is *not* good. It really isn't.

MT: No, it's not.

AW: Uh-huh.

MJ: It really isn't...and the Democrats will tell you the same thing, too. I mean, you know, it's...it's...it's a joke. But I, I did, I loved it. I served, I became the Assistant Minority Leader and...it, it was a great experience. But the Mass Office of Travel and Tourism I ran my own

show. I had thirty people who worked for me; I had a 14 million dollar budget that I controlled; I traveled...all over the place. It was, I'd never—if you think the people in legislature are good, you should see the people in the hospitality industry. They're *really* nice.

AW/MT: [laughter]

MJ: [clears throat] And I had just the most wonder—and they, it wasn't without its pressures and its, you know, trials and tribulations, and all that, but it was wonderful and I still have a *lot* of friends from that, too. So, it's been good.

MT: Um, how would you compare your experiences with the town legislature versus the federal government?

MJ: Oh, the town was a piece of cake.

MT: Oh, really?

All: [laughter]

MJ: Things have gotten...nastier in town government now. I, I watch our Board on television and it's disgusting; it wasn't like that then.

MT: Oh, really?

MJ: We had a five-member board and it was very, very compatible and we didn't always agree on everything but we were civil about how we handled our differences of opinions. Now they battle and I blame television. They all get their, you know, little hour there where they can, you know, pander to that TV audience.

MT: Mhmm.

MJ: And they, they just look like jerks most of the time. I didn't have that at all, it was really very, very nice. We accomplished a great deal [clears throat], and we had the strong Town Manager government, which is good. But at the same time, what they have now, even though it's strong Town Manager, it's, it's very confrontational, and I don't like it.

AW: So it seems that everyone's putting on a show now that their behind a camera.

MJ: Yes, exactly, exactly. And the Worcester City Council is even worse. I mean they're just, you know, blah blah big shots 'cause they have the TV camera. We didn't have TV cameras, thank heavens back then. When I left there in eighty... eighty-two, eighty-one, eighty-two, something like that, and we hadn't televised [clears throat] the Selectmen's meetings... so.

MT: Was there a lot of that confrontation, um, between parties?

MJ: No, you mean the legislature? No there really wasn't confrontation. I mean, the Republicans were the extreme minority, and so we were, we were always on the offense, you know, we were attacking all the time, we were—you probably don't remember but under Mike Dukakis who... Nice guy, I know him he's... very nice guy. He was planning to run for President and [clears throat], he spent the state into jus... almost bankruptcy, because this was his way of building up constituencies. And it was really, really, really bad. By the time he left we were almost bankrupt. And Bill Weld came in and he did a phenomenal job. He was a, he was the best Governor I've ever known. He—I traveled with him too. We went, not alone but, um, we went to France and Germany on a trade mission once; it was wonderful.

AW: Wow.

MJ: But he, you know, he put the state back in order. And it's been pretty good since then—we have ups and downs. But under the Dukakis days it was, it was really bad. Nice man, but it's sort of like his focus was elsewhere, like Romney is today, you know, his focus is elsewhere. He's running for president too; they all run for president.

All: [laughter]

MJ: They're not gonna get elected.

All: [laughter]

AW: On the topic of presidents did you have a favorite one, throughout your life? Only that you thought did a much better job than the others.

MJ: Um, I liked Ronald Reagan.

AW/MT: Mmm.

MJ: I think he's the best that, you know I mean. I, you know, there were others there that I wasn't paying a lot of attention to, but—and I must say I loved J. F. K. I loved him; I just thought he was the best thing since sliced bread.

