

Interviewee: Linda Forte
Interviewer: Sherri Baker and Jessica Petrangelo
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Transcriber: Sherri Baker and Jessica Petrangelo



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Abstract:

Linda Forte is currently a fifth grade teacher at Worcester Arts Magnet School. Although teaching wasn't her initial career goal, Linda finds it rewarding and worthwhile to be able to make a difference in a child's life. She was the first of her family to be born in the United States, as her family emigrated from Finland. Although she faced no gender discrimination, she was discriminated against as the child of two immigrants. Linda was born in Fitchburg, Massachusetts in 1960. She was brought up in a culturally diverse neighborhood with her five siblings. She describes the importance of family, religion, and community throughout her entire life. Linda stresses community as a great aspect of her life beginning with her childhood, carrying through her days as a student at Assumption College and into her adult life today. In this interview, Linda discusses her various relationships throughout life. She elaborates on her relationships with her three daughters, with whom she is close, as well as other familial relationships and close friendships. Linda elaborates on the changes that she has seen within Assumption College over the years. She also shares her opinions on the differences in today's society compared to when she was growing up.

SB: Okay, first we just have to start off by asking if we have your permission to record this interview today.

LF: Yes, you have my permission.

SB: Okay, thank you. So first, what is your full name?

LF: Linda Elizabeth Forte.

SB: Okay, when were you born?

LF: April 27, 1960.

SB: Have you ever been married?

LF: Yes.

SB: And are you currently married?

LF: No, divorced.

JP: So what is your maiden name?

LF: Eskola.

JP: Eskola.

SB: Do you have any children?

LF: Yes, three. Three girls.

JP: Could we hear about your children?

LF: Oh, sure.

[Jes and Linda laughing]

LF: My oldest daughter, her name is Kristin, and she is a graduate of Bentley College. She's working in public relations and she just got married last spring. Married somebody from, from Bentley, and she's living in Waltham, working there as well. My middle daughter is Karalyn, and she just graduated a year and a half ago from Saint Anselm's, and she is a veterinary nurse and working to go to graduate school to study immunology and virology. She'd like to work for the CDC [Center for Disease Control]. And then my youngest daughter, Katie, is at Arizona State, and she's a sophomore there.

SB: Okay. Now what culture or ethnicity do you identify as?

LF: Finnish.

SB: Okay, and going off of that a little bit...

LF: Mhm.

SB: Both of your parents were born in Finland?

LF: That is correct.

SB: Could you tell us a little bit about that?

LF: Sure. My parents were both born in Finland, as were my five, five older siblings. I'm a first-generation American. I speak, read, and write Finnish fluently. It was a very big part of our culture. I grew up in Fitchburg, and Fitchburg had, at that time, a very heavy Finnish population. In our – we had Finnish church services. We had – everything was Finnish. So I truly am bilingual. You know, not just saying "Oh, I speak another language." I'm truly bilingual, that I could be sitting here talking to you and then [*speaks Finnish*], but then I can come right back and speak to you in English. So, it was just how you – you, you know – the culture at home. That's what we were raised. You walked outside, you learned English, and it was very – you know – my parents were very strict about that. We're in America, you speak English, but at home, you

know, we have a cultural identity of being Finnish. All the customs at home, we celebrated the holidays, and had the traditional foods and things like that, but my parents were very big on the education in the United States.

SB: Sounds good.

JP: And how did they - did they decide to come over?

LF: They did. It was after World War II. My father had served in the military in Finland. He was, I believe it was a major, in the Finnish army. And after that, they were starting to go through some really tough times because of their connection with Russia and things. So they were actually going to – they had all their boarding information, passport information, everything, and they were actually going to go to Australia. And there was a big Finnish population in Australia as well. And one of my dad’s war buddies had written to him and said “Don’t come, the economy is really bad here right now”. So, they came to the - they said “Okay, we’ll go to the United States”. My mother had relatives here, and they were willing to sponsor us as a family. So my parents headed out, and it’s pretty cool, and they came on a – the ship they took, half of it was passengers, and half of it was cargo. And it wasn’t like one of these luxury liners or anything. You were really in cramped quarters. And, and it took them about a week or so to get to the United States. But at that time, the United States had a ban on the number of northern immigra-immigrants coming in. So, my parents arrived in Boston, and they had to board a train immediately and they were sent to Canada. And then in Canada, they had to wait until their visas were called. And then they came, and they were there for almost two years before they were, for lack of a better word – embargo on northern, northern Europeans immigrating in was listed. And at that time, you had to pass a physical, you had to have a job, you had to have a sponsor, and you had to have a place to live before they allowed you into the United States. So everything was in place, and, you know, my parents and my brothers and sisters had arrived for their physicals. Everyone passed. My dad’s blood sugar was elevated just a little bit, and they almost denied us access. They gave him one week, and then he was to come back and have the blood test again. And fortunately, the blood sugar level had lowered, and they allowed us entry into the United States. So, then they came here, and that was 1958, the end of ’58, and I was born in 1960. And at that point, my parents had already entered night school to learn English, and so they could take their citizenship test and things. So they’ve all, you know, my family all became citizens of the United States, and then I was born as a first-generation American. Which is really unusual, to talk to people that are still, you know, a first-generation.

JP: Mhm.

