

Interviewee: Laura Caswell
Interviewers: Fitore Gjennica and Audrey Hazel
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Transcribers: Fitore Gjennica and Audrey Hazel



Overseen by Dr. Carl Keyes, Assumption College

Abstract: Laura Caswell was born in White Plains, New York in 1961 to a Roman Catholic family of Irish and Italian descent. Upon finishing her first year of college at Rutgers University, she learned she was pregnant and made the decision to abandon her studies and marry her boyfriend at the age of 19. Laura and her husband had three sons. At the age of 37, Laura and her husband divorced and she began working as a computer programmer. She is currently employed at the Information Technology center at Worcester State University in Worcester, Massachusetts as a computer programmer. In this interview, Laura discusses her love of being a stay at home mother, her struggles with returning to school and work after years of being a homemaker, her volunteer work, as well as her disillusionment with the Catholic Church and her views on varying issues like abortion. In addition, although Laura admits to having had many difficulties, she repeatedly asserts that she has no regrets over her decisions. In this interview, Laura also advises other women to appreciate the importance of family as well as education and she especially stresses the value of being able to support oneself.

FG: My name is Fitore Gjennica. My partner Audrey Hazel and I are here with Laura Caswell on Monday, May 02, 2011. We are completing a citywide oral history of the lives of Worcester women, aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences. Based on the goals of the 1850 National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on the areas of women's education, health, work, as well as politics and community involvement. We want to focus today on your particular life experiences. Thank you for your help with this important project.

LC: You're welcome.

FG: Is it OK for us to record your oral history today?

LC: Yes.

FG: What is your full maiden name and, if applicable, your married name?

LC: Laura Ann Markhert (??) is my maiden name. My married name is Caswell.

FG: When were you born?

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LC: March 2nd, 1961.

FG: Have you ever married?

LC: Yes.

FG: What is the name of your current husband?

LC: I'm divorced.

FG: So what is —

LC: His name was Peter Caswell.

FG: Do you have any children?

LC: Yes, I have three sons. Joshua who is 30, Gregory is 26, and Daniel is 24.

FG: Do you have any grandchildren?

LC: No [laughs].

FG: What cultures or ethnicities do you most identify with?

LC: Italian and Irish.

FG: Tell us something more about your parents?

LC: They were raised in a small town in New York outside of White Plains, New York. They kind of grew up in the same small town, got married, had three kids, and divorced 31 years ago. They are both still living [laughs].

FG: What was their educational background?

LC: Both of them just got a high school education.

FG: Where have you lived during your lifetime?

LC: I was born in White Plains, New York. I lived in Norwalk, Connecticut until I was seven and a half, Enfield, Connecticut until I was 15 and North Kingstown, Rhode Island where I finished high school and then left there when I got married, moved to Piscataway, New Jersey and then Marlborough, Massachusetts and now I live in Holden [Massachusetts].

FG: Did you grow up in Worcester?

LC: No.

FG: So where do you live now?

LC: Holden, Massachusetts and I work in Worcester.

FG: So what would be the town or city that you would most identify yourself with?

LC: As a child it would have been Enfield, Connecticut 'cause that's where I lived between the ages of seven and fifteen, but in my adult life it would be Holden.

FG: Do other family members live in the same area?

LC: No.

FG: What is your Worcester connection?

LC: I work at Worcester State College [now University] and I'm an alum of there and Quinsig. [Quinsigamond Community College].

FG: In considering Worcester, what challenges do you think this city still faces?

LC: Jobs – jobs mostly.

FG: Is that what you feel you would change most about the city then?

LC: Yeah, if I could change something that would be more local jobs, good paying jobs for people.

FG: What changes have you seen in Worcester over time?

LC: More involvement of women in local politics, increase in minorities, especially the Asian and Hispanic populations and development. There's been a lot of changes, the Mall [Worcester Center Galleria] is finally coming down; that closed. Shrewsbury Street has really boomed.

FG: Do you think those have been positive changes?

