

Interviewee: Gale Nigrosh
Interviewer: Dan Long
Date of Interview: November 2006
Transcriber: Dan Long



Overseen by Dr. Lisa Krissoff Boehm, Worcester State College

Abstract: Gale Nigrosh was born in Washington D.C. in 1947 and moved to Worcester with her first husband in 1967. Earning her Master of Arts in Teaching from Clark University and her Doctorate in Linguistics from Brown, Gale taught romance languages at Clark University for a number of years. She now works with the Worcester Public Schools creating partnerships with higher education institutions. In this interview, Gale discusses her extensive volunteer involvement in the Worcester community and her particular interest in programs that support women and children. She discusses her struggles with Multiple Sclerosis over the past twenty years and the importance of friends and support networks in helping her through tough times. She highlights the ways in which her health problems have influenced her day-to-day life, particularly the limitations it has placed on her abilities to do work both inside and outside the home. Gale briefly touches upon her Jewish heritage and the role of religion in her life as a child and today, particularly focusing on the changing role of Jewish women. She also shares some of her experiences of growing up in the South during the transition to racially integrated schools.

DL: What is your full maiden name?

GN: Gale Hilary Closter

DL: So you are married?

GN: Yes, for the second time

DL: Oh, ok. When were you born?

GN: 1947.

DL: Do you have any children?

GN: I have a daughter who will be 25 in February, and I have a stepson who is 35.

DL: Any grandchildren?

GN: Yes, I have a little granddaughter who will be...two years on December 27th.

DL: Oh, that's nice. What cultures or ethnicities do you identify with in your family background?

GN: Jewish

DL: Jewish? Anything else?

GN: In my family background? No.

DL: Ok. Um, have you ever married...obviously. What is the name of your current husband?

GN: Bob Sakakeeny.

DL: Thanks for that, that'd be rough to try to decipher. What is the name of your previous husband?

GN: Leon Nigrosh, and I kept the name Nigrosh because my daughter was three and a half...

DL: Ok.

GN: ...when I divorced him, and so I didn't want so many names on the mailbox.

DL: Yeah, yeah, that makes sense.

GN: And I think she may...be the really famous one (quiet laughter).

DL: Yeah, my mom did pretty much the same thing. Uh, she's been...same marital situation as you. She kept her original married name the first marriage...after the first marriage and then the...after the second one she went back to her maiden name. So...

GN: I had intended to do that, and I'm married now to Bob 19 years...

DL: Mmhmm.

GN: And when I signed our wedding certificate, I automatically signed the name I was used to signing...

DL: (laughter) Yeah.

GN: But I have no regrets because that's the name that I'm published under, and it's the only name I've ever been known by in Worcester...

DL: Ok.

GN: And so I think I would cease to exist (laughter) you know, if I went back to my maiden name.

DL: Yeah.

GN: And I didn't want to take Bob's name because, A: it's a mouthful (laughter) and B:

DL: Oh...

GN: And it means "knife maker." Bob's people...

DL: Really?

GN: came from Damascus, Syria.

DL: Wow, that's interesting. Um, so tell me a little bit about your parents.

GN: My parents... My mother's just turned 90, my father died two years ago, and he was a fundraiser for the B'nai B'rith, which is a large...large philanthropic organization for which he worked for 50 years. And he was an incredible successful fundraiser, and, I think, we used to laugh that he knew every Jew in America.

DL: (laughter).

GN: But my mother has always done volunteer work in various organizations. She's taught ESL, and now she's taking many courses because there are retired professors who live in her community in Silver Spring, Maryland. So she took a course in French Impressionism, after that a course on Shakespeare in film, and now she's studying Yiddish...

DL: Oh, wow.

GN: Which she spoke to her parents who were immigrants.

DL: Mmhmm.

GN: But she never learned how to write it, never learned the grammar, and knew mostly expressions having to do with eating, sleeping, being sick...

DL: (laughter).

GN: And now she can make political speeches.

DL: So, um, was she born in America?

GN: Both my parents.

DL: Oh, ok

GN: I'm second generation born here.

DL: Ok. Uh, could you spell that organization your, uh, your father...

GN: B-apostrophe-N-A-I B-apostrophe-R-I-T-H and it means "Brothers of the covenant."

DL: Ok.

GN: And it's from the late 1800s, it was founded, and it's still going strong.

DL: Oh, wow. Where have you lived during your life?