LF: And they settled in – initially, when they came into the United States, they settled in Ashby, Massachusetts, which is northwest of Fitchburg, almost to the New Hampshire border. And my mother’s cousins had a farm there, and that’s where they were living. And then my father found a job working in the paper mills in Fitchburg. And they didn’t have any method of transportation, so he would walk from Ashby to Fitchburg, and finally, they – he actually had to live in a boarding house, near the paper mill, that – the boarding house was for all the, you know, people

that worked in the mills and things that couldn't get back home or things. So, he lived in a boarding house, which was really interesting because I never knew that about my parents until after my dad had passed away, and then my mom was talking to us about it and the paper mill. So he used to walk from the boarding house to the paper mill, and then he would go on weekends back up to the farm, you know, to be with the family. And then my parents found an apartment in Fitchburg, and they lived there for awhile. And the house across the street was put up for sale, and my mother went over, and she said "Listen, I hear it's for sale," she said. "Let's make a deal right now." She said "We'll take it, as is. Everything in it, you know, da-da-da." And they shook on it, and they bought that house. It's a huge house, too, which amazes me – for 7,000 dollars.

SB: Wow.

JP: Big difference.

LF: Exactly, exactly! And, you know, you even had an apartment off the side of it that – so my parents rented that out. And it was – it was, you know, perfect size for our family. But it's just amazing that back then, you know, your mortgage may have only been about 75 dollars a month. But when you were only earning - at the paper mill, my dad was bringing home about 95 dollars a week. And then my mom worked as a house cleaner, housekeeper, maid for doctors, lawyers, people in the area. She would clean their homes, and then she would do their offices as well, in the evenings. And then, she would - you know, that little bit of income would help with some of the little bills and food and things. So then I was born in 1960 into that house, and that's where my family lived. Even up to this day, my sister ended up – my – my mom passed away as well, and my sister ended up buying all the siblings out. So she's still in the original house that my parents moved into in 1959.

JP: Wow.

LF: Yeah, so, it's...you know – that's the heritage. And it's still there, which is kinda neat.

SB: Do you go back there and visit it a lot?

LF: To Fitchburg?

SB: Mhm.

LF: Oh yeah to see my sister. And, you know, occasionally back to church because it's still the same church that the Finns built. And the original church burned down on Christmas Eve the year I was born. And then- then the Finns, because they were all carpenters and everything, they built a big church on the outskirts of the city. And, you know that's still to this day; it's the Finnish Lutheran Church. And that's where people with Finnish heritage go to church. It's pretty cool. And they have a monthly Finnish service still for the Finns that are still alive. Or the next generation that is bilingual. So...

JP: So has religion played a big role in your life?

LF: Huge.

JP: Yeah.

LF: It is. It's – it's like the be all and end all of – of our family. God first, family second, and that was the order. I mean that's what my parents always relied on, was, you know, when my dad was laid off, my mom said, you know, "Don't worry, God will take care of us." You know, and they always would quote – my mom was famous for quoting Proverbs or you know, something like that. And, and now as an adult, I'm thinking to myself, "Oh my gosh, she was like, brilliant! The woman was brilliant." But, you know, like – and sure enough, you know, she worked for a doctor's family and when the – the wife had ordered the groceries she said, "Just whatever we're ordering, just send double and bring it over to the Eskola's." Or people would, you know – there would be a turkey on our front porch or whatever. And my mom always said, you know, "God'll take care of us." But she was also very – very strict about – even when we had a meal, she would first of all, load up dishes and plates and she'd send all of us kids to deliver meals to all the people that were alone or elderly. Th – only then, when we had taken care of other people, were we allowed to sit down and eat. So she really – there was such a charitable side to her. And I – I know that that was very, you know, religious driven. And my parents said that's always what it was and when we – when she passed away, we were talking about what kind of legacy do, you know, your parents leave you? And ours was our faith. You know, that's what they left us with and that's what my mom said. You know, you don't leave your country without a substantial amount of faith that God will take care of you and He puts you where He wants you at the time, so... You know, in all our activities, social activities, at that, you know, time, the fifties and sixties, even into the early seventies – is really – church. You know, you went there and everyone in your community was at the church. And all the activities and things – it's not like today where people have to travel to get to church, you know, this is a real neighborhood and, you know, all the Finns came there, and all their kids came there. And the churches, you know, at that time, they were packed because you had families of seven to ten kids. At that time, you know, the immigrants had huge families.

JP: Mhm.

LF: So, yes, religion was a major factor in our life. Still is today, so...

SB: Now it sounds like – you've mentioned community several times, it sounds like –it's –it's played such a big role in your life. Did you live in a neighborhood growing up where there were a lot of other immigrant families?

LF: Definitely. Fitchburg as I said had a very heavy Finnish population. But we used to call our street like the little United Nations because my – we were the Finnish family, across the street was another Finnish family, but then diagonally across the street were the Italians. No one spoke English. Two doors down were the Greeks. He didn't speak any English. Then we had a French - a French-Canadian family across the street. So it was absolutely hysterical. I mean, no one spoke English, but everyone got along. Like, you know, when my dad had died, I remember, you know, everyone would come over with stuff, and you know, they really couldn't speak to my

mother very well, but the idea was “here, you know, here’s food and food was like, you know - that broke any barrier.” You know, it was like, okay... [laughter] And I remember the Greek family, two doors down from us – he was a Greek priest at the Orthodox Church. And he had an incredible vegetable garden. So every year at the, you know, harvest time, he would, you know, bring tons of fruits, you know, fruits and vegetables to all the families and everything. And then if my mom was baking, she’d send us down there, and you know, so – it we – we were laughing about it one night actually about just the fact that, you know, the Italians and the Finns – and even though we all spoke a broken English, it was like there was no barrier there at all. Everyone understood each other, and you know, the needs of the community at the time. So it was pretty neat to grow up in a time like that where, you know – I brought up the Blizzard of ’78 ‘cause I’m reading that with my class right now, and I said, “You know, at that time, you know – yes, we couldn’t communicate, but everybody was out there shoveling each other out, and making sure that you had heat or electricity or you had enough food or whatever. And today, people don’t even know who their neighbors are.” So it was a neat time to grow up because community was not defined by ethnicity, but community was defined by that helping hand kind of thing. You didn’t have to speak the language. You just knew what people needed, and you responded to it.