LC: Yes I do. I think it has been good for the city. It gives the city a – after all from what I – I didn't live here during that, but from what I understand from people, when all the factories and stuff shut down the city went through a tough time and so it's just been – there's a little more

pride in the city, I think, with those changes for people as well as job opportunities.

FG: What do you think women's experiences in Worcester have been generally?

LC: I think they're improving. I think they're getting better. There's been – yeah – just overall just getting better [laughs].

AH: OK, so now we're going to talk about education. Where did you attend school? All of your schools.

LC: All of my schools. Wolfpit Elementary School in Norwalk, Connecticut. Hazardville Memorial Elementary School in Enfield, Connecticut. Henry Barnard Elementary School in Enfield, Connecticut. Kosciuszko Junior High School in Enfield, Connecticut. North Kingstown High School in North Kingstown, Rhode Island. I went – and then I went to five colleges [laughs]. I attended Rutgers for college – University for two semesters just trying to get back into school. Middlesex County College in Edison, New Jersey where I thought I was going to finish. Quinsigamond Community College where I got my Associates Degree and Worcester State [University] where I got my Bachelor's in computer science.

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

LC: Differently – definitely differently than boys. I mean one of the things that comes up with me when I started kindergarten when I was a little girl, I could be a nurse, or a teacher, or a secretary. By the time I graduated high school I could definitely – you know, I could be a doctor. I mean that was – that's a radical change from when I was – I was raised to believe. And as a little girl, I think if any of us said we wanted to be doctors or lawyers or anything it would be, “no, no, no honey you can't,” and -- so to have that up by the time I graduated high school to have that a – that's a huge shift in culture and in (??) and so that was cool. I mean - I don't think many of us thought, you know – girls went to college when I was five and that's what we talked about when I was five. We knew people went to college but I don't think it was as considered as common or as much as of a thing that we would do. By the time I graduated high school we were – you know people who were taking – my high school had like a sides of vocation, traditional vocational track, they had like a business track and people were learning shorthand and typing and those skills, and there were girls I knew who were in those programs and they were going out and getting real jobs. There were a whole bunch of us who were going to college – I mean it wasn't even, it wasn't weird. You know, we were, we were in honors you know and AP Calc [Calculus]and all that stuff. There wasn't any question about us being in those classes or anything like that. And I think when I was five years old starting kindergarten it wouldn't have been the norm to have as many girls in those classes.

My aunt actually has a Masters in chemistry and when she got there in the early 60's which was pretty phenomenal field for a woman at that time to go into.

FG: What do you think the expectations of women are after they finish college in terms of staying at home and raising their children or working?

LC: I think – I think everybody kind of feels like they have to work. I think there's a lot of women who still would like to stay home and raise their kids. I think that's – I think there's still an undercurrent of that in the culture that – that you know, you'll graduate college and you'll work and you'll get married and then you take some time off and raise your kids and I don't even know if that's wrong and I don't know how we – if it means we necessarily changed. 'Cause on some level I think – and, and you know nature, nurture, culture, blah, blah, blah [laughs]. I think a lot of us want, you know, a lot of women still want to have kids, you know what I mean? That you still – men and women still want to get married and raise a family and so how do you balance all that? I think it's easier for women who don't want to. My sister is – has been married for 26 years and doesn't have kids and some people wonder about that but it's not – you know she's not – (??) she's not looked at as a weird-o, she's not – it's not like, "Hmm, you never had kids." I mean it's, it's fine. But I think there's still an expectation that that's what women will do and I think you have to fight it a little bit when you don't – if you don't want to and I don't know. I mean my son has joked – two of them joke about staying home and being stay at home dads [laughs] and that's not – I mean and I think that's even a harder, a harder trend – thing to do than for a woman to step back and say, "I'm going to take some time off and raise my kids." I think it's harder for a woman to say, "I'm going to work and my husband is going to stay home and take care of the kids." I think what happens is both of...both people in a marriage work and the kids go to day care, and (??) I'm not- I don't make-want that to sound like I think it's an evil thing but that idea of a man staying home and raising the kids is still not the norm in our society [laughs].