GN: I was born in Washington DC, and lived in Arlington, Virginia until I was about 5 years old. And then my family moved to Silver Spring, Maryland on the other side of the district, and I was there until I was 17 and then moved to Manhattan. I went to Barnard College. And from New York I came to Worcester with my first husband and I've stayed here ever since. So I've been here a long time.

DL: Yeah, (laughter). Um, what neighborhood do you live in?

GN: Now? I've been three years on the West side and before that on the West side. [possible transcription error?]

DL: Well what...um, maybe a better way to put that was, what neighborhoods have you lived in and what is your...what is your present...

GN: Ok. The first place I lived in Worcester when I was at Clark University where I taught for 20 years was in a big house on the corner of May Street and Woodland Street, and it was a huge house that I think became a crack house for many years. We lived there for two years and then we move to the Tatnuck area. My first husband and I, we had a house there. Then I left and moved into the Pleasant Street area still on the West side near Pleasant and Richmond. And from there, I had a town house for a very short time before my second husband and I bought a house...

DL: Mmhmm.

GN: ...off Salisbury Street, and we moved three years ago because my husband was bound and determined to get me into a one-level house.

DL: (quiet laughter)

GN: ...without stairs. And we moved all of a mile and an half, two miles away 'cause we didn't want to be far from our friends, which had become our family.

DL: Yeah, I'm sure. So you did a lot of moving around.

GN: In the last few years, yes, but prior to that, no.

DL: Uh, what is your neighborhood like generally?

GN: It's...a beautiful neighborhood. Probably, the loveliest neighborhood I've ever lived in. All of the houses are built on ledge...

DL: Hmm.

Gale: And so they're all ranch style houses, no basement...

DL: Right.

Gale: ...no attic.

DL: Mmhmm.

GN: Um, a lot of yard space, the house that we bought—we're the second owner—had been the house of people who had lived there from the late 50s. And they were very successful business people who also purchased close to 4 acres of land behind the house so that it would never be built on in any way. And so, I think of myself as a city kid (laughter) and now I have white tail deer and...

DL: Oh wow, that's cool.

GN: ...turkeys, yeah.

DL: (laughter) Um, since you weren't born in Worcester, when did you get here? How old were you and in what year?

GN: I came in 1967. I was 20 years old. I had just been married.

DL: Were you still married to your first husband then?

GN: I had just been married to my first husband to whom I was married for 20 years, and I was a student at Clark University, having left Barnard at the end of my junior year. Barnard was one of the "seven sisters" colleges, so-called, and there was, at the time that I was there, a regulation on the books called Senior Year in Absentia. And it was so common for women to be married at the end of their junior year that they allowed you to do your senior year elsewhere and still graduate from Barnard.

DL: Wow.

GN: So I came to Clark, did my senior year, and I was invited to do a masters at the same time so I did two degrees simultaneously...

DL: Wow.

GN: And then I was invited to join the faculty at Clark.

DL: How did you come to live in Worcester?

GN: By marriage. My first husband was the—I guess he was a manager, I'm not sure of the exact title, of the ceramic studio at the Worcester Center for Crafts. And he and I had met in New York. He worked in the East Village at the time managing the Greenwich house pottery at the time he took this job, and we came to Worcester.

DL: Do you have a lot of family members living in the area?

GN: Here?

DL: Yeah, in the Worcester area, not necessarily in the city but...

GN: No, no I don't. And the day before my second husband and I were married, my mother and father came up from Washington, and my father said to get Judy Finkle who was a principal at Flag Street School and her husband, David—the doctors Finkle—over to the house and he would show me that we were related...

DL: (laughter)

GN: And he brought a family tree because he was the family historian and it turns out that he and Doctor Finkle had the same great grandfather.

DL: Oh.

GN: So after so many years of living in Worcester having no kin, I suddenly had a cousin. And we've become very, very close. You know, someone's house you can show up at...

DL: Yeah.

GN: ...and say, "I need a cup of coffee."

DL: Yeah, that's awesome. What challenges do you think the city faces?

GN: Today?

DL: Yeah.

GN: At this very moment, our mayor who has done a great job, who's also been the chair of the school committee is now the Lieutenant Governor, and it's very likely that he will leave his position at City Hall. And I think there are so many projects that Tim Murray has started and started, well, that it's a real challenge to the city to see the leadership that will follow through on those projects. Because if I were Tim Murray going to Boston, there are some very good people here that I would encourage to come with me to Boston...