JP: So you’ve kept that same sort of value of helping others, like through the rest of your life obviously?

LF: Absolutely.

JP: And you’ve tried to instill that with your kids as well?

LF: Absolutely. Yup. It’s just so important because again, it goes back to, you know, the – the basis of religion in your life and, you know, the expectations that we are to do this for each other. It should not be a government expectation. It shouldn’t be a government program. It shouldn’t be government telling us you have to do it. It should just be natural. Natural charity to – towards one another because, you know, that’s what God wants us to do, so...

JP: You mentioned your work in your class. What are you – a teacher in what kind of school?

LF: I’m an elementary school teacher, public schools. It’s Worcester Arts Magnet. So it - it has extra programs for the students. Dance and theater and things like that. But we are also a, you know, all-subjects school. And we run from pre-k to sixth grade. I’m a fifth grade teacher, all-inclusive so I teach all the subjects. And then I’ve been doing that now in Worcester for sixteen years. Longer in general, but in Worcester for sixteen years.

JP: And what made you want to go into education?

LF: I’m not quite sure actually. I’m a graduate of Assumption College, and I studied Social and Rehabilitative Services here, and I did a minor in Education. And I went through and when it came to the end, it was Social Rehab, and we had to do - in Social Rehab, we had to do different internships, kind of float through different things. And I was like “Oh my gosh, I can’t do this!” I

said Social Service – I was at Worcester City Hospital, which doesn't exist anymore. And I was there in Social Rehab or Social Services. And we had to do all these cases – you know, and I would go to these – and I was like just absolutely beside myself that people lived in squalor, that children were not taken care of. And I said, "How can you not get personally involved in this?" I said, "I can't do it." So I said, "Now what am I going to do?" And I had my education degree and I loved – I mean, that instruction part of it – I love that, and the engaging with kids and things. So I went ahead and took my tests and then applied for certification in education and that's how I ended up in it. It was just kind of by chance but I love it and I'm glad I did that so...

SB: So it sounds like that really means a lot to you.

LF: It does. I think it's working with kids more than anything and I think through teachers kids really do establish an awful lot of what they like, what they don't like, whatever. And I think what my whole purpose as a teacher is always to instill the wonder in every single day. I mean you wake up in the morning and the goal is to learn something new, whether it's in school or whether it's, you know, you turn on the news or you're walking, you know doing your walk in the morning or whatever. I said, "There isn't anyone that can say that you can't learn something every day" and that's what I really want to instill in the kids and then just a passion for history. Because everything I try to tell them has history in it and the more you know about your history, being part of America, being part of, you know, the world in general. I said, "It just makes you a better, rounded person." 'cause then you can talk to anyone about anything. But that's always been my - my goal as a teacher, just to make sure that kids – you know, no matter what hardships they have or whatever there is something to be learned in everything. And if they can walk away with that, then I've done a job, you know.

JP: Did – did you face any challenges in your education...

LF: Myself personally? In education?

JP: Yeah.

LF: Definitely. Being part of an immigrant population, and it's funny you ask this 'cause I was just talking to somebody else about this, there were not any of the bells and whistles you have today to help kids. You walked into a classroom, you were labeled "immigrant." You were put at the back of the room. And I was telling someone the other day that I was sitting in the back of the room and as immigrants came in, they kinda put us together, just in the back. And the girl they partnered me with, she came in and she was actually, literally off the boat from Greece. And they put her with me and they're like "You can help her" and I'm like "Oh my god, it's all Greek to me" no pun intended. [Laughter] You know, I – and I'm thinking to myself, "How do I help - you know I speak Finnish, they're not even close in language at all. And I said, "Alright so you know – you – you learn to visual them – create visuals for her and things like that and we got to be pretty good friends. And – and you know, we helped each other through that particular grade and she was just like one of these most beautiful – I – see, being blonde haired and blue eyed, that's all you ever really knew, other than – I did have red heads in my family, a couple of my siblings. But she was one of these, you know, Mediterranean beauties,

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the – the dark hair, the brown eyes, we were all like, “Wow” [laughter] You know, like she was just gorgeous, we’d never seen you know, it was like, so that’s what the Greek myths are about, these goddesses, you know. And you’re a little kid- I was in fifth grade at the time when, you know, she was put with me at the back of the room so that was – a – a – a huge thing that we had to overcome because it was either you were gonna sink or you were gonna swim, there was no question about it and I think a lot of the immigrants at that time were gonna prove everybody wrong. The work ethic that the immigrants had was incredible so, like, when I would come home from school, my parents, even though they couldn’t help us at all, like, it was Greek to them, basically English, so we’d come home and if I said, “Oh I don’t have any homework” [whispers] no, that didn’t cut it. [speaks normally] We would have to bring home books and we had to sit and we had to study and I remember saying to my dad one time, I said, “Dad, I don’t understand this” and he said, “But you were the one in school today.” You know, so there’s just a huge difference in the way school is today because I’ll get every single excuse why someone didn’t do their work or whatever and, you know, oh they didn’t understand it or this or, you know, that. It wasn’t – that did not cut it, you know, when I was growing up, and you just worked that much harder to get things finished and if they came to you, great, if they didn’t you just had to keep plugging along. And I think writing was always really difficult because Finnish is very different from English. So I actually put myself into Latin classes so I could learn, you know, how language fit and, you know, roots and, you know, the prefixes and suffixes and things like that and just really, I guess, how language was arranged and Latin was really good at that so I put myself into those classes so I could learn language better. And it was, you know, it was a challenge but, you know, that – that’s what makes you who you are, you know, and okay so yeah you had those challenges but you learned to overcome them and then you – you moved on. So and then, you know, coming into college, I was the first one in my family to go to a four-year college. My – you know, I had siblings that are professionals like one of them is a nurse and she went three years, another was a medical secretary and she went two years and another one is a hair dresser at hairdressing school and another is a hair dresser at hairdressing school, one went to art school, one was drafted to Vietnam and he came back on the G.I. Bill and did some – never graduated – but did a couple of courses in business and opened his own, very successful, construction/roofing company. So everyone’s had, you know, a little bit of education ‘cause education was important but it was what you did with it, that’s what my parents were like, yeah you can go and you can sit and do this but what are you gonna do with it in the end? So I was the first one to graduate from a four-year college and that being Assumption College. It’s great.