FG: You mentioned the idea of nature versus nurture, do you believe women are naturally more nurturing or do you think it has a lot to do with culture?

LC: I don't- I have never been able to figure that out. I'm so maternal [laughs], that I think some of it is nature, but—but then I look at my sister who was raised the same way I was and it's not that she doesn't have a maternal bone in her body, but not having kids hasn't been – they chose not to have kids and it hasn't been an issue for her at all. She's – she's complete so I guess maybe it is more—makes it more nature than you know the way you were raised cause my mother certainly raised us both to think, and my father too he was like, "You'll go to college—why am I paying for you to go to college if you're just going to meet somebody and drop out and get married." [laughs]...which is what I did but that's [laughs]--and my sister didn't but you know that we were raised with that and so she didn't so I think—I think maybe some of it is more nature you know your –your maternal instincts. I mean some guys--I mean some man guys, you see them with little kids and they're just like, you know, amazing and—and other guys look at – look at a two year old or an infant are like, "What?" [laughs] so...

FG: So –

LC: So I think it could be more nature but, that's my guess [laughs]

FG: So what do you think influenced your decision to stay at home after college?

LC: Well part—part of my decision really was that I got married at the end of my freshman year in college so I hadn't finished school and I went—one of the reasons I attended all those colleges was to go back to school and finish. My ex-husband—my husband at the time had—he had graduated so he got a—he had—he's a computer programmer and so he had some pretty good jobs that enabled me to stay home and we both wanted me to finish school so you know we made some sacrifices that way 'cause the types of jobs that I probably would have gotten would have been minimum wage jobs without—without the education so—but I enjoyed it I mean—I mean staying home with two year olds can be mind-numbing at times but I don't—I don't regret any of it and going back to work—going to work when I got divorced was tough in some ways 'cause I hadn't worked and juggling the kids and everything, but-- and career wise, salary wise and stuff like that I got a late start and didn't start working till I was 37 so I started at a low end of the pay scale. I didn't have the experience, and in some ways I won't work long enough—I have the same career as my ex-husband—I because I'm working for the state and education, I don't get paid as much, but if I did a private sector thing I would never—that pay disparity would—I would never catch up because I hadn't worked for you know 15 years, but I don't regret any of it. One of the things I've always known about myself is that I did want to grow up and be a mommy. It was like—and I had a tough time when the kids left 'cause I was like, “the only job wanted is gone.” [laughs] Like the only job I wanted—like for me all -- all of my -- even -- ya know even graduating high school and knowing I could be a doctor, or a lawyer, or a banker or whatever. Everything for me was go to college, get married, have kids and everything else was secondary for me though I—that's what I always wanted to do is raise a family so I've been lucky that I've been able to do it. I know a lot of women who have to take, ya know, work in jobs they don't want to do in order to put food on the table—I mean it's one thing if you've got a job that you enjoy or that you want to do, but just to work to make ends meet is tough.

FG: O.K.

AH: Did you face any challenges during your education?

LC: No, not really, the biggest -- by the time I decided to get into computer science there were quite a few women doing it, and I did a lot of it at night so that was as a nontraditional student. It was less, less barriers in the way -- that way. My biggest thing was to try and do homework while having three kids at home [laughs] and do math homework while you're cooking dinner it's ya know... it's -- I used to yell at my kids and be like how come you can do that, watch television, “because I'm the mom” [laughs]. A lot of double standards [laughs]. But no, other -- other than that there wasn't any barriers -- I didn't feel there were any barriers but again because I did the night school the nontraditional road -- I didn't, going into computer science -- I didn't feel the effects of that.

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

L.C. Mostly getting a job that was [laughs] – getting a real job. That’s—that’s basically what the goal of education was, was to get a – it felt good to finish.

AH: Did you experience any difficulties in transitioning into adulthood, and if so what were they?

