



Interviewee: Mary Jo Nawrocki
Interviewer: Lindsay Butt

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Location: Marlborough, Massachusetts
Transcriber: Katherine Biegner

Overseen by Linda Ammons and Leslie Choquette, Assumption College

Abstract: Mary Jo Nawrocki was born on September 13, 1949 and grew up in Pennsylvania. Central Massachusetts became her home after she moved with her husband to the area. Nawrocki, currently a superintendent of a school district, manages to balance her incredibly active life. Not only has she created a career for herself in education, but she has risen to one of the top levels of that career. She has also managed to raise a family, volunteer in her community, and become engaged in local political life. Nawrocki, however, credits this balanced, full life in part to her husband, who has always encouraged her and supported her. In this interview, she describes the challenges in girls' education as she grew up in the fifties and sixties, as well as how she balances the obligations of work, family, and community involvement. Her life offers insight into the challenges facing a girl growing up in the 1950's and 1960's, as well as insight into what it means to be a woman today.

Note about the interview/transcription: The introduction and first few questions got taped over accidentally; they will be included so as to give an introduction and some sense to the interview.

LB: 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 Woman's Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on the areas of women's education, health, work, and politics/community involvement. Thank you for your help with this important project! Do I have your permission to record this interview?

MN: Yes.

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

www.wwhp.org

LB: What is your full name?

MN: Mary Jo Nawrocki

LB: When were you born?

MN: September 13, 1949

LB: Do you have children?

MN: Yes.

LB: What ethnicities do you identify yourself with?

MN: Italian and Czechoslovakian.

LB: What is the name of your current husband?

MN: Mark.

LB: Tell me about your parents.

MN: My parents – my father is no longer living, his name was Andrew. My mother is living; her name is Santa and she is 93 years old. And they were both born outside Johnstown, Pennsylvania. And they met each other after my father came home from World War II. They were married 24 years before he died of lung cancer. My father worked in the steel mills in Pennsylvania and my mother was a homemaker.

LB: Awesome. Where have you lived during your life?

MN: I've lived in Johnstown, Pennsylvania; Bensalem, Pennsylvania; and Marlborough, Massachusetts.

LB: So when did you arrive in Massachusetts?

MN: In 1974.

LB: And what city do you live in now?

MN: Marlborough, Massachusetts.

LB: Do you have family members that live in this area?

MN: A brother-in-law who lives in Boston. And I guess my son and daughter-in-law who live in Clinton.

LB: Okay. What do you think women's experiences in Central Mass have been like, generally?

MN: I would say women are very active in Central Mass; they're politically and socially.

LB: Okay. Now a little bit about your education. . . Where did you attend school?

MN: High school I attended in Pennsylvania, it's called Johnstown Central High School. And college I attended Pennsylvania State University and State College, PA. And graduate school I attended Lesley University in – I believe it's located in Cambridge.

LB: Alright. . .

MN: Maybe it's (____? ? ?)

LB: Alright. What year did you graduate college?

MN: 1971.

LB: What were your challenges in education for you?

MJ: I would say in the areas of mathematics, the higher mathematics I always found very challenging.

LB: Upon finishing your formal education, what did you see as your options?

MJ: My options at that time were either to go on to college to study to become a teacher or to become a nurse. Though I really wanted to go into medicine and study to become a doctor, but I was not encouraged to do so.

LB: Where there any support networks or mentoring that have been important to you?

MN: I would say not after I got teaching job because when I first became a teacher, there were

no formal mentoring programs, but after I became an administrator there were mentoring programs to assist, you know, individuals who attained leadership roles. So that I found very helpful.

LB: Now a little bit about your job. . . Do you work outside of the home?

MN: Yes I do.

LB: So you have and [_____? ? ?] outside the home for wages, when did you begin working and what did you do?

MN: I began working right after I graduated from college, and I [_____? ? ?] a teacher and I continued to work up until I had my first child, and I took a year and a half off from teaching. At that time I was living in Massachusetts and teaching at Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School. After I had my daughter, I took a year and a half off from teaching and then went back to teaching and ended up taking three years off when I had both of my sons. And I've continued to teach or work in an administrative role ever since.

LB: Who have you worked for? What schools have you worked for?

MN: I've worked for Bensalem High School, in Bensalem, PA; for Wayland High School in Wayland, Mass; and the Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School in Marlborough, Massachusetts.

LB: And what has this work meant to you?

MN: Excuse me?

LB: And what has this work meant to you?

MN: It's been, it's been very rewarding. It's – I very much enjoy being an educator and I very much enjoy working with young people.

LB: So what were your primary responsibilities in terms of housework? Now and when you were growing up?