DL: Mmhmm.

GN: And I fear losing them.

DL: Yeah. What would you change about the city? If anything?

GN: A lot.

DL: A lot (laughter)?

GN: It's a great place to raise your kids, and that surprised me mightily, but it truly is a great place to raise your kids. So many different cultural organizations, wonderful things going on for children. However, there's no downtown life.

DL: True.

GN: There were probably more when I first came. And now there are no stores, and I watched, you know, what was the Galleria become the outlet mall...

DL: Empty.

GN: And now there's literally no place to shop.

DL: Yeah.

GN: And you can't beat the cultural opportunities here, and so much that the colleges make available, but there is *no* nightlife.

DL: Yeah.

GN: There is *no* nightlife.

DL: That's true.

GN: And, um, I see a lot in the way of promise, but I haven't seen it happen yet.

DL: Yeah, it's got potential.

GN: And I worry that all of the children that I and my friends have raised will never come back here.

DL: Yeah, that's too bad... So what, what changes have occurred in Worcester since you've been here? Obviously the downtown.

GN: When I came here, [Interstate] 290 was being completed—Route 290. And so the downtown—the city was just split right down the middle. And I remember learning years later that people that lived on one side could no longer reach their family and their friends on the other side. That was a fissure that, I guess had pretty much taken place. Um, other things that were going on when I came was...included the Galleria being built, which was, you know, wonderful for a couple years and then declined and declined and declined. Then I saw the outlet mall open with real good New York stores...

DL: Mmhmm.

GN: ...and tourists coming in to shop and that disappeared. So I've seen that. One of the things I think is very promising is the college, the pharmacy school, college of health...and pharmacy. I can't... pharmacy and health sciences. I saw UMASS medical be built. I think it's an incredibly wonderful facility. And having left Clark after 20 years of teaching there, and coming here in 1990, I've seen—I've had an opportunity, given my role, to see how much the college community has to offer. And I've spent my professional time here building collaborative projects with the colleges and the schools.

DL: Mmhmm.

GN: And, it's—it's just a wonderful, wonderful opportunity.

DL: You know, I think it is a—you're right—an excellent, an excellent college city.

GN: It's a wonderful college city.

DL: This is the first place I looked at, Worcester State, and it really caught my eye right away just because of the reviews and the prices.

GN: And that's a place too that I've seen change and become much, much more powerful. And its faculty has grown in depth and breadth, and the new President is wonderful, President Ashley. And I say the "new" President—she's been there a while.

DL: Yeah, well, I'm in the Criminal Justice program there, and I'm...I'm not sure if you already know this but they had an exchange program with Westfield State. They had the same professors.

GN: No, I didn't know that.

DL: Oh, well they had...they had an exchange with the same professors from Westfield State that came to Worcester State to teach. And you'd get a joint diploma from Westfield and Worcester State.

GN: Ahh, and that's becoming a more and more desirable major, I understand.

DL: Yeah, and Westfield is the, the number one Criminal Justice school in the state.

GN: Is that right?

DL: And Worcester just, just this year in fact...broke off and started their own program instead of just being a satellite campus.

GN: And I heard on WBUR the other morning that there's a program now where lawyers are studying the effect of programs like "CSI" on the legal system—the expectation that these kinds of forensics procedures are really doable in the real world.

DL: Yeah. Um, we discussed what schools you attended,

GN: Actually we didn't, I went to Barnard College I have an MAT, a Masters of Arts and Teaching from Clark University, and I have a doctorate from Brown in Linguistics. But Clark University really kept the door open on my position there while I was completing my doctorate, so I was in two places at once.

DL: Oh wow. So you didn't pursue any vocational training? Or anything along those lines?

GN: I'm not sure what you mean about vocational.

DL: Um, I don't really think there is any in the teaching field.

GN: Well, I mean that's been, you know what I, what I studied, and what I did...so no, I don't think vocational training other than that. I've also worked for an international student travel agency—in fact the oldest in the U.S.—and I did that while I was teaching at Clark, and, and a little bit after. So I was the Assistant Academic Director for that program and we would organize student travel all over the world. And that's the only other vocation, I think.

DL: What were some of your challenges in education?

GN: In education? First challenge was being the youngest on the faculty in Romance languages at Clark. And it was traditional at that point in time that the newest got the most freshman load...