AW/MT: [laughter]

MJ: He is—he brought in a whole new wonderful Camelot type of [clears throat] atmosphere and his wife was beautiful, and his children were adorable, and I trusted him. I thought he really knew what he was doing. And I can remember going through the Cuban Crisis—you heard about that. I mean, we were ready to be, to go to a bad war, and, I mean, it was really bad. And I just said, I know he can pull us through. I don't think he was a, you know, I don't think he was great president now, but he wasn't there long enough to really—I remember when he died, ooh God, that was awful; it was horrible. And I do say, I would say that Ronald Reagan was the best President in his eight years. And, the year I ran, the legislature was 1982, and that was his mid-term election, just like this was, you know, Bush's mid-term election. And he lost all the Republican seats. It was the same thing, you know, this is not an unusual situation that happened,

you know. They all say, “oh, wow this is big time stuff.” No, it, you know, it happens all the time in the mid-term time when times are not the best. And it happened with Reagan, too, but I’m not saying anything on Bush but um, yeah, Ronald Reagan.

All: [laughter]

MT: And your education for the schools you went to before you worked with those two gentleman, and also the tutoring you probably received from those two gentleman, how, how has that helped your career, do you think?

MJ: Well, Classical High School was, you know, really worked with your brain so that you did very, you know, you, you had good training in that department. It was not an easy school at all. It was predominantly Jewish, and Jewish, for the most part, are very, very studious people. And I mean, their, their parents really made them work, so no matter how hard you tried you could never, I could never catch up to them. But I did well, and it was a very, very good school, and then the Salters just trained me in the things that ended up, you know, I mean I didn’t know.

MT: [laughter]

MJ: And it just, you know, it gave me the skills that brought me to the different places that ultimately brought me to wonderful opportunities that most people in this world never even have. So it’s, it’s sort of like a fairy tale type of thing. You know, do I wish I had gone to college? Absolutely, but my mother didn’t have any money, and, you know, they didn’t have scholarships like they do today and, and Pell Grants and, you know all that sort. They, they just didn’t. And I worked all through high school too. After school I, I worked at a bank, and um, always worked, and, you know, paid for myself. I’d have to give her ten dollars a week. That was my board and room when I was 15, 16 years-old.

All: [laughter]

MJ: Very different. But I don’t regret it because it gave us a lot of—my brothers were similar. And my brother next to me he was, he went to New England School of Accounting, which is not a college, you know, it just trains you to be an accountant. It just so happens my father founded the school...

AW/MT: Oh wow...

MJ: Back in the, you know, years before but he had died. But the school continued, and my brother went there and he ended up being a CPA and with huge accounting firms and did phenomenally well. Now, you know, does he regret that he didn’t go to college? Yeah, we both do, very much so. But we, we couldn’t. We, we just—it was not in the cards for us. But we made the best of it, you know, out of the bad situation we made the best. But I know he’s the same way. If somebody starts, you know, you’re sitting with a bunch of mucky-muck people and they start talking college, all of a sudden you gotta go to the bathroom.

AW/MT: [laughter]

MJ: You know, you just don't want to have to admit that you didn't go to college.

AW/MT: Mmm, yeah.

MJ: You know, you avoid the subject. And, I avoided it, my brother always avoided it. So I'm glad you're going to college.

All: [laughter]

MJ: But you know...you know, it doesn't seem like that long ago to me. I'm sure it does to you, but there wasn't the emphasis on college like there is now. It was 50 percent. Out of Classical High School just about everybody went, but the rest of them, not that much. I didn't want to be a teacher, and that would have been the only school I could have gone to and maybe afforded it, was Worcester State. But see, I wanted to be, I thought I wanted to be a nurse. Thank god. You don't how many patients lived because I wasn't a nurse.

All: [laughter]

MJ: And that's a fact.

All: [laughter]

MJ: Anything else?

MT: Um, yeah.

MJ: Ok.

MT: Do you think that there are a lot more opportunities for college nowadays for just, like, the people in Worcester?

MJ: For, to go to college?

MT: Yeah, like, do you think—like you said your family had, your siblings and stuff had a hard time paying for and getting to college. Do you think it's a lot more available?

MJ: Oh sure. Oh absolutely, there's all kinds of loans and programs and... [clears throat] I mean, when my, my oldest son, when he was ready for college, he went to BC. He... listen to that rain, wow.

