

Interviewee: Stephanie Yuhl

Interviewers: Cassie Morea and Amanda Cousens

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**Overseen By:** Drs. Linda Ammons and Leslie Choquette, Assumption College



**Abstract:** Dr. Stephanie Yuhl was born on September 17, 1966 in Santa Monica, California where she grew up in a large family of ten (five sisters, two brothers and her parents). Dr. Yuhl enjoyed being raised in Santa Monica because of the beautiful beaches, lively streets, and the diverse culture. She is the mother of her three children, Julia, Emmitt, and Phineas. Dr. Yuhl attended Georgetown University in Washington D.C. for her undergraduate degree and later attended Duke University where she earned her PhD. In 2000, she moved to Worcester to accept a job in the History Department at the College of the Holy Cross. Dr. Yuhl enjoys teaching because she takes pleasure in challenging young students. Challenging these young adults enables them to expand their perspectives on the world in addition to expanding their beliefs. This allows them to form their own thoughts as unique individuals. Although Dr. Yuhl enjoys her career, it can become stressful when trying to balance it with her family life. Dr. Yuhl is on the steering committee for the Women's Oral History Project and heavily involved in a political organization known as "Stand for Children," which supports increased public education funding. Dr. Yuhl would like to see young girls be true to themselves and not get shaped by what society says is "beautiful."

CM- What is your full maiden name and your married name?

SY- My name is Stephanie Yuhl. I did not change my name when I got married.

CM- Why?

SY- For professional reasons and it just didn't make sense to me. It's somebody else's name, not mine, so...

AC- Do you have children and if so how old are they?

SY- I have a daughter, Julia, who is nine and a half. A son Emmitt, E-M-M-I-T-T, who is almost eight and a son Phineas, P-H-I-N-E-A-S, who is four and a half.

AC- Were they born in Worcester?

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SY- Two of them were, and Julia was born in Chicago.

CM- What cultures and ethnicities do you identify yourself with? Basically your family background.

SY- My family background, my father is mostly Hungarian and my mother is Irish and a typical American mix of German, French, and English.

AC- Did you grow up with those cultures at home?

SY- No. Not really.

CM- Have you ever been married?

SY- Have I ever been married? Yes I'm married. Thus the conversation about my maiden name. I am married to a guy name Anthony Cashman who is from New Jersey and we moved here together.

AC- So tell us about your parents when you were growing up.

SY- About my parents, my father was born in New York City but he spent a lot of his childhood in Europe. His parents were from Hungary and he used to return to Hungary every summer so he grew up speaking French and German in the household. English was his third or fourth language and they lived, I know this is interesting isn't it? And then, they lived in New York and his dad was a doctor and he, my father, studied medicine in New York and then moved to California where he met my mother. And my mother was born in Los Angeles in 1930 and she met my dad through a mutual friend.

AC- And where were you born?

SY- In Los Angeles, actually Santa Monica, California.

CM- Did you like it?

SY- California? Absolutely. Yea there is nothing not to like. Where I grew up it's beautiful. I was right near the ocean, it was a very diverse culture. Lots of great cultural entertainment. It was terrific. A great place to grow up.

AC- What was the neighborhood like?

SY- My neighborhood was right in the city. Los Angeles is pretty spread out. It's really a series of smaller cities so I grew up right next to UCLA. Uh and it was a nice neighborhood. Pretty

affluent. Lots of kids but surrounded by major roads, Sunset Boulevard, Ocean Boulevard, and Beverly Glenn which are four and six lane roads, so it wasn't, I mean a block away was a major thoroughfare. It was definitely urban. It's an interesting kind of urban living.

CM- When did you get to Worcester?

SY- I arrived in Worcester in the summer of 2000 because I got a job at Holy Cross in the history department.

CM- So where in the city do you live now?

SY- I live in an area called, what's it called? Well it's near Newton Square, there is actually a technical name for it. I'm trying to remember it from an old map that I saw at the Worcester Historical Museum. But it's near, uh, between Tatnuck Square and Doherty High School off Pleasant Street.

