

Interviewee: Barbara Groves  
Interviewers: Andrew Savard and Brian Dixon  
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Worcester Women's Oral History Project

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**Abstract:** Barbara Groves was born in Springfield, MA. Her father was a salesman and deacon, and her mother was a pianist at the local church. She has one sister; she's married and has two daughters, one son, and one child deceased. In this interview Barbara discusses her life story including her moving to nine different locations throughout her life. She discusses her teaching and counseling career and how they have helped her find meaning in her life. Indeed, in this interview, Barbara gives insight to a number of ways of finding significant meaning in life.

**BG:** Well, I grew up in Worcester, although I have lived all over the U.S. and when I went to college, people would ask me where I was from and I would say Worcester, Mass. And they would ask where is that? And I would say near Boston. Is today the 16<sup>th</sup>? My other grandson's college application is due today. Do you want my address here? [completing forms]

**AS:** Yes. Just so you know we have iPads and are using them as recording devices.

**BG:** Ok.

**BD:** This is for the Worcester Women's Oral History Project, and there is a list of questions that we have to ask you.

**BG:** Ok.

**BD:** If you don't feel comfortable with everything then just say next question.

**BG:** Well I have been in education for 35 years, so I am used to weird questions.

**BD:** Oh, we'll have some interesting stories then.

**BG:** Oh yes.

**BD:** Yay!

**BG:** And of course I want you to get A's on the project.

**BD:** Yeah it's a very important project.

**BG:** It is. Oh nice!

**BG:** Do I need to fill this out?

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**BD:** No, because you have already filled some of this out.

**BG:** Well, in case this falls apart, I'll put my name on the top. So where is Fremont near?

**AS:** Plaistow.

**BG:** Oh, okay, my sister lived in Hudson, which is near Nashua.

**AS:** Oh, okay. Yeah, I'm 40 minutes from there. I'm very secluded in the woods.

**BG:** Oh nice. Well there are some beautiful places. Other names I use? Well, Nana. (Laughter).

**BD:** Yeah, there are some really weird questions. You don't have to answer them.

**AS:** So, you don't have too, but we were instructed to take a picture of you. You have full rights to say no.

**BG:** That's alright.

**AS:** If you'd like to, we are prepared.

**BG:** You don't get an A for the course if you don't...

**BD:** We need a visual because we are doing a power point.

**BG:** Yeah, ok, now brothers and sisters... hmmmhmmm

**BG:** Let's see I wasn't born here but I grew up here. Hmmm. I lived a lot of places so. I'm trying to think of the year my parents came here. I guess it was 1940 to 1961... I'm gonna put near WPI because I lived in two areas. Over there by Tech [Worcester Polytechnic Institute].

**AS:** Thank you.

**BG:** Did I answer all of them?

**BD:** Yep.

**BG:** That thing is cool, it's like a Kindle?

**BD:** Yeah, actually we are reading a book on Kindle for this course right now, called *Life of Pi*.

**AS:** Yeah, *Life of Pi*.

**BG:** Yeah, I like reading on my Kindle.

**BD:** My mother has a Kindle. It does a lot of things and its lightweight so we don't have to carry around a bunch of lumpy books.

**BG:** So you get to take notes and things?

**BD:** Yes and all kinds of neat things.

**AS:** Yes.

**BD:** But it's incredible. We can record things just like right now.

**AS:** This is my phone I'm gonna take a picture.

**BG:** Oh okay.

**AS:** When you're ready...

**BG:** Anytime.

**BD:** Do the picture.

**BG:** Yeah do the picture. Before we get going.

**AS:** [takes picture] Alright, that's suitable?

**BG:** Yes.

**BD:** Alright let's go, so the first questions we have are very similar to the ones you filled out. So we're gonna go through them very quickly. What's your full maiden name?

**BG:** My full maiden name was Barbara Louise Burnett.

**BD:** And now your married name?

**BG:** Groves.

**BD:** Where were you born?

**BG:** Springfield, Massachusetts.

**BD:** Oh, out west!

**BG:** Well, (laughs) the western part of the state.

**BD:** Do you have children?

**BG:** I do! I have three children living. I have one child that died. I had four.

**AS:** Sorry that's rough.

**BD:** Any grandchildren?

**BG:** Seven. Five boys and two girls.

**BD:** What cultures or ethnicities do you identify with?

**BG:** On my father's side, the family was Scottish and French with a little Irish in there somewhere. On my mother's side it's all German.

**BD:** So the next part is tell me about your parents. So like what were they like or how did they help you grow up?

**BG:** Well I was lucky I had wonderful parents. My father was a very friendly outgoing man; he spent most of his life in sales and was very active in church. My mother was a pianist and grew up in Ohio, and she was a -- I guess I would call her a very classic type of... very dignified, very quiet and in some ways creative. They were quite different but that was probably a good thing. (Laughs). They were very loving, I had one sister and we were only 13 months apart so we were very fortunate to grow up in a home somewhere where we had lots of love and I think we knew it and lots of discipline and I think we knew that (laughs). So yeah.