LC: I don’t know, I mean... I’m sure I did but getting married at 19 and having your first baby at 19, you kind of either [laughs] -- you’re just kind of like boom I’m doing this. So in some ways... you know I took on all those responsibilities and my ex-husband and I – we took that seriously. So we kind of turned into middle aged old foggies at ages 19 and 20 [laughs]. So I kind of after the kids grew up a little, I didn’t go too wild but some of those questions that you ask yourself when you’re in college and afterwards and stuff, I’m sort of fumbling around with now like what do I want to be when I grow up but I’m 50 years old so it’s [laughs]... some things aren’t changing [laughs]. Unless I was really brave and daring and wanted to chuck it all and go cross-country. I’m not that brave [laughs].

AH: What support networks and mentoring have been important to you?

LC: When I was at home with my kids, I had a play group, a formal play group that I belonged to and it was just a bunch of moms who got together. That was – that was helpful 'cause we had kids the same age – talked about what we were going through. There were some – ya know, there weren’t as many stay at home moms when I was growing up and there’s even less now so it was nice to have each other, ya know, as backup during the day and stuff like that. And when I was in school, one of my professors over at Worcester State was very helpful. She had gone back to school herself when her kids were growing up, gotten her degree and so she understood a lot of where I was coming from, so she was just a good role model. She’s not a lot older than I am but just enough so that I could see – sort of taught me how to – gave me the insight on how to juggle work and to raise kids and – and all of that stuff so she was very influential. In fact she called me out in the salon (?) and was the one who told me the position was open at Worcester State – so I hadn’t seen her. And then my mother – my former mother in law was a big influence... she was very welcoming and nurturing and she was a lot of help.

AH: So how did you come to do your work at Worcester State?

LC: I have the degree [laughs] in computer science and I said my – my former professor let me know about it, and at the time it was a part time position. I like working in education; I like working. I don’t work directly with the students but I like the atmosphere and it’s a lot less crazy than private corporate America and so she let me know about the job. She had known that I was interested in those types of positions so I applied and came on the interview and then I didn’t get the job and they hired somebody else. A month later they called me up and the person who had taken the job said she didn’t want it so I was second choice [laughs] So I took it

'cause I was working for a private firm in Marlborough and I liked most of the people I worked for, but the – the owners were crazy so I had to get out of there. So that's how I got the job and now I do data base board for them.

AH: How long have you worked there?

LC: Twelve years and I started – first 2 and a half years were part time and then it became a full time position.

AH: Who did you work for? Do you have a boss?

LC: Ya, my current boss, Kelly, [laughs] – actually she was a student at Worcester State too. She's been there longer than I have. Then I have one other co-worker – I have – there's five of – well there's my boss and me and three other people in our group but there's one other person that I work closely with, another programmer and we work well together – it's three women. She's a good boss [laughs].

AH: What has this work meant to you?

LC: In one respect, being able to work part time for a while and having – and in the college it just isn't as hectic so when my kids were little, just having – working there meant I could have the time I needed to be with my kids which was great. And then being able to get the full time when I was ready for it was fantastic. In terms of, sort of personally, and stuff like that, I just – one of the things about programming you just bang your head against the wall until you solve problems and I actually like to do that – like I like to do soduko puzzles and crosswords [laughs] – not very good at jigsaw puzzles but I like to do them too 'cause it kind of fulfills that needs – programming is like, ya know, how do you get from – do something – how do you get from point A to point B and filling in all the spots and I enjoy doing that so [laughs] very excited.

AH: What were your primary responsibilities in terms of housework?

LC: When I was a stay at home mom I did all of it and that was partly my choice because I felt like – because I was home it seemed silly for my ex-husband to ya know work a 40 to 50 hour work week and then come home and do a load of laundry. If I'm home all day then – I mean I'll do the laundry and then he's, ya know, we have evenings and weekends to do stuff as a family or whatever so that was just sort of the way I – that was the reason for that. Then I started working and got divorced; I hired a cleaning lady and [laughs] and I still have my cleaning lady even though nobody's at home anymore and every once in a while like I should get rid of her and 'cause I really don't need a cleaning lady 'cause it's just me [laughs] I'm not that messy but I enjoy it and my cleaning lady is a single mom and – herself, she's about my age and her kids are grown too – I know she can use the work so – I mean like it's not just pity, it's really selfish [laughs] I don't clean my own toilets [laughs] so I keep her. I haven't cleaned a toilet in like [laughs] I don't scrub a lot in between – but ya know like really scrub the bathroom, I haven't

done that in a long – like 15 years. I just don't wanna go back to that [laughs].