CM – So have you lived in multiple areas?

SY- In Worcester, no. Just here we flew in for a weekend, looked at houses when we were living outside Chicago and we bought this one and that's it.

AC- Do you have any other family members living in this area?

SY- No not at all. Everybody is pretty much on the West Coast.

AC- Is it sad being isolated from them?

SY- IT'S HORRIBLE being isolated from them actually; although there are also very good benefits. I'm from a really big family. I have seven siblings and so sometimes a big family can be wonderful, comforting rooting experience, and sometimes it can be a suffocating unliberating experience so I think it's not a surprise that I left at seventeen and never lived at home again.

AC- Do you go back and see them often?

SY- I go back, we go visit, exactly. In fact my mother had surgery this week and it's moments like that I feel the distance, and I also feel an obligation to my siblings who take care of the people who are at home, take care of our parents at home.

CM- How many brothers and sisters do you have?

SY- I have five sisters and two brothers and I'm the youngest.

AC- Now that you are living in Worcester, what challenges do you think the city faces here?

SY- Uh well I think this city like every other city faces a number of challenges. Worcester's particular inferiority complexes in relation to Boston put it behind the current terms of developing its own independent identity. I think Worcester is very satisfied with a kind of static way of doing things, business as usual and I think that we can really benefit from an influx of new ideas and new monies and new businesses that could benefit the schools and also the aspects of city health.

CM – What distinct characteristics makes Worcester the place that it is?

SY – I think the thing that sets Worcester apart is its neighborhoods. Worcester is a city of distinct neighborhoods all with a bit of an urban center, so even here as you drove in from Assumption and as you saw from the corner of Richmond St. and Pleasant there are several little cafés and coffee shops and a dry cleaner and then down the block in the other direction on June and Chandler there is the drug store, hair salon, a mini market, post office so you have these neighborhoods that are self contained for these smaller errands and I think there is a real sense of identification on all sides of the city – on the East side, the West side, the South side, and the North side there are very distinctive characteristics in the neighborhoods.

AC- Do they just make one big group?

SY- Yeah although it is not always that well integrated. The city is pretty divide in terms of class and race and I think that is another challenge I think Worcester currently faces. In particular the sort of East side West side socioeconomic divider that bridges those gaps.

AC- What do you think about women's experiences in Worcester in general?

SY- I think it's hard to generalize about women's experiences. I think Worcester has an exciting history in the person of Abby Kelley Foster and the National Woman's Movement meeting that took place here in 1850 and I guess I would like to see more organizing among women. Again across this neighborhood divides, across class, across race because Abby Kelly Foster she was a real radical and she would have definitely not been satisfied to be in a prominently white west side of town. She would have rather branched out and see the connections between people.

AC- Do you think she would have been satisfied with this project?

SY- With the Worcester Women's History Project? That's a great question! I don't know if Abby Kelly Foster would ever be satisfied with anything. I think she was such a constant reformer but like there was always something more one could do. I really think that was her way

of looking at the world but I think she would be delighted women were given a space to express their voice and that many of the interviewers themselves were women who can look to their interview subjects as models of a future mature trajectory. I think she would be pretty pleased with that.

CM – Moving on to education. Where did you attend school and what were the names of them?

SY – University or high school or all?

CM- Just high school and on.

SY- Um, A girls prep school named Marymount High School in California and then I went to Georgetown University in Washington D.C. for my undergraduate. And then I lived abroad for a while and I worked and then I went to Duke University for my masters and PhD.

AC- Did you do any special programs while there?

SY- As an undergraduate and an American studies major and I also started the program intensive liberal arts seminar circumstances that I think really shaped my intellectual approach and probably had a huge impact on why I became a professor.

CM – How were girls treated from kindergarten through college?