**BD:** Good that's perfect. So like where have you lived during your life?

**BG:** Well, I started out in Massachusetts and I lived here until I went to college, and I went to college in Ohio, and then I married my husband. And we lived in Pennsylvania for two years and Delaware for two and a half years. We lived in Virginia for two and a half years, and then we moved to Portland, Oregon. And we lived there for six and a half years. And then we came back to Massachusetts, and I lived in Auburn for 24 years. And then in 1998 I moved to Louisville, Kentucky.

**AS:** Wow.

**BG:** And then I lived there for seven years. And in 2005 I retired and I came back and we live in Holden.

**AS:** So was it a job that prompted all these moves or...

**BG:** Yeah, in the beginning it was my husband's job. When I went to Louisville, it was for my job. So, my husband was with American Optical Company and when we moved he moved from Pennsylvania to Delaware to Kentucky to Virginia to Oregon.

**BD:** That's amazing.

**AS:** So was he an optician or...

**BG:** No, he actually managed the branches of American Optical Company so he was in management.

**BD:** He wanted to be an Optometrist. One of these days that's what he is here for.

**BG:** Oh that's great!

**AS:** (chuckles)

**BD:** Such a good connection.

**BG:** That's a great field.

**AS:** Alright, so I guess if you could just tell us a little bit about what the neighborhood was like when you were growing up, you can choose probably anyone you want.

**BG:** When I was a child?

**AS:** When you were a child.

**BG:** When I was a child I lived here, I lived in, as I said, near WPI off Institute Road. There were old Victorian homes there if you have ever seen that neighborhood and I had friends; there weren't many kids on the street. I had friends though that we walked to school, we didn't get busses, so before that when I was younger, you know like around first grade, I lived off Holden Street and we lived in an area where, you know, we had a lot of woods behind us and so forth. That area is built up a lot today but not when I lived there.

**AS:** So of all the places you've lived would you say you preferred a city suburban area to a rural area?

**BG:** I never really lived in a rural area. I've lived in suburbs; I like the city. I think when I was in high school we lived on Institute Road. I used to walk downtown. I used to take the bus, you know, if I was gonna go to a movie or something. Yeah, I liked the city. I don't think I would have enjoyed living in the country too much although I love to vacation in, you know, the mountains and the woods and so.

**AS:** Ok, so do you have any family members that live in the same area, like currently?

**BG:** My only sister lives in Minneapolis so that's pretty far away. I have an uncle, in fact I just talked to him an hour ago, who lives in Longmeadow, which is just outside of Springfield. He'll be 80 in January. My husband has a sister and a step sister who live in Worcester. And I have a son now who lives in Walpole. Which is not too... It's about an hour from where we live. So my closest family member would be our son in Walpole.

**AS:** So, like your immediate family, discounting your children, are more spread out as opposed to your new generation kind of.

**BG:** Yeah my parents are both dead; my sister lives in Minneapolis. I have a daughter in Dallas, Texas, a daughter in Atlanta, Georgia, and then my son in Walpole. So..

**AS:** Alright so if... so you attended school at the college of Ohio?

**BG:** No I attended college in Ohio, I went to Oberlin.

**BD:** Oh, Oberlin I know someone who goes there right now.

**BG:** Really

**BD:** Yeah, it's kind of odd. I met her this summer but yeah, she says she likes it there.

**BG:** Oh good.

**BD:** Yeah, she's from Wakefield, Mass. I don't know if you have heard of that.

**BG:** Yeah yeah.

**BD:** So that's interesting what are the chances. What a good connection (chuckles).

**AS:** (laughs).

**BG:** Is she musical or is she...

**BD:** Yeah, she's a junior. She made her own CD and she's really into music so.

**BG:** Yeah well music is.....

**BD:** Yeah.

**BG:** ....at Oberlin, it's the college, Liberal Arts College and then the conservatory of music.

**BD:** Yeah that must be why she goes there because she is making a CD and stuff.

**BG:** Yeah, yeah.

**BD:** Oh that's nice.

**BG:** So.

**AS:** OK so what, were you like affiliated with a program or what did you go there for? Did you go there for your job or...?

**BG:** To college?

**AS:** Yeah.

**BG:** No I went for Liberal Arts study.

**AS:** Liberal Arts study.

**BG:** I was a government major and an English minor. And .....

**AS:** Did you... did you attend graduate school from college or...

**BG:** I didn't go from college but when we moved to Oregon I went to Portland State University and got my Master's Degree in teaching.