AH: Okay, how have you balanced different priorities, responsibilities, rules, and interests in your life?

LC: I was just saying to my girlfriend this afternoon, “Not very well,” [laughs] My father was a workaholic—my father is a workaholic—and my sister, brother and I have sorta (ph) picked up that tendency from him. Because the job that I do is problem-solving, a lot of things start—I mean I don't intend to (_____ ???) I don't literally (??) go home and think about it but things will come to me and so sometimes, sometimes I'll make myself a note and other times I'll actually log on and do it and, and... and work after hours and stuff like that. So, I don't... so I don't let go of my work probably as good—as well—as much as I should—sometimes—other weekends I'll go home and I'll be fine so it varies, but sometimes I think I get a little obsessive with that kind of stuff I need to balance a little bit better—but I do know when it gets out of whack because I get cranky [laughs] I start thinking I am the most put-upon person on the face of the earth, nobody has to do as much work as I do; nobody, nobody, has it as bad as I do. I'm just like—and as soon as I start feeling like that, I just know I'm being cranky, so usually, I... I stay away, so I don't like you know throw—make everybody through a pity party for me but, [laughs] I just I... I... I do something to relax and just you know, like, just like this is ridiculous—feel sorry for a couple of hours and then I do something fun and then I'm usually over it [laughs]. Everybody—you know, everybody deserves to throw their own little pity party. It's just you don't have to inflict it on the whole world [laughs]. I'm chilling out, I'm not talking to anybody [laughs].

AH: How would you characterize the personal and professional costs of you chosen path?

LC: Now (??) professionally, working at the college as I said, it's not this fast-track, money kind of thing—on the other hand the nice part is I... I don't work 60 hour weeks, and when I do go home and work extra or work on the weekends it's because [laughs] (_____ ???) doing it it's not imposed on me. So that's the nice thing I like about the college, it's just a different environment. I also like—I mean colleges do worry about having money to keep programs going but, we're also in the business of educating students so there's this balance of, you know—everything is in bottom line [pounds table], how much money are we making [pounds table], you know [pounds table] “we need to make more money” [pounds table] “we need to make more money.” You know, a lot of our focus is geared on how can we do better by the students, how can we attract more students, and that kind of thing—so I—it makes for a different atmosphere. And my personal, yea— I mean, I don't think I have any great regrets over anything over anything I've done—I – you just kind of have (_____ ???) great boo boos and you

know, and that kind of thing that I wish I hadn't done and I think you reach a point when you just learn to roll with 'em, and we all do something—I might do stupid things during the day but, nothing that, you know, really makes me wish that I hadn't done it.

AH: What type of work did you husband—ex-husband...

LC: Yea...

AH: ...do?

LC: Yea, he's a computer programmer so... He's—it's his fault that I'm a computer programmer—I tell everybody that... [laughs]. I was originally gonna be a business major and—so after we got married and went back to school and I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do, he said, “You might like, might like this,” so I did it and it turned out I did, so, I blame him [laughs]. I also blame him the fact that I'm Episcopalian because I was raised Roman Catholic. We got a little frustrated with the Catholic Church after we had the kids and stuff so—his father is Baptist, his mother is Roman Catholic and so my parents are both Catholic—there was like no other religion, it was either Catholic or nothing and he was—because of his father's background and half his, you know, half his family, you know, his cousins and aunts and uncles were Baptist, he was kind of like, “Oh you know it's not all evil if you're not Catholic” [laughs]. So, we were really frustrated, so we left, and decided to leave the Catholic Church and—but we—our faith, our religion was important to us and we wanted to bring the kids up in a faith community so he suggested Episcopalianism because it's close and—and I had been to a few Baptist services over the years and didn't like them. I don't feel like I've gone to church 'cause there's no liturgy, there's no community every week, (_____ ???) and that bothers me, so we became Episcopalians but, I blame him too [laughs]. But, I've been there 20 years and I'm now on the board so, (laughs) it's really not his fault (laughs)—I just decided to pick on the poor guy (laughs), he's my ex-husband, I'm allowed (laughs).