DL: (Laughter) Mmhmm.

GN: And I have to say, I fell in love with that level, having spent my time studying French Literature and more advanced. And I really, I think that's what propelled me into the study of Linguistics because it was basic language acquisition that fascinated me. And then moving into Linguistics, the field that I pursued was Socio-Linguistics, which was very new at the time I got my doctorate in '85. But Linguistics had traditionally been the study of phonology, syntax and semantics and Socio-Linguistics introduced a whole other dimension, like how something is said is also part of what is said. So if I say to you "Yeah, yeah," it means "no."

DL: Mmhmm. (laughter). That's interesting.

GN: So what was frustrating at Clark was that there was no department of Linguistics, and I really had to cobble my own network there of...psychologists, sociologists, English, you know, which was interesting, but I was ready to make the change when I did. And now I'm still connected, you know, with all of my colleagues and I've made new ones.

DL: That's great. So when you finished your formal education, what did you see as your options?

GN: At that time? When I finished, when I was studying French at Barnard I was going to be a translator for the UN.

DL: Hmm.

GN: That was really what I wanted to do. P.S. I never did it.

DL: (laughter)

GN: But at the time, there were fewer options for women, and it's so exciting to see how many options women have now. I remember going to the bank for a mortgage that my first husband and I bought in 1969. The only way that a woman could qualify on a mortgage...had any collateral weight, was as a nurse or a teacher. Otherwise nothing.

DL: Wow.

GN: And the way the mortgage was written. It was written in the husband's name, Et. Ux. meaning "and wife."

DL: Wow.

GN: So, I had no name even.

DL: So uh, what support networks and mentoring have you...been important to you?

GN: Oh boy, support networks... There've been so many people... professors at Clark that really took me under their wing and, and friend. Especially having no family here, my friends have been so valuable. And now that I find myself... somewhat handicapped—I've had Multiple Sclerosis now for 20 years—I have relied on that network more and more, as difficult as it is. One of my friends said to me a while ago, "You know, it's harder for us if you don't tell us how we can help... than if you tell us." And my husband and my immediate family have, of course, been wonderful. I think... other good people doing good things... that, that network. You always learn, you know, and I remember reading some years ago that good things happen when people—professional people go to other good people. And by that was meant, forget about the hierarchy of degrees. I mean there are people here in this school, the Superintendent's administrative assistant—a "Secretary" in quotes, if you will—one of the smartest, best people in this system. She runs the system...

DL: (laughter)

GN: And, and that's the kind of support network. And these people are my friends, not just my business colleagues.

DL: So what have been some of the challenges that you've faced with your MS?

GN: Oh boy... I was a dancer, I was in very good shape for about six years and I'm grateful for that because I could see my daughter through her elementary school without too much struggle. But it has a way of catching up with you. And, and so my balance is not good. It's not easy always to walk, but I am bound and determined not to give in.

DL: Mmhmm...

GN: So there've been all kinds of drug treatments that I've tried, but the best thing, I think, is physical exercise. Having been a dancer, I work out every day, about 40 minutes.

DL: Wow.

GN: There's not a day I get up and don't work out. And then I work with a trainer. I'm doing Pilates now twice a week, which is very tough discipline .

DL: Yeah.

GN: And so those are all challenges. I hate it. (laughter)

DL: Um, switching gears here... When you started working for wages, when did you begin and what did you do?

GN: I was... going way back, a babysitter. I think we got 50 cents an hour.

DL: (laughter)

GN: Then I was a councilor at summer camp for some years. I think we made probably \$200 a summer...

DL: Wow.

GN: Eight weeks plus tip. And then, my first “job” was at the Smithsonian Institution over the summer—was a fabulous job. And then I was, of course, at school. I was in Barnard’s babysitting program where, where you would, you would be qualified to go and babysit. And there were certain regulations and pay scale, which I don’t remember. And then I came to Worcester and my first job was at Clark as an instructor. And I remember, I think I got \$6,000 dollars a year at that time...I’m forgetting the basic question. I don’t wanna get too far afield. So just remind me of what you want.

DL: Oh, well that’s, that’s basically all I need. Um, how did you come to do this work?

GN: How did I come to do this work...

DL: What were your motivations?