SB: Now since you’ve mentioned a couple of different times how different things are now, could you maybe talk about some of the - the biggest differences you’ve noticed, either in, and you’ve said you’ve been in Worcester for sixteen years now, either in Worcester or in Assumption since you’ve graduated or from your school years to now when you’re teaching.

LF: Mhm. Okay I think – well Assumption if you look at the physical, it’s changed a lot. The – the only thing that we had on campus the – the extension of lower campus were just the four and five men apartments, the townhouses, that was it. That was, you know, we used to – we had the Hill, you know, A, B, and C dorm. I lived in C dorm my junior year and then we had – we

were in 4B one of the townhouses. Nothing else was there. It was just open and I used to walk because I did my student teaching at Nelson Place so I – the little kids that lived in the neighborhood, it was hysterical, they'd walk through Assumption's football field, pick me up at 4B and we'd walk to school together. [laughter] So, anyway, but there was like nothing. And as I was telling you, I was on the library committee because we had to break ground on a new library back in '82 in order to get our accreditation. Assumption was like teetering because all we had for a library was the Salon [La Maison Francaise], second floor, that was it, top, that was all we had. Most of the books we had were in French, so it really didn't help a lot, you know. [laughter] So we used the [Colleges of Worcester] Consortium to go to the different libraries if we needed to. But that's all we had was that tiny spot up there. And it [laughs] it was funny during finals from, you know, you'd have to run in there at like when it opened at seven to grab a carrel because you had – there was no space at all. And if people moved your books you were like ready to kill somebody. [laughter] You know, it was like ahh! And then we would go and go to brunch and then run back over, you know, on a Sunday and grab our spot. And so it was really – I mean the whole – the general, physical appearance of Assumption has changed tremendously just the construction and – and, you know the gym, we had just the gym. It wasn't the Hagan Center, there wasn't the Plourde Rec Center - I mean it's just amazing how much has changed physically at Assumption. And I think also academically my class was the first class to graduate with an Accounting major, didn't even have it before. So we were the first class to have accounting. And a couple of my good friends were in that program and you know, I – it's just amazing to me – oh and the funny part was computers were just starting to develop and we had a computer room, one room, and the mainframe was like huge and we were learning – it wasn't even like getting on there and like typing, it was like you had to learn computer programming back then. And let me see, where was that? In the bottom of Alumni. It was one room in the bottom of Alumni Hall that was the computer room that was our lab. And then the Post Office was down there on the first floor and we had Campus Ministry was there – but it was all down there on that first floor of Alumni. And what else? Oh, the Pub, this was really great, Founders, the bottom floor of Founders was our pub and our first year here, you know, everyone was drinking, [laughter] you know, and you went to the pub and that was great 'cause you were 18 and it was the – we left for Easter break, which you know, of course, being a Catholic school we had like that Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and then Monday was Holy Monday so you had that off too. It was like a week off. And before we left for Easter break, that was the – when we were coming back that's when the drinking age went up to 21. So our freshman year, first semester and half of the second semester everyone was like partying and wild and then we came back after Easter and it was like [makes face, laughter] you know, we couldn't drink. It's like, yeah. And Founders, it was the greatest pub though, it was like jam-packed and oh, it was so much fun. [Hits hands on table] And real sticky on the floor and everything from all the beer [laughter] oh, it was a great place. And then that kind of went by the wayside and then I think it was, no it was after we graduated, when they made the – the pub in, is it Hagan Center? That's where it was, then after that...

JP: They have pub night.

LF: Pub night.

JP: But it's – it's not necessarily a pub pub.

LF: No pub pub.

JP: Yeah. [laughter]

