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Marseille
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Nancy Johnson was born in Worcester, Massachusetts at Hahnemann hospital in 1932 and graduated from Clark University with a major in Romance Languages and a master's in education. She earned a doctorate from Boston University. As a language major, her desire was to be an interpreter at the United Nations. However, she decided to continue her studies and become a teacher. After a few moves from Groton, to Newport, Nancy worked at Worcester State University where she was a professor of education for 27 years. In this interview, Nancy discusses the struggles and accomplishments as a woman in education. She elaborates her passion for education to dig below the surface. Nancy also touches upon the changes she has seen in Worcester over the years particularly with women. She specifically discussed her prominent role in education throughout the years. Nancy began her career by teaching children foreign languages. She taught in the elementary school grades in various towns teaching multiple subjects. Nancy reiterated the fulfillment she got from teaching these students and hearing the impact she had on them. Nancy expressed how her interest in children and the way they think has led her down this path of a lifelong commitment to education.

ED: Hello, Ms. Johnson. I am Emily. This is Kelsey and Danie, and we are part of Assumption College's Women's Studies course. We are completing a city-wide 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 education, health, work, politics, and community involvement. We want to focus today on your experiences with education. Thank you for your help with this important project. We would like to confirm if it is okay to record.

NJ: Yes, certainly.

ED: So, we would like to begin talking about your background information in Worcester. So, what is your full name, including both your maiden name and married name?

NJ: Dr. Nancy Anne Johnson.

ED: And where were you born?

NJ: In Worcester, Massachusetts. Hahnemann Hospital. [Laughs].

ED: Have you ever been married?

NJ: No.

ED: What cultures, ethnicities do you identify with?

NJ: I am Swedish descent. I am 100% Swedish and 50% Irish. They did not believe me in Ireland. [Laughs]. They wanted to have it the other way around.

ED: Tell me about your parents. What are their names?

NJ: Anna E. Johnson and Arthur E. Johnson. Both born in Worcester. My father was a tool designer, and my mother was a clerk at city hall.

ED: Oh.

NJ: Yeah, purchasing department.

ED: So, where did you live during your life?

NJ: We lived in the north end of Worcester. Including Malvern Road and now I, of course, live on Lincoln Street. Just on that stretch between Nordrens (??) and the expressway is being remodeled right now. And I have lived in Groton for my job. And I have lived in Newport, put that down that was a short term, went to school in Newport.

ED: So what was it like in your neighborhood growing up?

NJ: It was quiet my earlier years are spent during World War II when people worked Saturdays and Sundays. Doing war work, we don't know. Doing bomb sites or whatever. Each factory in Worcester was allocated. And then growing up in the north end of Burncoat Street. And then, of course, I moved to Groton. And that was an entirely different culture—community. But I enjoyed the schools. I had some very famous students there from the Boston area. And, it's like another world until they invited me to teach at Groton schools. And I said, I don't think so at that time. So I wanted to go back to the big city. [Laughs]. So I came to teach at Worcester State [University] and went from classroom teaching to supervision and reading supervisor and remedial reading teacher and librarian. And you can imagine the librarian starting in an elementary library was not easy with the help of the high school librarian. So I came with an, "I just am teaching juniors and quite-a-quite-a jump from fifth graders."

ED: Yeah, what was that transition like?

NJ: It was startling at first because they would confess all their ills to me. I wasn't used to dealing with adult problems from students you know. And so should I keep my mouth shut, what should I do? So I chose to just be quiet and eventually the student I first saw showed up in an inappropriate dress, that's all I am going to say and the next day he was—he looked like a fashion plate with his tie, and shirt, and jacket. So that was—so that was quite a shock in dealing with them looking at me and I was only like a few years older than they were. So it was interesting. Oh, I miss them. I miss the students. They are all retiring now. And I say don't tell me that makes me feel even older [Laughs].

ED: Do you notice any changes that happened in Worcester over time?

NJ: Yes, I noticed the multi-ethnic stress in Worcester in the commercial area and the effect on schools and enrollment. One of the things that I struggle to do with a language background, because I speak Spanish I get by in Italian and so forth, even Irish, but that's not too popular in the street as just a, "Oh not that"! It's just like speaking Latin at Assumption, you know. [laughs]. You just don't do that anymore [laughs]. But I do notice the effect in music festivals, in the arts, having worked with Worcester Women's History Project where I'm on the Steering Committee and I worked a table, helping numbers of the Steering Committee. Of some of the ethnic tables that were available in the music and so forth, I can see the profound of fifty-five thousand people came out to see that. It was quite an event. But you can see the multi ethnic changes in Worcester just through that event. You know?

ED: What distinct characteristics make Worcester the place that it is?

NJ: I think what makes Worcester is its diversity. I think it's striving for diversity, of course it's made a jump from industry to automation and it has affected the culture, it has affected the architecture, the service agencies everything. But I think it's striving now to achieve a profile. Look at the profile taking off of going by train and Worcester is beginning to get a regular profile like New York City or Washington. You just immediately get notified and that will change with the building that's going on here. There are many service agencies people work with and I think education strives to it. I know but they still have the same problems, I remember supervising the protection agency on Rte 9 and my first sign when I came in was no weapons beyond this point and I thought okay, well I am here with my little notebook to evaluate this student and that was quite a lot of pressure for that student because I had one eye on one kid and another eye on the other and they are all in difficulty, the students that are there. A detention building, just shy of UMass Hospital there. So we do have those problems. Worcester's changed quite a bit. It has quite a drug problem at this time, but its city wide it is nothing to do, it's statewide actually. It's a shame.