**AS:** So what did you teach?

**BG:** English.

**AS:** English.

**BG:** One year I taught history, but most of my career... most of my career I was in school administration but I did teach for about five years.

**AS:** So did you have any like challenges in your education? Was there something that you really didn't enjoy doing or were you pretty good at everything?

**BG:** Science challenged me. Science and math were not my forte. I had a tough time in chemistry my freshman year in college... and most of my... most of my courses in college were government courses, English courses, history courses, international relations, I did take French, but I stayed away from too much science and too much, too much math.

**AS:** Yeah, me too, I'm not too fond of math either (laughter). So did you have any mentors that were important to you while you were going through college or...

**BG:** I actually had a lot of really good teachers from high school and then in college I had some nice, wonderful teachers. Once I got into my major field, I guess there were two professors I had that were particularly helpful to me. I also was very friendly with the Dean of Women, and she was extremely helpful to me just as a human being. She was an amazing person. So yeah I would say I had probably, when I think of the people back to my college years, those three probably stand out as very important and encouraging people.

**AS:** She was the Dean of?

**BG:** She was the Dean of Women. They don't even have that thing anymore you know. There was a Dean of Men and a Dean of Women 'cause Oberlin is coed. A lot of what she did was help with the social life and activities. So, I mean, you know, I went to college way back when they had curfews; had to be in at a certain time. No alcoholic beverages on campus. Even in the town -- the town, you could get free [tube 20:49] beer. I think you had to be 21 to enjoy... I never liked beer... but yeah.

**AS:** Alright, well, so well, obviously you worked outside of the home. So it says if you worked outside of the home for wages when did you begin working, so when did you begin teaching I guess is what...

**BG:** Right, well I actually began in the mid '70's. My children were in school. I always tell people I have the best of both worlds. I started off as a 21 year old graduate from college teaching in a private school in Pennsylvania for one year when my husband and I were first

married and then our son was born, and I was able to stay home for about 13 years while my children were being born and raised and going to school and doing all that, and in about 1976 I began to work full time so... and I retired in 2005 so I worked for 35 years. And I stayed home 13 years basically.

**BD:** Ok, so I'm sure there are many but who did you work for? So just...

**BG:** Well I spent 20 years at Bancroft School in Worcester.

**BD:** What like level is that?

**BG:** It's a K-12 private school. I taught English and then I became a college counselor there. And then I became the principal of a high school.

**BD:** So like what has this work meant to you?

**BG:** Well, I have loved, I love being in education. I always was able to get along well with kids. Most of my career was spent with high school aged kids, some with middle school. I taught seventh grade for a while. But even in most of my administration, I was a college counselor for eleven years so I was working with seniors in high school, younger ones too, but primarily seniors. And I loved having the opportunity to help kids focus on where they were gonna go, what they were gonna do, and working with their families. When I was a kid my father always said that each generation should leave the world a better place than they found it and I guess I thought if I could help young people do that, then you know...

**BD:** Yeah.

**BG:** ... that was a good thing.

**BD:** Definitely, I really liked my guidance counselor in high school too. They really are so influential 'cause like they help you make this decision. College, it's like your most important decision. Ok, so shifting gears a little bit, what role has religion played in your life?

**BG:** Well it's been very important in my life. I was raised in the Congregational Church. My parents were both active in the church. My mother, being a musician, she was an organist; she was a choir director. My dad was always ... volunteered a lot and was a deacon in the church. So, my husband, when I met my husband, I had been going to the Episcopal Church. And he happened to be raised in the Episcopal Church. So ever since I've been married I have been worshiping in the Episcopal Church and I'm extremely active at the diocesan level. And in my own local parish so I would say the church has played a central role in my umm life.

**AS:** I'm a Congregationalist too so that's cool.

**BG:** Oh really.

**AS:** Yeah.

**BG:** Every once in a while my Congregational roots come up, you know, certain hymns that we sing every once in a while. I'll say hey, we used to sing that in the Congregational Church too.

**BD:** And then we just got some of these so. Some of them we have already asked so we don't need to do some but just whatever you think is important.

**AS:** Alright so, would you care to tell us a life changing story that affected how you look on the world? Like...

**BD:** How you kind of look at life, like the meaning of life? Any specific life, any specific event?

**BG:** Well... I suppose the most significant one would be probably the most dramatic one was the death of our child who was four. I was, if you had asked me the day before if I could survive such a loss, I probably would have said never; however just like you'll find out you sometimes never know what your gonna have to endure. I think that's when my faith was tested a great deal I also think that it was an opportunity for me to recognize people who really did care about our family. It was a chance to recognize that sometimes you grow deeper in your character through tragedy and so I'd say that was definitely a life changing event. And it was hard work. I mean, you know, it was a lot of hard work coming through that and, you know, helping my children through that loss as well, 'cause they were deeply affected.