GN: To teach? I thought I was good at it. I’ve always taught in one capacity or another. I mean, at summer camp, you know, I was...instructor on the waterfront until I became the director of the waterfront. I mean, I’ve always liked to teach. And I’ve done a lot of volunteer work, reading for children, reading with children, so—and in my family, I remember my father always pointed out to me his cousin Esther. And he would say to me—she was a spinster in Brooklyn, NY—he would say, “Cousin Esther is a teacher.”

DL: (laughter).

GN: And she was so revered by the whole family. And then there were years when, you know, I wish that I was some successful business person. It was almost—I hate to say this, but—embarrassing to say I was a teacher because it’s held in such low esteem in so many places.

DL: Yeah. It’s too bad, but it really is.

GN: But I intend to change that.

DL: Yeah (laughter). Um, what has this work meant to you?

GN: Oh... it’s exciting work, and it’s work worth doing.

DL: Yeah.

GN: And...given the role that I play in the Worcester Public Schools, I have the privilege of being outside with people in the different colleges and universities. And they’re doing

interesting things, and I think one of the challenges and one of the...successes, if I can say that, has been building an awareness of a K-16 continuum, not a K-12 and higher ed.

DL: Yup.

GN: Because that means K-12 is lower ed.

DL: Mmhmm.

GN: And the people in K-12 are the future clients of the people in the college and university system, and each needs to know how to cross the boundary into the other culture. I've seen so many connections made—faculty to faculty, student to student—it's been very exciting to see that starting to happen.

DL: Yeah.

GN: Slowly.

DL: It still does seem like completely different worlds though from high school to college.

GN: How so?

DL: Um, well in college you have so much more responsibility. And in high school, your classes are registered for you. You don't get to pick them. You basically just get a list of what you're gonna be in the next semester, and teachers hold your hand along the way and...help you with project deadlines. In college it's, it's your responsibility to sink or swim.

GN: And one of the things, I don't know if you're aware of this but we...

(Tape ended)

GN: ...we have dual enrollment, are you aware of that?

DL: No, no. I'm not.

GN: Where high school students—ok, juniors and seniors—can take college courses and get credit for high school courses sometimes they can also get college credit.

DL: Oh.

GN: It was a program that started with a lot of money from the state after the education reform law was enacted in '93. And now the money has dried up, but colleges in Worcester have generously kept the tradition alive so that students from the Worcester

Public schools can take courses at Assumption, at Worcester State, where President Ashley has made both high school and college credit available. We have eight students taking Mandarin Chinese there.

DL: Wow.

GN: This fall, we have students studying at Quinsigamond Community College, at Clark University where they're getting both college and high school credit. Those are the students from University Park Campus School...College of the Holy Cross has a gifted high school student program where, uh, high school in the area—not just the Worcester public schools—can nominate three students. And it's a year-long program. If a student's accepted, he or she can take a course each semester, um, for high school credit. I don't know if I've left—Becker College has just added to that. We have five positions each semester available so that, you know, there are openings for high school students to go to college and learn a little bit...

DL: Mmhmm.

GN: ...about what's, what's involved. And there was discussion on this end about how much credit because it had to do, on the high school end, with seat time...

DL: Hmm.

GN: ...what's called a Carnegie Unit, and I think that the Worcester public schools have come to realize that being in a college course is not just sitting in a seat.

DL: Yeah.

GN: You know, it's preparation. It's thinking. It's not sleeping too much.

DL: It's a lot of out...out of classroom work too.

GN: Yes, exactly.

DL: See, that's one of the big things that's different from high school. In high school, you don't have to do nearly as much independent studying. In college you're basically in class to take notes and study them afterwards.

GN: Exactly, exactly. And it puts a lot of...[inaudible]...on the college professor to make the class more important than just a note-taking exercise.

DL: Yeah, uh, what are your primary responsibilities in terms of housework?

GN: In terms of housework?

DL: Yeah.

GN: Less now than before because of the fact that I'm physically unable to do a lot. I think my passion in the house is cooking.

DL: Hmm.

GN: I love entertaining, and I'm the one in the house that makes decisions as to color, and the art, and I like doing all of that. In the house, in the, in the marriage, I would say that I'm the one that remembers birthdays...

DL: (laughter)

GN: ...and takes charge of presents and stuff.

DL: Oh yeah?

GN: Because my husband would never remember.

DL: (laughter)

GN: And then we'd fight about whatever he'd decided on getting.