LF: Yeah we had a little pub it was really cute. And then – it – it's just amazing because this is all we had really. We had Alumni, Desautels and Founders, those were our dorms. And then up on the Hill we had A, B, and C and the six man townhouses that were up there and then it was like, [gasps] miracle of miracles, they built four and five man townhouses and we got into one of those which was exiting our senior year. But it was just you – you know I think back and it was – we were such a small, like even physically we were very small, you know, so everybody knew everyone, I mean, I'd walk on camp – “Hi, hi how are you?” And I remember one of my friends' roommates they said, “Oh you know when you go away on the weekends we just have a sign saying ‘Linda says hi’” You know, and I said, “Great, good keep it up! PR!” And – that's – and then we had our – in the basement of the gym was our snack bar, and yeah I know, weird huh? [laughter] And that was – that was the Assumption Junction. I think that came after, I can't remember what its name was when I first arrived. But that's where we could go and we could get snacks and stuff and then it was really cool because freshman year I lived on the third floor of Desautels and it was locked at 9 o'clock. We called it “The Nunnery.” Now it was like you couldn't – you couldn't come on the floor unless, you know, someone let you on and it was really – I mean we were all up there and it was hysterical because that year I was also a Fire Marshall. Oh! Big man on campus! [laughter] Fire Marshall and you know like on SGA and everything and when we'd have, back then we had bomb scares and things like that so bomb scare got called in and we had to, you know, evacuate, so I had to go knock on everybody's door and I – I was like, “If anyone else is in there, don't tell me. Come on out.” [laughter] You know so it was kind of – it was just we had a lot of fun, we really did and... what else? Oh, and the science building was only the Kennedy building. That's where all our labs were and everything. Because when I first came, I was a Natural Science major. I was gonna do Pre-Med. And that's all we had. And then they had one lecture hall that we – you know, that's where all my education courses were, all in the Kennedy building. And we had what were called ‘the relocatables’, too. And they were these you know, like trailers, kind of, and they – when classes started to get larger as Assumption was growing, they brought these like, trailers, and that's where we had classes. And those were [clears throat] those were all my English classes, were down in the relocatables. And the Fuller building was only our Social Rehab classes. And so it was really, I mean, as I said, physically, it was small. So you did get to know everyone on campus. Let's see, so there was the –the – the snack bar in the basement of the gym, the pub was in the basement of Founders. Campus Ministry, Post Office, and the computer lab were in the basement of Alumni. And the third floor of Desautel was a nunnery, locked at nine o'clock. And I – you know, we had triples because you know, there was overcrowding my freshman year, so some of the girls were in triples. And so, you know... great times. Great, great times. And still, my best friends – there were four of us that have remained friends right from college, and you

know, we still see each other on a weekly basis or you know, a monthly basis to go out to dinner. We all had children the same time, so all our kids are the same age. So it's pretty neat, the lasting friendships that you – you've made. But I think academically, of course, I mean, I see what you guys have now, compared to what we - I me – oh my gosh! I mean, your choice of majors now, the different things, you know, that you can do is just amazing to me.

JP: I'm sure the tuition was different as well.

LF: Oh, yeah. My freshman year was 3,800 [dollars].

JP/SB: Wow.

LF: So you know, \$3,800.00, it was something that I could work, and I did. I worked all my summers, all my vacations. I worked three jobs on campus. I had a work study job. I did a tutoring job off campus in one of the houses right on Salisbury St., and then on – one of my friends was student manager in the caf, and at that time, there was Saga - was our food provider or whatever. So she needed people to serve, or she needed people to wash pots. "Linda, you available?" "Be right down!" So it was, you know, and – so I could. I worked all my vacations, summers, three jobs during the school year, and I could afford \$3,800 dollars, you know. And then by the time I graduate - Now, this is how much it started to go up. \$3,800.00 my freshman year; when I graduated, it was \$10,000. So in four years, see, it was starting to really go up. But then when I like – I'm like thinking about that, I'm freaking out because my daughter told me, she goes "Aren't you glad I graduated from Bentley like a couple of years ago?" I said, "Why?" She says "It's 55,000 dollars." I'm like [gasps]. And – and then Karalyn said "Yeah, St. A's is about forty, forty-two [thousand dollars] now". And you know, Katie being out of state at ASU, it's 32,000. So it's like, oh my gosh. I mean, I – and our salaries really haven't changed a lot. I mean because basically, what Kristin was paying – would have been paying at Bentley, is basically a teacher's salary. So one year of my salary would have paid for one year of her going to college. So thank God they had work ethic and they got scholarships because – not happenin' on my budget. But that's, you know...\$3,800. 00

SB: That's incredible.

LF: Woo-hoo, you know, and back then – you know, back then, it was do-able, but that was a lot for us, you know, \$3,800, so... I could go on. I just loved Assumption. I just loved our time here because then I went on and I was on the Alumni Board, and I did homecoming – I was co-chair of homecoming for a couple of times. I served on the Alumni Board, I think – I can't even remember how many years I was on that. But then, now I'm on the Central Mass Worcester Committee for alumni. So I've been doing a lot with Assumption. I just can't get enough.

SB: I think that'll happen when we graduate.

LF: I hope so. I hope so. It's just like, it's so great.

JP: When you were going to school at Assumption, were the majority of your peers men or

women?

LF: When I came, I think there were still more men here than there were women. Then how come pickings were slim? I don't get it. Anyway – because most of them were probably going into the priesthood. [laughter] Anyway, but I think there were more – there were more men because remember women were only really admitted early '70's, and I came in '78, so there was still – there was still that flux of, you know, the ratio was still pretty imbalanced.

JP: And did you experience any discrimination because you were a woman?

LF: No. None at all.

JP: Well, that's good.

LF: Yeah, none at all.

JP: Well, speaking of discrimination, were – was there any other reason that you were discriminated for – I – I don't know if anybody is discriminated for being Finnish.

LF: No, you know, but – no, because no one knows about it [laughter]. That small little country. It's kept quiet. It should be the Switzerland – no, I'm only kidding. [laughter] Anyway, it – no, I really don't think, you know, you came across any kind of discrimination. I mean, by the time we get to college, I think you know, from my experiences, everyone was here. We were doing the same thing. We were here for education. You made your friends. And just like anything, you'd seem to move towards people who were very similar to you. And that's what college is about. You found your friends, and you didn't need a thousand of them. You had your handful, and those are the ones – I mean, to this day, you know, my core of my, you know - the four of us - but there's still the group that we all hung around together. And you know, we still call each other, talk, you know. And not just holidays. This is still, you know - last night, I was on the phone with one of my friends. He didn't transfer here until his sophomore year. And we just kind of absorbed him into the group. And I was talking to him last night because his daughter just got accepted to Hartwick College, and he was telling me about, you know...So it's great. Those friendships have really been lasting through all the years. But no, no discrimination. No.