MT: Yeah.

MJ: Woo, let's stay here for awhile.

AW/MT: [laughter]

MJ: He, he was able to get, you know, 'cause we didn't have much money at that time either, and, I mean, we re-mortgaged the house and all that sort of thing to be able to send him. But he was able to get loans and grants and things like that, which they, they didn't, they just didn't have that back in the late 50s, early 60s; they were few and far between. And they, you know, my mother didn't stress college. She didn't... she wasn't one to push in that direction. She should've but she didn't, and... you know, life sometimes takes funny directions.

AW: Did your other three siblings attend college?

MJ: My sister was a nurse. My next brother down, he went to University of Massachusetts. My other brother—no, he didn't. He later on went to what was then Worcester Junior College at night, and got an Associate Degree, but he wasn't big into school. But he eventually did some, so...

MT: You keep mentioning about becoming a nurse without going to school. I think nowadays you need a lot of education.

MJ: You do, you do. You know, it was a different time.

MT: Yeah.

MJ: Absolutely, I mean, you would probably not be able to achieve half of that if you didn't go to college today. I mean, I happened to have been lucky. I mean, I could have been a schlemiel, too, you know. I could have just not pushed myself and...and worked hard and, and...and just been an average nobody. But I wasn't that way; I had the, the drive, but I wasn't overly ambitious either. As I said, these things all sort of happened. I wasn't out there saying, "Oh, I wanna be a State Representative." [inaudible] I had never even driven to Boston by myself when I got elected.

AW: [laughter]

MJ: How was that? I was scared out of my gourd!

MT: [laughter]

MJ: I had to drive to Boston all by myself? I was petrified! Then I finally got to the point where, you know, I was, I drove with my knees and was half a sleep most of the time going.

All: [laughter]

MJ: I mean that's how much of a country pumpkin I was. [laughter] I'd been to Boston but I had never driven.

All: [laughter]

AW: And it probably wasn't as confusing as it is now with the Big Dig.

MJ: Oh, well the Big Dig wasn't there then. [laughter]

AW: Yeah.

MJ: But actually, where I was—that was only one section of Boston.

AW: Oh.

MJ: You know when I was, when I was working at the Mass Office of Travel and Tourism we were down by the um...theater district and that really isn't effected by the Big Dig at all. But the one thing, when I did retire, the *only* thing I didn't miss was the commute into Boston because I did it for 17 years.

AW: Wow.

MJ: I commuted to Boston. That's a long time.

AW: Yeah.

MJ: I kept my sanity by doing books on tape.

MT: Oh, yeah, my dad does that.

MJ: Oh, I love them. You know, I'd get the biggest, thickest ones I could find—these biographies that are just, you know, if you tried to read them at home, you'd fall asleep.

AW/MJ: [laughter]

MJ: Yeah, that was my salvation. [laughter]

AW: What were some of your favorite books?

MJ: Um, uh—*Truman*. *Truman* was fabulous. Absolutely marvelous book. You know, it was... very terrific and the other one was Catherine Graham, the...she was...phenomenal lady. And then I used to do a lot of historical novels and things like that. And then I got to the point where I couldn't remember which ones I had listened to and I was ordering them all over again. [laughter] They become a blur after a while; I did a lot of them. I did a lot of it.

AW: That's funny because...nursing seems to be more science and math, but...you seem to be more interested in history and politics.

MJ: Well, that's why I realized I didn't want to be... That's why, I think, you know, I think some guardian angel up there came down and said, "You don't wanna be a nurse. [laughter] You...you'll never be able to handle it." And a friend of mine went into the same class that I

was going to be in, and I saw her shortly after and I said, “So, what was it like?” She said, “The first day we had to observe an autopsy.” I said, “Thank you, God. Thank you, God, for not sending me!”

MT: [laughter]

MJ: How’s that for initiation?

All: [laughter]

MJ: So.