DL: I think that's pretty typical to men. I've got the same dysfunction, um...

GN: There is a way to fix that, you know. You get a book and you write down the date.

DL: That's a good idea.

GN: But then you have to check it, you know?

DL: (laughter) Um, now I'm sure you share a lot of housework with your husband, but is there anyone else?

GN: Yes, we have, um, someone who cleans the house, and we have someone who does a lot of the yard work... So, I think that's basically it.

DL: Yeah, uh... How has housework changed over time for you?

GN: Not being able to do a lot of it...

DL: Yeah.

GN: ...has, has been a big change. I mean, things have gotten easier in terms of appliances, in terms of just different cleaning products, you know. I think every generation sees that. You know, I can remember, my father, until he died he always called the refrigerator the "icebox."

DL: Oh yeah.

GN: And um, anytime he went to the dry cleaner, he went to “the tailor.”

DL: (laughter)

GN: And uh, the shoe repair people were always “cobblers.” And I think, you know, those sorts of things are quite a bit different.

DL: Yeah.

GN: We didn’t have computers when I was growing up, and it’s made an enormous difference. And especially for me. I don’t hold a pen particularly well, so that writing is not as easy as it used to be. It’s not easy at all. And I was a fairly good graphic artist. I drew very well, and I can’t do that anymore either. So the computer is a life saver. And I still do quite a bit of writing...you wanna shut this [door]?

DL: No, no it should be fine, it usually doesn’t pick up background noises like that. Um, how have you balanced different priorities, responsibilities, roles and interests in your life?

GN: Not well. (laughter).

GN: I try to do everything, and um, it’s very hard for me to cut back on anything.

DL: Oh yeah?

GN: Even here at this school. I, um, qualified and took advantage of disability insurance when it was offered through the Mass Teachers Association. It’s very hard to get it otherwise as an individual. And I am supposed to be on part-time disability working 24 hours a week. For me, that’s meant cutting from about 150% to 100%, I haven’t figured it out yet.

DL: (laughter)

GN: I work all day. I work all night. And part of that is because I love the work I’m doing. It’s work worth doing, and uh, it’s like that with anything I do.

GN: Mmhmm. My sister’s kinda the same way. She’d work herself...sick just trying to get everything done because she’s so motivated. And she works like 48 hours a week doing uh, Paramedic work. And then she’s got a second job that she goes to on her off days and sometimes after her 24 hour shifts, it’s...

GN: Wow

DL: Yeah...

GN: And being a grandmother.

DL: She kinda takes it to the extreme.

GN: Being a grandmother, I'm constantly thinking about what I can do with my granddaughter and, how I can do things and help her and interest her.

DL: Yeah.

GN: And I'm one of...of seven grandparents to this child given, given the...the world of divorce and remarriage...

DL: Right.

GN: So I'm the step grandmother.

DL: Hmm.

GN: You know?

DL: Yeah.

GN: But I've been able to spend a lot of time with her. In fact, I was just in New Orleans where she lives now with her mom and dad, and that was two weeks ago, you know. I'll see them again soon.

DL: Uh, how would you characterize the personal and professional costs of your chosen path and... what about the benefits also?

GN: Benefits... are the people and the feeling that I'm learning from them and I hope they're learning from me—making opportunities available. Ah, the costs... I'm sure, hah, that I could making a ton more money...

DL: Hmm.

GN: ...and other things, but I ain't complaining one bit.

DL: (laughter)

GN: Not one bit. And being in the, um, Mass Teachers Association—which is not a choice if you come to the Worcester schools. It's closed shop and you must join.

DL: Mmhmm.

GN: And otherwise, you pay an agency fee which is the same as union dues, and you have no rights.

DL: Wow.

GN: So, I was very glad that that was pointed out to me. But um, there are a lot of benefits I've come to realize. If I were in private industry, there'd be no pension, there would be uh, no... no provisions for um, tax sheltered annuities. You know, it would all be 401K, not 403B.

DL: Mmhmm.

GN: And um, I have a certain amount of vacation time spelled out, so then I'm not sure that uh, it's a bad thing at all. And at the time that I came to the Worcester public schools, pay scale was much better than any of the universities...

DL: Mmhmm.

GN: ...or colleges. Now I think it's straightening out a bit.

DL: Yeah. Uh, what type of work does your husband do?

GN: My husband is with Hewlett Packard. He's always been over the last 20 years with hi-tech, but he's not a propeller head...