JP: [laughs] What was considered fashionable when you were younger?

LF: Oh my god, we were gross! [laughter] Ohhh, fashionable. I think, you know, like I loved that like, the prep look. I loved, you know, L.L. Bean, or you know – did it even exist then? Yes, I think so. [laughter] But you know, I liked the button-down oxfords, which was - it's a classic look, so there really wasn't much you could veer from, you know. And I always laugh because – we still laugh about this – anyway, just a couple of kids on campus that – they had the – their slacks were pressed. These guys looked like models. It was like, come on, you know. [laughter] They had, you know, the khakis and you could see the crease in them, and then, you know. And we'd always say, “well, you know, they came from wealthy families”, but I think, you know, I don't think we were that much different. Our hairstyles were horrendous. We really did come out

of the '70's, which was gross. You know, polyester was urghhhh – I don't even – I can't imagine that you'd want to even bring polyester back, but [laughter] go ahead, experience the sweat running down your arms 'cause it's not absorbed by fabric [laughter]. But you know, I – I really don't think – I think some of the things I laugh about like – I saw someone the other day, and I – I – I had to do a double-take. We used to wear like, leggings under our shorts when we'd go running. I mean, how like gross was that? I'm like "Oh my gosh! You're stuck in time! Get rid of your – get rid of it!"

JP: Oh, that's definitely coming back.

LF: Yeah, oh, why? [laughter] It just kills me. But yeah, you know, I think when I look back, we weren't that much different, you know? I think we were shaking off the '70's and moving into the '80's, but – and our hair was big. It was gross. [laughter] You know, and we thought we looked good. Oh, that w – I think that's the kicker. You leave thinking "Oh, I look great!" you know, and then you look back at pictures and say "How did anyone let me out of the apartment [laughter] or the dorm?" I mean, but then we all looked alike, so it made no difference. Big hair was big. I – I – It was gross. Li – lion mane. It was huge. It was gross.

JP: What did you do for fun?

LF: Oh, everything. We really did.

JP: You mentioned the – the pub.

LF: The pub. We used to go to the pub. But we used to have like, live band dances. You know like, you know, the – the caf was where we had everything. And we would, you know, break down the tables and the chairs and then put up the stage and the band would come in, and...oh, it was awesome. It was really great. And you know, we did that, like every Friday night. That kind of thing. And you know, some of us were – like I was on the track team. And one of my roommates was also on the track team, so you know, we did that, and oh, it was a lot of just really hanging out together. I mean we had more stories to tell from being in the dorms and – and stuff, but you know, being on SGA and being class officer. Junior and senior year I was Vice President, and you know, we would run the dances at that point. But there was one part, see it's so different now to try to explain it, but you know where you guys come in now, to get into the cafeteria, there's that little desk. Well none of that was there. And you would come in and there was just a bar right – kind of – I don't even know how to explain it. It – It was just really different. But we would corner that area off with like chairs and - and things, and that was the pub over on that side when we'd have a band, and 25 cent beers, and you know...Oh yeah, yeah. But that was tough back then. [laughter] "Anyone have a quarter?" So – and you had to stay in that area to drink because see now the drinking age had gone up already, so you had to kind of – people were trying to sneak under there, but I'd grab 'em by the cuff. "Don't even try it." [laughter] Or people would try to get in for free, you know, climb under, and it was only like a buck to get in the dance, and I'd be grabbing them. "Oh my god, Linda's working the door!" [laughter] "Yeah, it's for our class buddy, so cough it up!" And then we had, you know, like we would do...we had the dating game one y – we – so much fun. We set it up and you know,

people volunteered to be dating game. We had oh, oh, I don't know, what do you call them? Everyone put on like skits. We had skit nights. We did, you know, a – a variety show. My group of friends, we did the short people, you know. And it was funny, the costumes. And we had you know, Halloween dances and parties and you know, just – it was so much fun. And dorms would compete against each other in different things, and you know...it was just great. It was just such a – a great environment to go to school.

JP: So you really always had that sense of community?

LF: Always.

JP: When you were a kid, and even when you went to college...

LF: Right into college. Yep. Yep.

JP: Wow.