MT: Actually, um...I want to talk about religion.

MJ: Uh-huh.

MT: How has religion been a part of your life?

MJ: Um...Not significantly.

MT: Not significantly?

MJ: No...no...um...I’m Catholic...but not a real one... I mean, I don’t...no...It hasn’t. I mean I, you know, I... I was taught all the right things and brought up, you know, with Catechism and all that good stuff and all the First Communion, Confirmation, all that stuff. But, I think, um...I’m not into big, formal religion. I think you can have your own religion to yourself. Just as long as you’re a good person and care about the next guy and try to lead a good, honest life.

MT: Yeah, you can practice on your own.

MJ: That’s right. You know, the Church scandal really turned me big time against it and, you know, and the hypocrisy of it all... My father was Catholic and my mother was Protestant and when they got married they had to go into the Rectory. They—she wasn’t even allowed in the church.

AW/MT: Wow.

MJ: And she eventually—many, many years later—became a Catholic. But, uh, we had kind of a mixture of religions in our family, not... We were all brought up Catholic but everybody started heading in different directions and...when I was getting married...my brother, my oldest brother...I wanted him to give me away because my father was dead, and so I wanted him to walk me down the aisle. Well, he had since become an Episcopalian and the Church knew it and they said he couldn’t walk me down the aisle.

AW: Wow.

MJ: Walk me down the aisle! He's my brother! But we managed to get somebody of the Chancellery to say it was okay for him to walk me down the aisle. That was the kind of the things that turned me off. [laughter]

All: Yeah.

MJ: I mean that's, you know... So I, you know, I've done all the right things, brought my children up the right way, blah blah blah. But, as far as myself, no.

AW: So, you probably, you didn't run into any difficulty at school 'cause you said it was mainly Jewish, right?

MJ: Oh, yeah, I mean, it was predominantly because the West Side of Worcester is predominantly Jewish.

AW: Uh-huh.

MJ: And, uh...it was then, I think it probably still is. Uh...oh no, no, they were all my close friends. Very, very close friends. Yeah, no. No. Not at all. Nothing. That had nothing to do with anything.

AW: Okay.

MT: Can you tell us about your immediate family now?

MJ: My immediate family now? My husband is retired also. He had his own insurance agency out in Barre. Ever heard of Barre? [laughter] I gotcha! It's north of Worcester, it's north of Holden. It's, uh, Rutland, Oakham, Barre...you know, up that way. And he sold the business to whom? Our son, who now runs it and is doing a phenomenal job. And our son lives in Rutland and he has three children. He has a Freshman at UVM, and two other boys. And my daughter lives in Shrewsbury, and she has three younger children...ten, eight, and five, or something... And my other son died when he was thirty.

AW: I'm sorry.

MJ: So, that's the story of my life.

AW: I remember, back—you said you went to France and Germany?

MJ: That was with the Governor Weld on, on a...um...It was a trade mission. And I was invited to go along with, you know, contingency or business people and some people from the administration. And that was when I was in the legislature. And it was, you know, I mean, we were treated like the kings and the queens and... Actually his wife went along, too, but she was off in another direction a lot of times. She was doing other things and we went to this extremely fancy luncheon. And they, and the French parliament—whatever they call it—and it was a big, long table and it was all, you know, American flags and French flags and fancy, fancy, fancy,

you know, table settings and everything. And I was across from the Governor and I was the highest ranking female there. So, *I* had to sample everything first.

AW: Wow.

MJ: I was the first one served and they came over with this *massive* tray full of I don't know what was on it.

AW: [laughter]

MJ: And I didn't know what to do! [laughter] And, finally, the guy next to me says, "Just take one; just point to what you want."

All: [laughter]

MJ: And it was, it was really funny.

AW: Wow.

MJ: It was, it was so funny, and everything... I was the first one served and everything, of course, and I didn't know...