DL: (laughter)

GN: He is more in the area of marketing, analyst relations. He's worked on both sides, He's been an analyst of the hi-tech businesses, and he's been on the inside. Now he does, um, analyst relations for Hewlett Packard. He's been very successful at running massive conferences. In fact, he was in Singapore for several days at the end of September. There was a big conference there, but Hewlett Packard is based in Palo Alto...

DL: Hmm.

GN: ...and so he must travel once, once a month for about a week. And it's given me all kinds of opportunities that...[inaudible]...academics, you never get. I mean, I remember when he was at Wang and I went to the first achievers' conference which, which he had qualified for. I saw things that academics would never, ever have experienced, and this was in Hawaii...

DL: Hmm...

GN: And we were wine and dined and feted. It was great.

DL: Uh, do you consider yourself politically active?

GN: To the extent that I can be. I mean, during the '60s, I was probably on every march...

DL: (laughter)

GN: ...and demonstration, and constantly in Washington protesting this and that. At this point—and I've talked about this with, with others of my friends—I no longer think, although I wish it weren't so, that I can change the world. But, I've concentrated more on one person at a time, and I hope that I can make a difference. And I have to say, I am thrilled with what happened in this election both in the state and in the national government. It's fabulous.

DL: It's a big turn around.

GN: Let's hope so.

DL: Have you been involved in volunteer community work?

GN: Yes, I have.

DL: Uh, what groups?

GN: Oh boy... I've been involved with the YWCA. I mean, this is off and on. With Daybreak, with Abby's house, which I support to the extent that I'm able.

DL: Mmhmm.

GN: Greater Worcester Community Foundation, Dynamy, Temple Sinai, to name a few...

DL: (laughter)

GN: Uh, the veteran's shelter, which I've gotten involved with through my husband. Not so much now as previously. For a while I was involved with Romanian children's relief. I wish I could do more, but it's not always possible.

DL: Yeah, there's only so many hours in the day.

GN: Yup.

DL: Um, one of these organizations... Ah, what led you to join?

GN: It's not a matter of joining so much as supporting. I was a trustee at Temple Sinai where I'm a member. Also on the board of directors at Dynamy for a short time, but it's very difficult to commit the kind of time, and it's not cheap.

DL: Yeah.

GN: So you do what you can do.

DL: Yeah. What are the organization's main goals?

GN: Those organizations? They're all quite different, but I'm very interested in organizations that support women...

DL: Mmhmm.

GN: ...and that support children. And uh, I'm active too in the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, and I support the uh, American Cancer Society. I've had so many friends and family members affected by cancer.

DL: Yup.

GN: But it really comes around to more monetary support now rather than physical support. And I'm sorry I can't do more physically, but, but I keep my finger in it all the time.

DL: Um, what were some of the main programs or initiatives that you worked on?

GN: With Dynamy, it had to do with...students who came to do the year between, uh, high school and college or between college and more college. With the YMCA it has to do with different programs. I would say that what interests me most is programs for young women to really let them see what the possibilities are. I'm very, very committed to—and this is through education too—to see more women and minorities get involved in engineering, um, in math and sciences. My own daughter was a computer science major at Carnegie Melon. Her mother is a complete ditz.

DL: (laughter)

GN: And then when she finished, she immediately applied to a Masters in Fine Arts program in theater lighting, and I asked her to please connect the dots for me, and she said, "Mom, it's all done by computer." (laughter).

GN: And she's in a three-year program, and Carnegie Melon has the best in the country at, in computer...in uh, theater lighting.

DL: Mmhmm.

GN: And I'm committed to seeing people do what they love. I mean, both my husbands and my children respective, are involved in the arts. My stepson is getting a Doctorate in

musicology from Columbia, and my daughter...in MFA and lighting design, and we laugh and say that we're raising two starving artists (laughter).

GN: But they're doing what they love, and I think it's important to encourage that, and follow your dream.

DL: Mmhmm.

GN: So...

DL: Uh, what would your work consist of?

GN: What would my work consist of?

DL: Yeah, with these, um, with the organizations.

GN: At, at this point, it's much more contributing. At the point where I was able to do more discussion, it was, you know, volunteering ideas for direction. But, it's been very limited that I've been able to do anything...other than offer monetary support. Just not been in the cards. I've too much health that I'm responsible for.