SY- That's a very broad question. kindergarten would be 1971 and college would be in 1988. I think there is a huge range; you know growing up with a really strong mom and five big sisters so I never had a sense that girls were less than. My one sister Jennifer broke the barrier in little league in Southern California. She was the first girl on the boys team and she made all stars. I never had a sense that girls were less than but when I went to college I was an editor of the newspaper and I looked around the board table one day and realized I was the only woman on that board of twelve board I thought, "Where are all of my smart female friends? Why is this the case?" A bunch of us got together and started talking about it and we decided to start our own undergraduate feminist journal our senior year and in that process I realized how much resistance there was to the word feminism and to the idea of women speaking their minds and having interest in the politics that might concern women, so I think that I never was aware of it personally until I was at this very unenlightened elite university and suddenly you threw out the word, feminism, and there was all sorts of resistance. And I think that made me even more interested in finding my own definition.

CM – So, how old were you when you were allowed to date?

SY- How old was I when I was allowed to date? I think sixteen. I went to an all girls school so I think the dates were we had an all boys school across town so the dates were the typical dances – football games, we would go into Westfield Village which is the town really cool, fun college town right next to UCLA which is right by my house, and movies, shopping, dinner, and stuff like that. So I was the youngest of eight kids so and my parents had gotten separated by the time I was fifteen so by the time I was dating I was pretty much not under the radar screen so there weren't a lot of curfews and a lot of input. With that said I was I highly trustworthy child. I didn't push too many boundaries as a younger kid.

CM – What was considered fashionable as a young woman?

SY- Fashion as in clothes or fashionable...

CM – Fashionable as in clothes

SY – What age? Tell me what age you're looking for.

AC – Fifteen.

SY – Fifteen. When I was a teenager? Definitely preppy. Crazy, crazy, ridiculously over the top preppy. In my, in my world we're talking about Bermuda shorts and a Bermuda bag. Do you know what a Bermuda bag is with the matching cover with the Burberry ribbon band, and matching watch band, and matching belt. I mean pink and green plaid craziness.

CM – What about twenty-one?

SY – Twenty-one ...well actually by seventeen it was more mod. My sister used to call me a punk prep because I got really into British Scott music and post punk music and so I kind of changed the style a little bit. College was the Reagan years in Washington D.C. so it was still pretty conservative. Dresswise, it was more tailored, less preppy I would say, but you know what some bad clothes too. Big shoulder pads, tight pants, absolutely big hair – my hair was really thick I could never get my hair that big because it was so heavy but I had some friends who had extremely large bangs. Ah so yea a lot of jackets. I remember buying a leather bracelet, sort of a Madonna leather bracelet and all the bangles so there were some definite fashion mishaps.

CM – What was your favorite band?

SY – My favorite band in the 80s? Yea well, by the time I was in high school, it was the Special and the Jams which were British bands. When I got to college my roommate thought I was crazy because of the music I listened to, but I liked bands that subsequently became popular: the

English beat, Tears for Fears, have you heard of Tears for Fears? The Smiths, The Cure, You've heard of the Cure? I liked those kind of bands. My boyfriend in College and also my roommate in college got me into classic rock which was more of my brothers' taste, but they got me more into that.

CM – That's like my brothers. They love Grateful Dead, The Allman Brothers Band, The Eagles and all of that stuff.

SY – Exactly, all of that stuff. I mean from my sisters I inherited a lot of interest in Joni Mitchell, Carole King, and all the late 1970s woman power music. And Fleetwood Mac, I remember loving Fleetwood Mac. But that's at the time. I loved everything. I was a DJ in college actually for four years so yea it was pretty fun, it was pretty crazy.

CM – Like parties and such?

SY – No I DJ'ed on the college radio. Spinning some disks chica chica chica. And that's another thing. Rap was really big. Like early rap, Run DMC and early Beastie Boys. So this is kind of funny to remember.

CM – Early 90s rap?

SY- Early? I graduated college in 88. The legit real roots stuff. But I'm going to thank you for bringing that up.

AC – So back to the educational part of school, uh what were your most challenges while you were in college?

SY – How to answer this? I didn't really have that many educational challenges to tell you the truth. It usually came pretty easily -- I was fortunate.