FG: What was it that you actually disagreed with?

LC: Birth control is the easy one—I just... I just that birth control should be allowed for people. I...I... I don't quite understand the thinking behind... behind that—I mean I... you know you're playing God, your choosing when to have children but I think that's better for everybody, I mean, you see, you know, third world people who are having kid after kid after kid and, and in awful poverty, I... how is that... I can't wrap my head around that one. I disagree with the role of women in the church although, that swings back and forth; there's been times when there's been a better place for women and then they push back and it seems to get a little more conservative and I just never understood as a kid why—I thought being a priest looked like a

really cool job. I realize now that it's a lot of work and I'm not sure I'm cut out for it and I don't know that I really want to do that, but [laughs] it looked like a really cool job—but I.. it looked better than being like the nun and I never really understood why—'cause the way it was explained to me, you know, God called you to a position and so, it kinda got explained to me like God called you to be priest and because you're a girl—you—God calls you to be a nun and it just—I couldn't quite grasp that God called you to serve him—you... like a... like... like it got... it got explained like, you know, you will... like that was a specific job [pounds table] as opposed to this idea, you know, you can serve God in the world and these are the positions—you know and then there's the only position for women but, it got explained to me in a weird way that [pounds table] seemed very limiting and I just—it didn't sound like the God I knew [laughs]. So, that was that and I think my priest over at Saint Francis is married and he has kids and the priest before him was married and had kids and I think there's a... I think in some ways it—and this is not to, to blast all Catholic priests 'cause there are some very good ones. I... the one who married us was great and he kinda got family life and everything but, they bring something—being married, having kids [pounds table], they can bring something [pause] to the table, I don't think that a single, celibate person can. And, you know, like I said... then there's... but then there's the times my priest has to leave a meeting early 'cause he's gotta go to his kids [laughs] soccer game and I mean, he gets that but then he might not—you know... I...but I... but I honestly shouldn't say that—if there's an emergency he'll drop that but, it's just a different balance and I... I just think the church would be you know... I think things would be... I think there's room for both I guess and its just really, I don't know, really crazy. Well, Pope John Paul II kind of said a few things—I don't remember exactly what, and we were constantly disagreeing with him so we like, “Why are we raising our children in this faith if we're like verbally saying ‘we don't [laughs] agree with anything it says’” (???) [laughs]. So... but, it wasn't easy I... I... the... the... we had joined the church—we had joined Saint Francis for a few years and then we decided to take the adult confirmation initiation class and everything and I took it and then it took me a few more years after that to finally make the decision that I wanted to become a new member of the Episcopal Church. For me, that meant I was definitely breaking with my Catholic [pause] background and that wasn't an easy decision and I really needed to think that through 'cause that wasn't really what I wanted to do 'cause, in reality, I had a really good parish and I could have stayed there and not become an official Episcopalian and stayed a Roman Catholic. That would have been fine—'cause, I mean, there are wonderful Catholic parishes around where people feel warm and welcomed and everything like that so, it was a tough... it was a tough decision—I laugh about it but, it took me a while [laughs].

FG: Do you consider yourself active politically?

LC: Not... Not real active, I pay attention but, not as active as I used to be. I used to be more

tuned to (???) the local politics in my town than anything else—but I vote—I make sure I vote and if I don't like candidates I write people in that's [laughs]—and I don't just write Bozo the Clown and I write like, like... like I'll write somebody in who I think would be good at the job just because I feel like I should, you know—if I'm, not gonna vote for one of the candidates I shouldn't do something silly, I should vote for somebody who (???)... make... make my point [pounds table] by writing in a legitimate person [laughs].