LF: The health. If you want to talk about health, it's funny. We had the infirmary. [laughs] And the infirmary was only, I don't even know if it's – I don't think it's there any – in the – where the cafeteria is. It was in the bottom level of the cafeteria. No one ever went [laughter] because everyone was always like “Yeah you go in with a sore throat and they're like ‘strip down.’” And I'm like, “But it's my throat. Can't you just look at it?” [laughter] You know, “It's my ear.” “Strip down!” So no one ever went because they were like, “Forget it, I have a toothache.” “Strip down!” [laughter] So no one ever went to the infirmary. It was like no; everyone stayed away from it. But I'll tell you, the first time ever being away at college and getting sick. Now Fitchburg at the time was about an hour, because you could only go route 12 to get to Fitchburg, before they opened [route] 190. So I really felt like I had gone away to college; I was an hour away. And first time ever it was like the world because I was – it was Valentine's day. I was in charge of the dance and we were sending candy grams and everything and I had to dictate from bed, you know. And I even missed the dance, I was like so upset. But anyway, they had — when you were sick you had the – there wasn't a private bathroom; it was, you know, it was a dorm. And so you had to drag yourself down the hallway and then you had to lay on the cold floor and everyone could hear you and everyone saw you laying – it wasn't like being at home and being able to like lay down on the bathroom floor if you weren't feeling good and close the door or whatever. This was like public domain. Oh my gosh, and you felt bad for each other but then, you know, someone's in there getting sick and nobody wants to go in the bathroom anymore. And the other thing we had on our floor was – we had telephone booths on every floor. And so you would get a phone call and someone would yell “Linda! It's your mom!” You know, and you'd go running down the hall and you'd, you know, sit in the phone booth, close the door and talk to your...[mimics conversational noises] And then, you know, you could call dorm to dorm; we all had extensions. So I was dating the guy I ended up marrying. He was up on upper campus. So he would call the – every floor had their own per – floor phone. And you'd get, “Linda! It's Jay!”, you know. So it was pretty cool, it was kinda community. Again commu - everything was community. Nothing was in isolation and that's probably one of the biggest things that I think is different now; everything is isolated. Like, you

don't have to leave your dorm room, you don't – you know, or whatever. You have phones, you have computers, you have anything you possibly need you have there; you don't have to mix with people. And we did. I mean, community bathrooms, you know the – the phone on the floor, everyone knew who was calling who. You know – you – you – it was just part of that community which I think now has become – we're practicing more isolationism. You know, which in history you hear that, you know, did the United States have a form – a policy of isolationism? But I think we as human beings are isolating ourselves from each other. You know, you can have groceries delivered if you want, you don't ever have to leave anymore or be with people. And I think that's the biggest thing I think I see changing is that, you know, people aren't associating with each other anymore. And I think – and then that – that non-association, we're getting less and less able to deal with situations that come up without reverting to violence or – or something like that. And I see that in school, kids aren't holding doors, kids don't say thank you, they don't say please. Just the common things as a civilization we should have in order to be able to – to get along. And it's – it's kind of evaporating because we've become such technological people and that's kinda scary, you know. But – but healthy, I think most people on campus were healthy. I think, you know, I don't ever remember, other than getting, you know, our sore throats or, you know, you know, ear infections or anything, you never heard of anyone, anything really happening.

JP: How about in terms of your family. Were there any big health issues?

LF: Oh yeah. Everyone. My dad died from a heart attack, but he was a diabetic which almost kept us from coming in, but little did we know that that's what it was gonna evolve into. My – my mom had blood pressure. She died of cancer. You know, and now it's funny because all the siblings, we've all kind of taken something from our – our parents you know? Three of my siblings are diabetics. One of my siblings has had cancer, and survived, thank God. You know, I'm the one that had – picked up all the respiratory problems from my mom, you know. She also had like scoliosis – no not scoliosis what is it? It's that - osteoporosis, so two of my siblings now have real bad back problems. So it's funny if you know your genetic make up you can now – well we all get together as siblings and say “You got that from mom, you got that from dad, you got that– and that person's really sick.” And you know, that kind of thing so there were – there were quite a – you know a lot of health issues. And I think we have better things now. See this is the flip side of technology; we have better ways of dealing with it than they would have. Like my dad died, he had a heart attack at the age of 68 and back then in 1977 - he never would have died from that heart attack if it were today because of everything that could be done for that. My mom's cancer, she had pancreatic cancer, which they still – it's a very rapid moving cancer and she was diagnosed and in ten days, died. So it's a real – they still don't know enough about that. But cancer itself, the research and things have evolved enough that my sister who had cancer is a survivor so you know you could see that technology has played a – a very important and great part in our – in our health, but it's really doing a disservice in our social aspect.

JP: Definitely.

LF: Yep.

SB: So do you think we have any, as a society today, any big, major health concerns? Or do you think the technology has helped to take care of that?

LF: I think we, you know, I'll think we'll always have health concerns. I think because, you know, I think your – if you're predisposed genetically to something, I think something triggers it in your environment. I think we're – we're smarter, we're healthier, I mean, my girls, I can't believe I mean, they drink water all the time and we grew up drinking soda. I mean, it – it was like and I love soda. And you know, now I'm like a water drinker, and occasionally I feel like a, you know - this contraband I got a Coke, and I felt like I had to shove it in my pocketbook so that no one could see it like "Oh my God, you're drinking soda." But you know it – it's just amazing to me that you know – and it wasn't something I demanded of the girls, it's just a lifestyle that they became. They were – they were all athletes so water was a – you know, part of their whole routine and things. They're healthier eaters. I mean, I'll sit down – if I'm craving chocolate, I'll make myself a chocolate cake. You know, they have a candy bar. I mean, come on, I'll eat the cake and they'll have a candy bar. [laughter] But yet, and I just think that they're – kids today I think, you know, not kids meaning little kids, but you guys. I think you – you make more healthy choices and maybe it's because you have more choices. I was in the grocery store and I – see I talk to anybody – there was a person next to me in line and we're looking at the cereal and I said, "You know, isn't this pathetic? We have like a whole row of an aisle of cereal. You can start at one end and go to the other and I still don't know what I want."

JP: Yep.