AC – Were there any social challenges?

SY – Trying to balance it all? It's probably the same with you – a lot of extracurricular events, boyfriends, school, I was always sort of a high energy person. But academically? Uh I was always really interested in school and curious about school. But once I got into school I took college level physics and premed physics in college and then I decided to more toward the humanities. I had been really interested in premed stuff, so I put that aside, so I can't say that you know, multivariable calculus would be easy. I doubt it would have been. I probably decided early to take a path where it came more readily to me.

AC – So upon finishing your formal education, what did you see as your options?

SY – Well my first formal education at an undergraduate level, I originally thought I'd be a journalist, I thought I'd be the ambassador of France, that was the plan for a while about which I would have no control of. I thought I wanted to be a lawyer, I looked into public relations and I actually worked in a lot of those fields. I did internships or did summer jobs at law firms or public relation firms and just decided that the thing that kind of stuck with me was I loved history, I loved reading, I loved writing, and I love teaching. I had done a lot of tutoring so I knew I wanted to go to graduate school so I moved to London and worked in London for a while and then I applied to graduate schools and then got my PhD which is a quick way of saying it took me eight years to get my PhD which is the average time it takes. It's a very long post-graduate academic experience. It was fun, it was hard. I was broke, really broke, you get this really shoddy stipend to live on, and your friends are broke too and you are all in this noble pursuit of knowledge that you kind of live off your nobilities. So anyway, I thought by the time I finished my PhD, I knew I wanted to be a professor and I was fortunate to get a position at Holy Cross.

CM – What support networks and mentoring has been important to you?

SY – That's a great question. I would say my siblings have been a huge support network and by their model that they have tried to combine satisfying professional lives, healthy family lives, it's not an easy path to walk by any means. Some days you feel like you're not a good mom, not a good professor, not a good wife, you are doing everything at kind of 30% but I think they provide some good models for committing to that because at various points in your life you're more than one thing than another. It gives you kind of a full life instead of limiting yourself to one identity. There is a faculty member in my department at Holy Cross that has a huge support network in one person. She is amazing and she is also a professor of history and she's just very, she sees the world with clarity and she has great wisdom so whenever I have questions she's able to sort of peel away the BS and help me see what is the right way for me to move forward. If you can find someone that you admire in that you trust and who will let you be who you are and develop a relationship particularly out of college, like Assumption where you have these small classes, you should find a professor that you have chemistry with and try to develop a relationship because it can be very rewarding.

CM – What is the age difference between you and your oldest sibling?

SY- Twelve and half years almost thirteen years. So for eight kids it's not that much. My mother also had two miscarriages. She had 10 pregnancies in twelve years. It's really intense. They just really wanted to have a big family. And she didn't nurse, she didn't breastfeed. She bottle fed and so that also affects your ovulation, I don't know if you know that. But when you breast feed

it can tend to stop your ovulation or slow it down so it's harder to pregnant sooner after birth whereas if you bottle feed your body kicks back into its normal cycle and low and behold ten pregnancies in twelve and half years. So know that ladies. But even though breastfeeding is not full proof birth control. I can go on record for saying that. Don't do that because you'll be calling me in a few years saying, "I have three children, why didn't you tell me!"

CM – New topic. If you worked outside the home for wages, when did you begin working and what did you do?

SY – I always worked. A lot of my jobs were unglamorous jobs. I was parking lot attendant, a part of the Olympics in LA, I was a waitress, I've been a typist in a typing pool, it was enough to get by so when I was doing my travels. I worked in a coffee bar in Italy for a year and a half at place called Montava, a place near Verona. They are by Lumberty, which is Montava M-O-N-T-A-V-A, it's called Mantua in English where Romeo got the poison in Romeo in Juliet and it's right between Milan and Venice. My husband's of Sicilian descent. He won a Fulbright scholarship to study aboard and do dissertation research. But back work I started as a dish washer in a bar, served coffee, I just did a lot of stuff because once I decided I was going to go to graduate school, I kind of decided on a life, a life in which money was less important. It was a means to live, not the meaning of life, and so I always tried to make decisions where I could shape my life in how much money we had didn't matter when we lived in London. So I don't want to give you a glamorous or romantic sense, it was very hard at times particularly coming off the lifestyle I grew up in. Yea so always work and since finishing my PhD, it's been teaching and writing and research, so always working outside the home.