MN: Growing up, I was responsible for dusting sometimes and cleaning and just little odd jobs or chores like that. As a wife and mom responsible for the upkeep of the house. Though currently it's not – currently it's just minor housework.

LB: How have you balanced the different priorities and responsibilities and other interests in your life?

MN: Basically I've been able to balance them because I've been involved even from the time when my children were young, not only in my profession, as a teacher and a coach, but also politically in my community and also as a volunteer and as a mom. And I've been able to balance it out because my husband has always been very supportive of any of the interests or activities I've been involved in. So we've shared very much in the raising of the kids.

LB: And what type of work has your husband done?

MN: He's always been involved in insurance, as an insurance consultant or broker.

LB: Do you consider yourself active politically?

MN: Now, somewhat. Previously, yes, very active; I served six years on the Marlborough School Committee and six years on Marlborough City Council. And in my job as a superintendent I am active in a political sense in that I have to interact with all the political leaders from the seven different communities that are represented by my school.

LB: Have you ever been involved in any volunteer or community work?

MN: Yes, several community organizations. One in particular is the Citizens' Scholarship Foundation; I'm the co-founder of that foundation in Marlborough, Massachusetts.

LB: And what led you to join this organization or other organizations?

MN: I was approached by an individual who is very active politically in Marlborough. Her name's Mary Lou. She asked if I would attend a conference with her about the scholarship foundation – it is a national organization. And I did and together we decided to begin a chapter in Marlborough. The scholarship foundation is a chapter, it still exists, that offers scholarship monies to students going on to two or four-year colleges. And these are the students that are, what you would call strong college candidates, but they're not necessarily in the top ten percent of their graduating class. Often time the group that gets [_____? ? ?] for scholarship money.

LB: And what would you consider the group's major accomplishments?

MN: That we established the organization back in the early nineties, and that organization has been able to sustain itself by a number of endowments that people in the local area have made, so that it's really self-sufficient now. And the individuals involved do not have to do small

fundraising events because that's how we really got it off the ground.

LB: Now some health questions. . . How have health issues impacted your life?

MN: Oh, knock on wood, I've been very fortunate. And I am very healthy.

LB: What is your experience in accessing quality and affordable healthcare?

MN: Just the fact that through my workplace, I am enrolled in the Harvard Pilgrim Health Plan.

LB: And whose health are you responsible for, outside of your own?

MN: I would expect I'm most responsible for my own health! [Laughs]

LB: [Laughs] Let's see, some additional questions. . .how old were you when you were allowed to date?

MN: About 16.

LB: What was considered fashionable when you were young?

MN: Bell-bottom blue jeans. [Laughs]

LB: What was your favorite musical group or song?

MN: The Beatles. And just about any song they wrote, I liked.

LB: How were girls treated when you were in school?

MN: They were basically treated as if their sole aspiration should be to graduate from high school and maybe work as a secretary or work in retail and find a good husband, get married, and have some kids. Unlike today, we weren't really encouraged to pursue careers outside of the home.

LB: What were your most significant extracurricular involvements?

MN: I was involved in sports. I played soccer, basketball, and track and field. And then activities that I was involved in were gymnastics.

LB: What did your parents' education consist of?

MN: My father had a high school education followed by a technical education; he was in the service and he was an electrician. My mother finished school – only completed school up to the eighth grade because at that time it was – parents had to pay for students to go on to high school and in her family, there were nine children, and only the boys were given the opportunity to go to high school. The girls worked in the family store.

LB: What difficult transitions did you go through moving from childhood to adulthood?

MN: I don't really recall any difficult transitions going from childhood to adulthood. What I would say is that it was a transition – I would say difficult in the sense was when we moved, after I was first married and moved from Pennsylvania to Massachusetts. That transition, moving to a new state and leaving behind all my family members and friends from that area, that would be a difficult transition. And once I had my first child, I wouldn't call it a difficult transition but it was certainly a life-changing event.

LB: When you are not at home, where do you usually find yourself?

MN: At work. [Laughs].

LB: [Laughs]. How do you define success in your life?

MN: I would say success - or what I'm most proud of- are my three children as they are adults now.

LB: How do you feel about the choices you've made in your life and do you have any regrets?

MN: For the most part, I think I've made very good choices. As far as regrets, [long pause] there are times I wish I would have had at least one more child, because I really do enjoy the kids. But I wouldn't necessarily say I regret that. I think if I had to do it all over again I might not have – silly as this might sound – stayed in the house that we now live in and added on to it. I would've looked to move and have a smaller home than what we have now.

LB: Based on your life experiences, is there any advice you would give to women today and future generations?

MN: My advice to a woman today would be to make sure that she is able to always support herself and maintain her independence.