LF: I said, "I grew up in a town when you had Frosted Flakes, you had Corn Flakes, I think Rice Krispies were just emerging on the market. [laughter] But you know, that's all we had to choose from. And now, I don't even know what to pick up anymore, you know like, but there were healthier cereals out there too, which is – which is good. Our – our choice was always like [makes noise] a glob of oatmeal. [Laughter] And that used to take me forever to eat [makes noise, laughter]. But I just think that you – your lifestyle is healthier. So I think it may not be the technology that's doing it, but I think your generations are making healthier choices. So sometimes genetics might be pushed off. But I still think no matter how healthy you are, if your genetic make – up, I mean I know thin, thin people that have heart attacks. Or you know, I think sometimes just genetically we're made, you know, made in the way that something could trigger something. But I think you guys are doing a better job making the conscious decisions to be healthy. Ugh, you know, us, oh my God, chips. And then we'd lather on like baby oil and go sit in the sun [laughter]. Oh my gosh. Sunscreen? What was that? [laughter] It was like, you know, get the Johnson's baby oil and we would squirt it and go sit outside and burn to a crisp. Oh my Lord! When I think about that – you know, and we didn't wear helmets when we were, you know riding our bi – how did we survive? How is there your generation [laughter] because we were like – we were like crazy. And, you know no helmets for roller blading and well, of course, I still had roller skates with the key and everything when I grew up. But no

helmets, there weren't car seats, seat belts were optional, you didn't – you didn't even get cars that had seatbelts back then. And maybe it's now because there are more of us on the roads and I think, you know, just the amount of people using cars, more traffic. Back then, we had a family of nine, one car. And we walked everywhere, you know, so... But you lived in a city where you could do that. Fitchburg was very accessible: the high school, the middle school, elementary schools, downtown. Everything was walking distance which was pretty cool. So...

JP: Just a couple more questions.

LF: Yup.

JP: Because I think we've almost, we have run out of time.

LF: Yeah, okay, so. I'm like talky-talky.

SB: Oh, we love it.

LF: Oh, great!

JP: Okay, in regards to housework, these questions, I – I ...

LF: No, go ahead.

JP: What are your primary responsibilities and do you share your responsibilities with anyone?

LF: Oh no, it's me. I do it all. [laughter]

JP: You do it all?

LF: I do it all. I painted my house, I did the plumbing, I do – you know, and I think a lot of that is also a result of, you know, it's expensive. And you will have to learn how to do things that come up in order to kind of save money. It's - it's within a budget. So, nope, I do it all. Inside, outside, it's me.

JP: So when you were married, w – were there like specific responsibilities for you and for your husband?

LF: Nope.

JP: Or it was just a shared...

LF: Nope. It was just shared. You know, if he saw that something needed vacuuming then he'd vacuum it, and if I felt like "Oh, today's a great day, I'm gonna go outside and mow the lawn," I did the yard work and you know... And it – it was just very shared. There wasn't any defined lines in our relationship. You just saw what needed to be done, and you did it. You know, I preferred to give him the things that were, you know, the difficult stuff like "You paint the house and do that" [laughter]. You know, so...

SB: So you didn't really have any of those stereotypical gender roles?

LF: No. Nope. And it was funny because even when I was growing up my parents were equal. If my dad, see back then we still had a ringer washing machine. I know, it sounds like I'm like – I came out of the dark ages but [laughter] it really wasn't. It was not too far ago, well, fifty years but anyway we had the ringer washer still. So sometimes, you had to do hand laundry. My dad would be doing it. He'd be washing our socks in the sink. If my mom was working at one of the doctor's houses, if they had a dinner party or something, my dad would make us dinner. You know, there was never any – it was just always a very shared responsibility and I saw that in my family so that's the way my relationships evolved. My husband's on the other side, his was very defined. The man was the head of the household. This was Italian. Man was head of the household, the wife did the cooking, raising the kids, da da da, boom boom boom. And see – and the Finns, much different. It was – family was extremely important and you shared your roles, you know, there were no defined roles, everything in a family was shared. You were part of it, and you did it. And that's the way their culture is today in Finland as well. Like, kids don't start school until they're seven years old. So there isn't any daycare, there isn't – kids are brought up at home and then they're sent to school at the age of seven with all the social skills and everything in place. And that's why Finland is number one in the world in education.

JP: Wow.

[laughter]

LF: Yes. But anyway, it – it really is. It just came out, there was a big study and Finland came out number one and people were like, "Why is that? Can we do that?" and I say, "No," I said, "Because their thing is family. They're not sending kids to school at 18 months old. They're waiting til these kids are seven years old and ready to be educated." So, anyway, but yup. Just cultures I guess, very different.

JP: I think we should conclude this.

SB: Did you have – just before we wrap up. Was there anything else you wanted to share at all? Anything else you thought would be important?

JP: What – what – actually what was your greatest success, do you feel in your life?

LF: My three girls. Those – greatest success. Seeing that they have become productive individuals and not only are they productive in their own personal lives but they have that, also that sense of community that – the three of them are extremely close. Which I think is – is phenomenal, that they consider themselves each other's best friends. And I love to see that because I just think I hear too many families where we...we're at a wedding on Saturday and one of the – the younger sister, who's the maid of honor, said it wasn't until her sister met the guy that she ended up marrying that did she even get to know her sister. I'm thinking, "How sad is that?" So, yeah they're – they're – just to know that they're productive and they're kind people and they have that, you know, sense of family, I think that's – that's huge. It's been my biggest

success.

JP: That's very nice.

LF: So...anyway. But that's it.

JP: So thank you for coming out and talking to us.

LF: Oh, you're very welcome.

SB: Thank you very much. We really appreciate it so much.

LF: Oh sure! I know, I could keep going, I'm sorry.

SB: Oh we'd love to listen to you keep going.

LF: It's just that there are so many stories to tell, you know, and so many even just within Assumption, you know, our four years here. And it's just great. So, anyway. Well if you need anything, follow up, let me know. You have my number, give me a call. Anything else I can do for you, just ask.