All: [laughter]

MJ: ...what I was supposed to do and... It was fun, though. And Bill Weld's sitting across from me and he's laughing 'cause he, he knew I didn't know what I was supposed to do. And, we...while we were traveling, I mean, while we were there—and, and in both countries we met with different businesses and hospitals and things like that so that we could have some communication going for opportunities for Massachusetts and the particular company or business ...or hospital that we were dealing with. And that was the point of the trip. It was really great.

AW: Was it all business or did you also have leisure time, too?

MJ: It was mostly all business, but the business was...

AW/MJ: Fun. [laughter]

MJ: It wasn't grinding. It was, it was fun. It was interesting and it was fun and it was...an opportunity that I will always cherish.

MT: Yeah, it doesn't seem like your work was ever a grind.

MJ: Huh?

MT: It doesn't seem like your work was ever a grind.

MJ: No! No, I...no! No. If it was I wouldn't have done it. [laughter] I don't like grinds.

All: [laughter]

MJ: I don't like to be bored. [laughter] It was fun; it was great. Wonderful opportunity. When I was at the Mass Office of Travel and Tourism I went to London and Paris and Dublin and...Where else did I go? I can't even remember... Germany. I had opportunities to go to Russia and Japan, but I, I didn't do them. They were going to take too long and I don't really love to...long travel periods and I didn't go. I sent other people. But I did a lot of, you know, European travel. Plus, all across the country, here, too, for meetings and, and different things. So it was great.

AW: Is there a country you liked the most out of them all, or did they all have their good points?

MJ: Our country versus...

AW: Oh, just like, of all the countries you've visited. Like, which one is your favorite?

MT: Of the ones you traveled, which one was your favorite?

MJ: Oh...Ireland.

AW: Ireland?

MJ: [laughter] I'm not Irish. But Ireland's wonderful, yeah. Oh, they're all great. They, you know, they, they really are. Everything has its ups and downs and goods and bads and, but it... I mean, you know, it's not... I'm not there on the daily routine type of thing. When I'm there, you know, it's on the finest of terms. So, you know, it's hard to judge. But, they—it, it, it was, it was a great experience. Wonderful experience.

MT: What nationality are you?

MJ: I am Scotch and German.

MT: Wow.

MJ: My husband's 100 percent Irish. People think I'm Irish; I'm not Irish.

AW/MT: [laughter]

MJ: But I like Ireland. [laughter]

MT: And Ireland's beautiful, too.

MJ: Oh, it is. The people are so wonderful, so nice. It's a lovely place. And then I'd gone back and—oh, Italy, too. We've gone back there as, you know, as a tourist and it's wonderful. I like to travel. I just got back from Las Vegas.

AW/MT: Oh, wow.

MJ: Ever been?

MT: Never.

AW: No.

MJ: No? I never had either. I wouldn't go again...I mean, I've seen it. It's worth a trip. It's, um, interesting. Different. It's, uh, adult Disney World.

All: [laughter]

MJ: It's very nice. Very, very good. I just got back from there on Saturday.

AW: Wow. Is that just for vacation?

MJ: Yup. Yeah, we just, we had some free airline tickets we wanted to use up and I always wanted to go there and just see it. Just once. We don't gamble; we're not gamblers. I mean, you know.

AW: Yeah.

MJ: Little nickel, dime stuff, but it was fun. It's very...very lavish.

MT: Yeah.

MJ: *Lots* of money there. Lots of money. [laughter] You know you're not gonna win at those machines 'cause somebody has to pay the bills here.

All: [laughter]

MT: I meant to talk about, uh, your retirement. I understand that you've probably traveled a lot in your retirement. And then also the W.I.S.E. Program.

MJ: Yeah, um...Retirement was very difficult. I...I was not happy. I was miserable. I missed my job, I missed the people... I didn't want to retire. [clears throat] So, and I was still very happy with what I was doing. And, so, it was a huge adjustment. Enormous. And, but I've gotten to—it's almost good now. I joined the W.I.S.E. Program. I'm the treasurer of it now. Somebody calls and said, "Do you want to be the treasurer?" I said, "I don't know anything about being treasurer." And they said, "Well, you were in the legislature, you know." I said, "Yeah, we only *spent* money."