AC- So what has all this work meant to you ethically?

SY- interesting. Work is really important to me I think in part because I have been able to do the kind of work that I value. I value teaching, I value the idea of having young people in my classroom whom I can challenge and push against and make uncomfortable and force to work really hard, uh and, uh, try to expand their perspective on the world and their presumptions and then they can decide for themselves what it is and why they believe it and they can believe it for themselves, so I think it has a lot to do with sort of forming citizens which sounds, corny but I really mean that – that you're actually active and engaged in critical citizen and that doesn't mean a negative citizen, it just means critical, you pay attention, you read, you ask questions, you challenge, and if you do that you're not just reiterating the values you perceive, but rather shaping your own. Hopefully one of the reason I like teaching at a Jesuit school and I take those values and put them into action through political lives and again not politics necessarily running for office and the things you do and the kind of person you are, social justice or charity work,

you just do you know what I mean? The kind of values and choices you make so, it's meant a lot to me, it's meant a lot to me, I really feel fortunate I have a lot of friends my age who work to pay the bills. And there are days I work to pay the bills but I still believe in it, so that's pretty nice.

CM – So do you share housework with anyone and to what extent do you share it?

SY- You should reiterate that. Does anyone share it with you? Do I do anything? (Haha) I do not like housework as evidence by my disheveled house, I would rather play with my kids or read a book or cook dinner than doing laundry, and I hate doing laundry. I don't mind doing laundry. My husband and I have very uh a very ethic set up. I never really have sat down and said, "Okay, here is your 50% and here is my 50%." But he is a self identified feminist too. And he has a very liberated idea of the work the household needs to get done. Someone has to do it, if he doesn't do it then I'll pick it up and if I don't do it, he'll pick it up. It's...we try, we probably do 80% and the other 20% goes undone or we wait until weekends to try and catch up. We do our best. I don't think having a neat house is necessarily an important thing. My house isn't a wreck. But a good friend of mine's mom when I was a kid, she had a sign in her kitchen that said, "Only boring women have neat houses." And I love that because I don't want to spend my life cleaning my house. It's not interesting to brag about my baseboards or my window sills. So right? Uninteresting, I'd rather spend my time reading a newspaper and do something else that is more interesting, so I'm lucky I found a husband, a partner who doesn't have set ideas about a woman should do or what a man should do. And I think I highly encourage you to not settle for anything less.

AC – When you were younger how was housework different from now?

SY – That's a good question. Well. Yea. We had a full time house keeper so I think that's one of the reasons why I don't like housekeeping because I was very spoiled as a kid. I never had to put my clothes away or make my bed. I was very spoiled. Well I remember my housekeeper spent hours ironing pleats on skirts, on the girls' uniforms. But what I remember, my dad gave my mom a blank check to buy a microwave when microwaves first came out and they were huge. New technology and my mother never bought one because she thought, "Why would you microwave something?" So we didn't have a microwave, I remember that. I'm sure things have changed a lot. I think the thing that has changed the most about life when I was growing up versus now is technology and the way people communicate. You know we had rotary phones, you know what one of those is? I called once a week to home from school, so from college I called once week to my parents from Los Angeles, 3,000 miles away. The phone was in the hall way of the university. There was no answering machine on the other end so if no one was there

to pick it up, I'd call on the next Sunday. So it was a real sense of remove against students today. Unlike students today, who walk out of a classroom today and text their parents. It's a real different kind of sense of independence. I think in some ways I would much rather prefer what I had. I think it's healthier. In other ways I think it's nice that people are more advanced with their parents, so you just have to find a balance. Communication, the consistency of it and publicness of it. You know? Facebook and Twitter, all these...and I think that it changes the definition of what's private material, so you might have a very different definition of what's private than I would because so much of people's personal lives are public, not just public in your circle, but public to everybody. I think that is very interesting think that's changed that we probably really need to think a lot about.