FG: Is there a particular party you most agree with or, identify with?

LC: I... I am registered Unenrolled, which in Massachusetts—drives me crazy, used to be the old Independent but, Unenrolled sounds like I'm not even registered to vote so I don't like it. They need to come up with a better word. I tend to be more... probably should just register with the Democratic Party because that's where I tend to lean the most is with that. I think that sometimes—some of that—I will probably always lean more with the Democratic Party but, in recent years, it's the Republican Party that has gotten more and more conservative on some of the issues that—and its... and its... and the Democrats do it too but, for the Republicans, for me, it's like either you agree with us or you're bad, you know bad or you know it's—there's no... there's no—its seems to be a less grey area for some topics, you know, you almost need to agree with them on everything to be Republican and I, you know, I just don't... I think social welfare programs are important. I think, you know, I don't think it's everybody's fault that they don't have a job or they can't work or whatever and I get really upset with—because of my maternal instincts, I get [laughs] very upset with programs that cut things for kids when I—the... I forgot about this story. The Big Y in Holden stopped taking the WIC [Women, Infants and Children] vouchers a long time ago and I was like, “What the heck? WIC? Come on!” You know, fruits, vegetables, milk, cheese for babies and pregnant mothers, I mean, this is ridiculous. So, I cut up my Big Y card and I didn't shop there a whole lot anyways, but it's in town so I shopped there sometimes. So I cut up my Big Y [laughs] and I mailed—I wrote this nasty—not nasty... but this very terse letter like I can't believe you're doing this, what the heck? You know, there are poor people in Worcester [Massachusetts] in Holden [Massachusetts], you know, yadda, yadda, yadda. Well, it turned out—they wrote me this very nice letter and sent me my card back and said that they had to stop because they weren't authorized to take them in that particular store and they had illegally been accepting them and then like processing them through another Big Y that was approved to take WIC so they [laughs]... they kinda had gotten caught [laughs]—and they were in the process of applying for a proper WIC permit and I was like, “Okay” [laughs]. But, see when I, you know... that kind of thinking tends to make you go toward the Democratic Party that you know—right now Republicans aren't supporting those kinds of programs. If they ever start supporting them again maybe I'll learn that way but... but they tend not to [laughs].

FG: What are your views on same- sex marriage and the issue of pro-life/pro-choice?

LC: I have no problems with same-sex marriage. I [pause] guess I just... I have a couple of friends who are in same-sex relationships—some of them are actually legally married in Massachusetts and I just see a couple people who love each other and I [pause]—you know, trying to live their lives [pause] so I don't think it... you know—I mean I got married young and had kids and you know have a two bedroom cape and a dog and you know, and a minivan and all those things—right things!—and I ended up divorced so [laughs]... So, I'm like (_____) ???) [laughs]... not quite seeing how that's the only way to go and [pause]... so I.. I just don't think it threatens... I don't think it threatens heterosexual—marriage in general—I don't think people are evil [pause] I... I just don't have a problem with it. And, I'm definitely pro-choice though [pause], I don't think I could ever have an abortion. Like I said, I found out I was pregnant—I got pregnant—two weeks before my 19th birthday and found out two weeks later and, you know, decided to get married, but I did think about for about five minutes and—as an option and I... I just couldn't do it—I don't think that I could personally do it but, there's... women have been having abortions since the dawn of time and my feeling on it is that—and they've inflicted a lot of harm, and you know, there's all those back alley abortion stories and... and... so [pause] I think we need to do what we can to prevent them and I also think (???) ... but I think they need to be legal and safe— I think safety is the number one...safety is the number one issue and I guess that's where I again disagree with the Republican Party because it's like there's not abortion and no birth control and... if you can... I don't want 13 year olds having sex, nobody does, you know... but [pause], if you can lay the groundwork, abstinence is best. I don't think anybody is gonna argue with that; if you don't want to get pregnant, don't have sex! [laughs]. But, if your gonna have sex use birth control, you know, and... and you know... and if you can get that out there then maybe the instances (???) of abortion would go down and... and resources for adoption. I mean it's very hard for a woman [pause]—I mean if you have a difficult pregnancy even if you're, you know, married—I've had friends, you know it can be wearing on you. Never mind if you're single, 16, and your parents are threatening to kick you out of the house and all that kind of stuff. I mean, you need... you need support to get through that so I dunno ..yea I don't... it has to be pro-choice, I don't see any other— but, like I said anything you can do to limit unwanted abortions is good too.