All: [laughter]

MJ: Um...[clears throat]...so I'm, I do that. And I'm on the board of AdCare Hospital, which is a substance abuse hospital in Worcester. I've been on that board since 1994. Um, what else do I do? Oh, I'm on an International Tourism Board that meets from time to time. I do other things, too... Oh, I joined the JCC. I go over there and go into some of there swimming programs and things like that. What else do I do? Take care of grandchildren, which is great. So I've gotten, you know, I guess I do some other things I can't even remember, but I've gotten used to it. It's, it was a huge adjustment, and I don't recommend it. Keep working; keep the mind going.

MT: I don't intend to retire yet.

MJ: [laughter] No.

MT: How has the W.I.S.E. Program helped you?

MJ: It's, some of it's good and some of it is...I've been kind of disappointed in some of the things I've taken. I did one at the Art Museum last time in September or October, and that was wonderful; I really enjoyed that. But some of the others, I...hmm...so-so. I did go, a couple—before I, I missed last week 'cause I was in Vegas, it was Asian...trade in Asia and that guy was terrific. Very, very, very good. I don't remember his name, but he was excellent. I think he teaches here now—don't know who he is. But some of 'em...so-so. Others have been very good. So.

MT: I can understand that.

MJ: Yeah. You know, they, they, um...[sighs]...What was it? There was one I was take—oh, I just finished it. It was history for the past 50 years, or something like that. Well, I think he thought he was talking to you who didn't live through it.

AW: Yeah, oh yeah.

MJ: [laughter] He's telling us things like...yeah! Uh, we know! We were there!

All: [laughter]

MJ: It was sort of like, duh!

All: [laughter]

MJ: So, you know, so I sit there and I try to keep the eyes open, as you can understand that.

MT: Yeah.

All: [laughter]

MJ: But there's goods and there's bads just like in your courses.

AW: Mm-hm. Do you try a mix of all different courses or is there certain ones that you try to stick to?

MJ: No, I try to mix, I try to mix. Yeah. I limit it, though. I don't take, you know, more than two because I'm busy with other things.

AW: Yeah.

MJ: And I like it. It's five, you know, ten minutes down the road from me so it's very easy to get here and...no place to park but...[laughter] But it's good, it's nice. And, you know, people are nice and I see people that I know and it—I think it's just, you know, it's just one more thing to keep the brain activated and that's, I think, very important. When you, if you just, you know, sit home and make cookies, you know, you're going to deteriorate fast, and I don't want that to happen.

AW: So, you said you lived about five minutes away. You grew up in Worcester and now you live, still living in Worcester.

MJ: Well, I live in Holden.

AW: Oh, you live in Holden.

MJ: Yeah, just over the [laughter] Worcester line. [laughter]

AW: Oh, okay. I was gonna ask, like, how far you moved from your original house.

MJ: Well, we lived in different places in Worcester, you know... We lived in a couple of other places in Worcester after we got married and then we moved to Holden and lived again in three different houses in Holden. So, but Holden is just, you know, a suburb of Worcester. It's, you know. But I mean, I...our lives were here, our families were here, our jobs were here, so it was fine, you know, I mean, we didn't care about moving. Traveling is more fun than moving.

AW/MT: Uh-huh.

MT: Alright. Um...I think we've basically got it all.

MJ: Got it all? Great!

MT: Alright. Thank you!

AW: Thank you very much! It was enjoyable.

MJ: Great! Your welcome! Good! Now let's see, what should I tell you that Worcester is not my favorite place? Maybe I shouldn't have that said that.

All: [laughter]

MJ: This is going to Worcester, right?

All: [laughter]

MJ: Not a good idea.

MT: Alright. Thank you.

MJ: Okay.