CM – How have you balanced different priorities, responsibilities, roles, and interests in your life?

SY – Not sure I have balanced – I tried to balance. I'm not sure if I've succeeded. I think I've succeeded sometimes. Uh, you caught me at a moment where I'm particularly overwhelmed with work at work and not necessarily the kind of work I'd like to do (committee work, research, and teaching) I think you again, you have to not tell yourself you have to be perfect at everything. You have to allow certain things to not be big deals, not bug you, to but there are also some bad things besides, for example, I was always a varsity athlete at Todd Robinson Grad School since work and babies, there hasn't been a lot of time to take care of my body. I'd like to lose weight, I'd like to be healthier, but that's one of the things that goes by the way side, which I don't think is very good. I think women tend to do that, and I think they should take care of their bodies, better care of their bodies because that's one of the choices I've made because we chose to have very little day care. When I put my kids in full time day care I might have had time to go work out and then pick them up, so everybody makes their choices and you just have to not seek to be perfect. That's all. You get help and you admit when you get help. That's another thing that women have a hard time doing because if you admit you need help then you think you're failing, but you're not, you just need help and that happens with everyone.

AC – So when you're not at work and you're not at home, where do you spend your time?

SY- I'm not at home and I'm not at work, usually not at work, not at home, I'm usually in one of the other places. One of the two places. But since my kids have gotten older, the youngest is four and half now, my husband and I have always made it a point to have lots of time with each other or as much time as we can, and that always depends on the age of the kids. So we've had our system of subscriptions to the theater in Cambridge or a concert series. Tonight we're going out to dinner in Providence. Last week we were at concert down in Connecticut and on Sunday

we're seeing a concert who's the lead singer of The Smiths by the way – a 1980s band. We're going to see Bruce Springsteen in two weeks in Boston. So just bought two tickets for September. Concerts, movies, and things like that but just because my kids are now older, when they were younger I don't have family here to babysit. I'm less inclined to have other people babysit them because I always thought they were a hand full and I can't afford it. A college student, as wonderful as you all are, charge ten bucks an hour, so you have someone come for five hours and it's fifty dollars for babysitting plus dinner plus a movie, it's like a \$150.00 night just to stay in Worcester so before the kids got bigger, we cooked. We both love cooking so we cook a nice dinner and Netflix, not very exciting, but relaxing. Yea, but that's what we do.

AC- What type of work does your husband do?

SY- He just recently changed jobs. He has his PhD as well. He went to Duke and got his PhD in modern European history. He taught for a while and he taught at Harvard for five years, he taught writing, but he recently got a job at Holy Cross being the director of graduate studies and distinguished culture. He is the guy who works with the top students who are trying to get fancy prestigious scholarships, like Rhodes scholarships.

AC – Is it easy working at the same place as your husband? Or harder?

SY – No! It's actually good, but you know we were always in the same program of graduate school, and from the moment we've met each other, we met each other first as colleagues and then fell in love so we've always been able to be a lot of different, not I'm wearing my historian hat. I am a historian reading your report and I'm being very critical, so sometimes it's hard you know? But it's not personal, it's professional. Or you just have to be the professionals and then you have to do the personal. I like it, he's actually on the same floor two buildings over, I can actually walk to his office. It's actually nice. The weird thing is its nine to five. Which we never did we always had this crazy flexible schedule which helped us not to have day care, we teach days we would really juggle our schedules and now he's at work and he's at work. But it is nice having him in Worcester because when he was at Harvard, he would leave for the day and he was gone all day way out there till the middle of the night and there was no back up. But here it's like if I have a meeting at 3:30 he can run over and pick up the kids, yeah so we're kind of figuring it out, figuring out the new rhythm.

CM: Now we're on politics and community involvement.

SY: O.K.