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

LC: Yea, I was involved in my son's Boy's Scout's Den and I volunteered at their elementary schools when they were little and now I'm on the board at my church and I do a number of things there. That's mostly [pause] all I've done.

FG: What led you to join these organizations?

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LC: The Cub Scouts was just... I didn't do as much with my older son—there's six and a half years between my oldest son and my youngest son so, when my oldest son was doing things, the other one was so little that it was hard to... hard to get involved and then they were looking for people who knew something about scouting. I kinda jumped in and filled... filled some of those voids there and the elementary was—I liked being with the kids and I liked being in the school but, I was also hoping to worm myself into a job [laughs]. I was hoping that I'd find a niche and, you know, like be really valuable without, you know, a teaching degree and stuff like that, one of the paraprofessional things but, that didn't work out. The Church just came naturally—we just—we have a lot of different activities at church and one of the things I've done in the last couple of years is—we have—we take our teenagers on work-camp trips and we went—so, I went to Manassas, Virginia and Loveland, Colorado and Rochester, New York—slept on the floor and did community service projects with them and everything. It's very trying and a little fun and makes it easier because I'm not their mom when they're there so its, you know, it's nice to go without your parents once in a while [laughs].

AH: How have health issues impacted your life or those in your family?

LC: We've been very fortunate—we don't really have any... I don't think there's any major health... health issues so I haven't really had to deal with them.

AH: What are experiences in accessing quality affordable health care?

LC: Because my husband— my ex-husband—and I are both white collar professionals in the state of Massachusetts [laughs], we've always had healthcare—we haven't had a problem, we've always—we've pretty much had our choice of health plans and you know, good ones that... and we haven't had to pay healthcare—health care is expensive but we haven't had to like pay exorbitantly for it...we, we've both worked for companies—I've worked for the state so it's easier but, you know, [pounds table] you'll work for companies where the benefits [pounds table] were good and paid for a good chunk of the... chunk of the healthcare so, we've always been very fortunate.

AH: Whose health are you responsible for besides your own?

LC: Nobody's right now. Yeah, [laughs], that was my goal in life [laughs], even though I love my kids I was like okay I just --for three months in a row I don't want to be responsible for anyone, so nobody... nobody... nobody I... I don't care... then they can all come back home and it'll be fine but, I got... I'm getting... I'm just about done with my three months of freedom from—to kinda worry about anybody— [laughs] being responsible [laughs]... that's good? [laugh].

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

LC: [laughs], I don't know. I mean friendships... I think friendships are—women's friendships—are important in telling... I don't think there's much else that you guys have left out. Friendships are important—long-term friendships [pause], how they change.

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

LC: Keep your friends around you [pause]; don't give up everything for a man... I don't... I don't think there's many girls—many women and girls—who do that these days but I'm sure there's some [pause] and I don't... I just don't think this is prevalent culturally but it's still out there, I know it is. Yea and, and... [pause] education is important but I don't know that everybody has to necessarily go to college, per se. I mean, I have a friend whose a... does health aid stuff and she's a CNA [Certified Nursing Assistant]... and...so she keeps doing stuff to... to do that and she likes that job and she's you know, happy, she's good at it, she enjoys it and everything like that but, I think educating, keeping... making sure that you can support yourself if you need to... you just don't know where you're gonna end up [pause] and... [pause] yea, I mean, that's just important.

AH: Is there anybody else you would suggest we talk to?

LC: I can't think of anybody right now.

AH: Alright, we thank you for giving us the opportunity to record your oral history.

LC: You're welcome.