DL: Yeah. Uh, what roll has religion played in your life?

GN: Um, growing up, given my father's role, um, it was pretty central. Judaism is much more family centered than institutional centered, and uh, it was a very prominent part of life at home—you know Jewish holidays. I was the first Bat Mitzvah in the Washington area that we know of. There may have been another one before me by about 30 or 40 years, but at the time that I wanted to be Bat Mitzvahed, the uh, conservative synagogue wouldn't even train girls.

DL: Wow.

GN: And my parents had to hire a woman to come to the house and teach me. And I have a lot of friends who've become Bat Mitzvahed as adults, but I was 13 years old.

DL: Hmm.

GN: And um, I think there was a period where I really was uninvolved. And it was when my daughter was born that I, you know, went back to wanting her to know who she was. Now she's completely uninvolved. I think for her, science and religion bang heads. And I'm not involved as I once was, but my father always looked at religion as something to question, I mean nothing was ever taken for granted...

DL: Yeah.

GN: ...and so, that's the tradition I've grown up in, we always answer, "Wait a minute... (laughter)...Why is this?"

DL: Yeah. How have health issues impacted your life?

GN: Well, I think I've told you that.

DL: Yeah, we already covered that, uh, what are your experiences in experiencing quality, affordable healthcare?

GN: You need to have money to get insurance, you know, and I've been fortunate to have insurance. My medical bills run...to astronomical figures, just the drugs that I have to take.

DL: Yeah.

GN: And for someone without insurance, it's, it's...unimaginable...

DL: It would be unbelievable.

GN: ...it is unbelievable. And it's gonna be interesting to see how Massachusetts really makes universal healthcare a real thing.

DL: Mmhmm.

GN: It's just so necessary.

DL: Yeah.

GN: So I've been fortunate, very fortunate. If I listed for you the number of drugs that I have to take, it would take me the rest of this time that we're into (laughter).

DL: Um...to conclude this... Now that we're working to tell a fuller story of the, uh, the, hmm... I don't like the wording of that question ... Well, since we're working to tell a fuller story to tell the past of women than has been previously recorded, uh, what should we be sure to include? Anything that we left out?

GN: Boy, that's a hard question... What I really want to say is that I'm so glad that this is being done. Now I've been listening to WBUR— "Story Corps," I think it's called—it just comes to Massachusetts, to Boston. And I'm listening to the stories that have been recorded where family members have asked each other about this part of their past or that part or what it was like growing up. And I think that just to be able to go back and find out things. Women have been so invisible...

DL: Mmhmm.

GN: ...so invisible, that the resource that will now be available... I can remember teaching at Clark—and I grew up in Maryland, in Virginia. I didn't go to integrated schools until the Supreme Court decision in '54.

DL: Wow.

GN: Well, I remember my students reacting just like you did. It was as though I was a Neanderthal, you know. And I played with black children after school, but we went to different schools until '54. And when they built the school at the top of my street, and the black and white children went to school together, it was anticipated that this was gonna be such a horrible situation, that we had all black reform school teachers because it was gonna be chaotic.

DL: Mmhmm.

GN: And it was the best situation imaginable because when the other children had to go—had to stay inside for bad weather and learn square dancing...

DL: (laughter)

GN: ...we learned tap dancing. We learned to buck and wing.

DL: (laughter)

GN: I mean, it was great, but those are the sorts of things that people your age really don't have a handle on.

DL: Yeah.

GN: You know, I remember what separate water fountains were like. What it was to not be able to share parks and swimming pools and movie theaters.

DL: Yeah, I mean, for me, it's just something in a text book, but...

GN: I was there.

DL: ...you speaking about it really personalizes it.

GN: It's true, and I have friends from school—black friends that I'm still close to—and I can remember doing things like buying a popsicle and tasting it, one and then the other to see if it tasted any different.

DL: (laughter)

GN: We didn't know, you know, we were kids.

...

DL: Yeah, um...ok, well, that should just about do it.

GN: Well I thank you...

DL: So...and thank you...

GN: ...for your time

DL: ...It's been a pleasure

GN: Likewise. And what happens now with the recordings?

DL: We're going to transcribe them...make digital copies and they're going to go into an archive in the Worcester Library.

GN: So you'll tell me more as this moves along, I hope.

DL: Sure, we'll keep in touch.

GN: So, thank you very much.

DL: Thank you.