CM: Do you consider yourself active politically?

SY: Yes!

CM: Have you been involved in volunteer or community work?

SY: Yes, I would say the one I am most involved in now, well I'm on the steering committee for the Worcester Women's Oral History Project. But politically the organization I'm working on locally is a group called Stand for Children which is a national advocacy group made up of civil commuters, parents and city residents that advocate for increase public education funding. So it's about public schools, so we do a lot of lobbying and petitioning and meeting with the mayor and city council and the budget just came out so we will be up at the city council meetings, making sure we pay attention and we vote so that we can try to influence their views because that's what politics are about. Again, that's again the small p in politics and what the values are getting put into action that's probably the thing I do the most. In a formal way, I'm a team coordinator; I organize other people in other schools. But then I also think my teaching is political. Ok, now again this idea of not political of not pairing my beliefs, actually I hate that, in a lecture to students, trying to get students to try to be engaged and to care not is okay saying "I'm really not that political of a person." I think that a cop off because everything is happening around you and it's your responsibility to pay attention. So I would say that's another way to be politically involved without it being about government, per say.

AC: What were some of the main programs or initiatives that you have worked on?

SY: Well I would say again in the recent years, the Stand for Children work, and the city council in Worcester to fund the public schools beyond the basic foundations. This is by law to fund to a certain percent. If they were going to cut class sizes, excuse me, make classes bigger and cut teacher's positions and we just pushed and pushed and pushed and we did the research, so we knew the numbers and we got more money as a result so we didn't have positions cut last year. And it's across the city, and that's what I mean about the idea of that the city is a whole instead of East side vs. West side kind of stuff.

AC: What role has religion played in your life?

SY: That's an interesting question, I was raised Catholic, I had a big Catholic family and it was important to us when I was younger and when I got older it was less important in terms of organized religion. I don't practice religion now even though my three children are baptized but that's it nobody's had first communion and they're not going to because I think the Catholic Church is really messed up. Particularly in terms of women and sex and some of the priorities are askew, but that's very different from believing in actually god, and faith and spirituality. Much of my mother, she should grin, we're not raising my kids anything, but I say that and my

husband says, “Yes we are, we’re raising them to be really good people, we hope”. So giving them the type of moral framework, links to a church per say. Sometimes a church can do really good things and sometimes it can be at its core about who is saved and who isn’t, who is right and who is wrong, who is included and who is excluded. And to me that’s what not what god would want. Just be good to each other, man. You can be different but you don’t need to be the sort of “I’m this, therefore I’m better than you or I’m different than you.” So that’s, so I say that’s the thing on religion. It was not an easy decision; it was not easy to come to that decision. And part of that was having a daughter who came home from mass one day when she was little, and we were still occasionally going and she asked, “mommy why aren’t there any girl priests?” And that was an interesting question for four and a half to ask, and then we have a lot of gay friends, and when we moved to Massachusetts there was the gay marriage debate and some of the discourse in Churches which were very anti-gay and to me that is anti-human and it really just kicks me out the door. So I grew up in more rural Catholic Church in California it was very groovy, I made a kite for confirmation that said be not afraid. When I came back here I was struck of how conservative, ethnically linked and then again I don’t identify ethnic with Italian-Catholic, Polish-Catholic, Irish-Catholic but, so I didn’t find a place for it.

AC: Ok, so about your health, how have health issues impacted your life?

SY: Not yet, (Knocks on wood), god willing, speaking of religion and knocking wood. Ah no, not yet, so far so good. I’ll be 43 in September. Keep it up.

AC: How about your family?

SY: Yeah, my father died three years ago but he was almost 80 and had cancer and nothing kind of chronic though no sort of person who had a major health scare that somehow shaped the family experience. You know for the most part, I think we’re pretty peasant stock. Nothing fancy, healthy is good for now.

CM: What are your experiences in accessing quality affordable health care?