**AS:** Thank you very much. We talked about in class how a lot of people find meaning through their family and some people find meaning through helping others, some people find meaning through religion and stuff so it seems you have sort of a triangle of all three?

**BG:** Yes, I've always been a person who volunteered a lot and you know I've been and still am. Most of my retirement years have been spent volunteering. I mean I'm active. I'm on the council here at W.I.S.E.(Worcester Institute for Senior Education), mainly because I'm a life-long learner and I wanna use my own experience. I'm now at that point where my experience, if I can help anybody else, yeah, I would say that I have -- my life has not been boring or quiet or (chuckles), you know, I have been busy all the time. I'm a very busy person and active and I find that it has made my life richer by giving to others and to organizations that need help and things like that. I'd much rather go -- I was thinking about this the other day, now that the holidays are here and I have to do all this Christmas shopping, I'd much rather go help in a soup kitchen than Christmas shop. I'm just not into (laughs) so or volunteer my time doing something else.

**AS:** So based on your life experience, what would you give us advice pertaining to... what would you give advice to some other younger people who are just about to set off into the world?

**BG:** I think it is very important to know who you are. What your gifts are, what your talents are, everyone has them. Some people can kick a soccer ball into the net all the time, other people can play the piano, other people can help children learn, you know. So whatever it is my advice would be, and I tell this to my grandchildren all the time, to develop that talent as deeply as you can. You know I used to tell students who would be struggling, I did a lot of academic counseling. If it were I, I would be doing my math and science homework first and save my

English, reading and history for later because I loved that part. So I would go through and I tend... you know if I have to iron or some chore I do those things that I don't like to do as much first (hand hits table) and then it's sort of like dessert. You know, you wait until the end to have that. And I also think it's important, I tell my grandchildren, that it's very important to develop a wide circle of friends to get to know a lot of different people even though you might not agree with those people with politically or religiously. Having a wide circle of friends gives you a broader exposure to the way the world is. Naturally I tell them that I hope they will always love to learn, and be curious and I usually tell them to learn how to have good fun, and by that I mean that when I used to hire teachers, 'cause I used to be the head of a school, I used to always look for someone who had a passion or fire in the belly for kids, mainly teaching. But I also looked for whether they had a sense of humor, because you have to be able to laugh at yourself, at life. Sometimes and particularly when I was younger, I took myself and life too seriously, and I think it's important to develop kind of a healthy outlook on a, on life. Not to take yourself too seriously.

**AS:** Very good. Good advice. Now Brian do you have any questions you want to ask or...

**BD:** Not really. There are some more things in here that are basically exactly the same so, I think we might have everything we need. So this was like amazingly perfect. (Laughter)

**BG:** So now tell me what this is and how many people you are interviewing and...

**BD:** Well basically there are two classes and there are probably like 40 of us and we each are partnered up so 20 different people are being interviewed. Part of this obviously, Worcester Women's Oral History Project, and we have our own assignment that we have to do. The class is life stories, so we read like all books about like you know, we study the life stories of people and figure out the meaning of life through religion or their family. So what we have to do with this is create like a power point and say what how you found meaning in life and things like that, and we have to relate it to the characters in the books we have read. So it's a project that has like five different like parts to it but yeah. So like 20 women are being interviewed over the course of like now and the next few weeks and then in December we have to give this large presentation of so we are looking forward to it. (Chuckles)

**BG:** Oh yeah well that's good so you'll get to hear what other people...

**AS:** Oh yeah.

**BD:** Oh yeah definitely. Yep and we have to have some audio clips and some quotes and so it will be good. This is some great information, everything was perfect.

**AS:** This is exactly what we wanted so we are very happy.

**BG:** Good! Well that -- I hope you will email me and let me know what...

**BD:** Yeah definitely we, we could, we could even send you a copy of the power point that we made once we are done with it, cause that will be all about you so umm...

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**BG:** I did this a couple of years ago and there were psych. students they were doing, they were actually, it was a class on aging and they were, you know, interviewing people from, you know, my age, and she did! She sent me the, she sent me her paper so it was kind of fun to read, but yeah I think. I, I don't know if I made it clear but I think if anybody asks me what was, what's the most important thing in my life, I would say my family my children and my grandchildren. I have great children; they are all married, they made good choices in their marriage partner and I call my seven grandchildren the magnificent seven. You wouldn't know it was a movie a hundred years ago called the Magnificent Seven -- it was kind of a western so we call them the magnificent seven.

**AS:** Thank you very much.

**BD:** This is excellent I hope you had a good time.

**BG:** Oh yeah it was fun!

**BD:** Oh yeah I like this too!

**BG:** Great well then I know you guys get to go to dinner so yeah nice to meet you.

**BD:** Yeah thank you very much.

**AS:** Yes thank you for your time.