SY: Another really good question, my experiences so far have been fine because I have the privilege of being employed. And have employers who help pay for those costs. I can’t imagine if I was self-employed or if I was living basically hand to mouth how difficult it would be to pay those finances. There needs to be huge insurance reforms. We were talking about banking and economic downturn, so much so many of these costs, for example, insurance, public school funding or costs have sky rocketed, in the past eight years and in the vast majority of those costs increase because of health care. So it just seems that something needs to change. We were members of a clinic in Worcester that we joined for political reasons, it’s a clinic called Family

Heath and it's on Queen St. and it serves underprivileged folks and high quality health care for under resource people. We thought it was wonderful and that we wanted to be a part of it and help but it was also very frustrating it not efficient and it was chaotic at times. Even though the physicians were wonderful and I think that's sometimes that happens to the quality of physical health care. Sometimes the systems are so over stressed that they can't provide a health care that's sort of peaceful rather than chaotic because they're so limited in their resources, they try but really hard.

AC: Does the health care at your job support your kids and your husband?

SY: Yes

AC: Are you the main subscriber?

SY: Yes, I'm the main subscriber, it's been fine so far, we like our doctors. That's the one thing I like about Worcester, when you say characteristics about Worcester, it has very good health care. Medical schools in town and St. Bridget's Hospital. I'm pleased with the health care, and my father was a physician. He was a neurosurgeon, which is a brain surgeon. And so the idea of, you know I kind of grew up in hospitals on the weekends and so I think I would be pretty picky about health care and I think its pretty good.

CM: How do you define success in your life? Has this definition changed over time?

SY: Hm, yes it has changed over time. I think when I was younger, success, involved power and status more. The certain idea of you knows this is what I do for a work and that's about it and doesn't it make me a lot of money. And I think the older, once I identified what my passion was those issues fell to the wayside. Doesn't mean I don't love power and it doesn't mean I don't love money, I'd take both if someone was to give them to me. I think the definition for success for me and um work enables me to have a life and a life outside of work. A kind of immigration instead of a compartmentalizing from the world. And that's success, not wanting things you don't need.

AC: Now that we are working to tell a fuller story of the history of women than has been recorded in the past what should we be sure to include?

SY: I think the mandate of this project which is trying to get at, the personal experiences of women as themselves political forces, you know the person that is political which is a wonderful contribution and diversity. I would like to see this project being more diverse and reaching out to communities and populations in Worcester that are underrepresented. But sometimes they have language issues like Portuguese for example, or Latino folks, right in the city I would like to see

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a more sense of variety. For now, we're pretty starting professional level of women which presumes a certain socio economic background of education and certain access. We need to kind of branch out and get a fresh, practically Worcester is a city of an immigrant city and it always has been from its founding. This is why the neighborhoods are so cool. It has always been in your face city. This project should tend to help that. I would like to sexuality on there more, which I know would be difficult questions for college students to ask women but I think that there is a presumption in part of heterosexuality in some of this and I think is also not reflected in some of women's experiences.

AC: Based on your life experience, what advice would you give to women today and of future generations?

SY: Oh my gosh! Run for the hills! No, what would my advice be? Oh, dear it would be for young it would be don't get caught up in body nonsense that the culture tries to constitute you to what actual beauty is. A lot of women abuse their bodies because of that and it's really damaging. So I think that the advice is would be and I don't know how to assure this but to try to be reflective and know yourself and be true to who you are and try not to be to shaped to be forces outside saying, "this is what you need to be beautiful or this is what is needed for success or needs to be who you should be." I don't know how you do that? Uh, shopping, music, friends. Experiences when people treat you poorly and you get mad, you say, "forget about it I don't need these people." You know, everybody has those experiences; my daughter is having them right now in fourth grade. Those mean girl little kookiness. And I guess I would also add that for men to that this idea too should not be about self. It's not just about I, I, I. It's about we, we, we and connecting with the larger sense of obligations to other people. It's not easy to do. It's easy for us to get caught up in our own. I included, you get caught up in your own world, you may get busy and find yourself just maintaining, instead of involvement.

AC: Thank you very much!

SY: You're welcome very much!