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

NJ: I think Worcester women have experienced a positive reception in their jobs, in their educational opportunities, in the college's willingness to give them [opportunities] based on experience. Worcester State for example has the intergeneric studies with service organizations and all of our graduates are in city service agencies for housing and community decision making and all of that, they are taking leadership roles and that is satisfying to know that the college can keep in touch with—as Assumption does—with the problems of society. I used to kip [sp] at some—at all of the seminars that they had right outside of my office and while I am working here I think it is wonderful. And students are not afraid to take anything; the more difficult the better. They just eat it up.

KL: So, we are going to move into education. So, where did you attend school?

NJ: I went to Clark University and I got my master's there as well.

KL: What was your undergraduate degree in?

NJ: Romance languages. With a minor in history and a minor in English.

KL: And what was your- you said you got your masters as well.

NJ: And yes, master's of education with a geography concentration. Then I had my doctorate at BU [Boston University] in curriculum and instruction. And I went to Harvard and I wanted administration, but they discontinued that program, so I went to BU. So I went to BU the arch-enemy across the river.

KL: So what were some of your challenges in education?

NJ: Oh I think making the jump on the grant field because we wrote several grants, and getting them into Washington and you have to drive down with the bids and put them in physically into the mailboxes. I suppose now with the internet you can just wire it, but years ago it had to be physical delivery. That was a pressure. I am talking midnight, beyond midnight, running around with papers and copying this and copying that. It's getting into the funding for special programs that you want to whether it is in the inner city or if it is a service program for children with disabilities and all of those, whatever department services need. I think that's been servicing—and then also you have these growing departments like child psychologist working in the classroom. And with the disappearance of the nuclear family you are bound to have problems with helping these poor children. I mean people—if you hear interviews or give them or listen to all the anecdotes in your class, it's a wonder these children live to grow up with the problems they face. And if you can help—we have tied ourselves up in the PC [politically correct] restrictions. It is a wonder that sometimes it's difficult to do anything. But people have to—but I think the students growing up today—I think Konnie—I used to be on Konnie Luke's Coffee with Konnie. She used to have that interview program. She said, "How do you think students

have changed?” I said, “I don’t think they have changed they have become more adaptable to meeting every need and they have to read and prepare themselves.” And I said, “They are no different. They are more malleable, they are more resilient of the facts of what field they are going into.” So that was my answer to her. I took another sip of coffee [laughs].

KL: So upon finishing your formal education, what did you see as your options, or opportunities?

NJ: Well I liked post-doctoral study. I did do a lot of grant writing for my neighborhood—wrote street grants and they gave me a key to the city as a result. So I had a street named for me. And so that was kind of exciting. I didn’t want it actually, but I knew about it two years ahead of time but, I said, “No no, no.” “Well you’re getting it,” they said [laughs], “whether you like it or not.” [laughs]. So it was quite an honor, but most of the time I’ve spent in the history of Worcester and the women and how they function being a docent at the Salisbury Mansion and American Antiquarian Society and the [Worcester] Art Museum. I was a gallery guide there at the art museum and Preservation Worcester doing tours of Worcester on foot and learning the history of how people coped even to, well beyond the architecture and the things and working with children which was always a delight. I think it was on Burncoat Street; the girl looked out and said, “I have this little girl sitting on my lawn drawing my house. Why is she drawing my house?” The windows and the doors, that was cute. And I have worked at that for 10 years. Then I decided that I’d branch out, so now I am in the Worcester Women’s History Project which I enjoy. Because there are so many women that have contributed and we have had such a hard role to pass beyond the limitations as though we like it at low speed and we do not want to get the car in gear. And I do not know if it is fear, or whether it’s laziness, or if—I really have not come to that conclusion. We like things to go along as they are. And I think fighting change—I think the students find that. I noticed that in sending students out into the school, “Well I am in school and they do not do things that way.” And I said, “Well as long as you represent the college you are going to do this, this, this, and this.” I would do the same thing if I were a student, “What do you expect from me? You are sending me like a little sheep into the lion den!” Because they don’t know what they don’t know yet. And then they have to reach their own style, so they did. It is a hard thing to go out into the working world when you have been, sort of not sheltered, but you have been in an environment that is more accepting. The real world.

KL: Being a woman, were there any struggles like finding a job or finding opportunities in school?

NJ: I found, yeah I found in higher education, I found the biggest thing is to overcome the formality of procedures like if you want to make a job change there is a lot of determinism which comes in a job. When it comes to placing ads for a job in other words, the jobs all filled. Why did you not advertise them in *Chronicle of Higher Education*? Well, it’s gone, just don’t. And I found that out from national conferences like Kapa Delta Pi, down in San Antonio [Texas]. I said oh I applied there for something years ago.... “Oh that is gone, do not worry about that, that is

gone.” I felt like saying, “Why did you do that?” and I think there is certain procedures at any level of education that we have to take a good hard look at and say, “Let’s be fair about this.” If people feel they want to do something different, I think the playing field should be level.

KL: And also, getting into schools, was there any differences between women and men?

NJ: You mean for equity? I think pay equity is a problem in many areas, I do not know necessarily in mine. But, pay equity is, you know, a lot of campuses are discussing equity. And you know, it is a little better. But I do not know because I am not on a committee, but I know someone who is on a committee and she said, “Oh my!” and I said, “Oh yes.” That is what I said. I think in all jobs, there is that equity. Women have to strive to be sure that they are treated equally. And it is up to them, no one is going to—unless, “So and so did that, and came to teach first grade, and I teach first grade. Well I do the same thing as she does, why am I getting the money with that experience and the credentials?” So that is always going to be a problem. But they have a fable actually, it is a myth and it is you have to work twice as hard to get equal treatment in a man's world. And I think we need to rephrase it. I think we have to be more intuitive in analyzing where the nub of the problem lies [alarm on device interrupts interview] that much of critical thinking. I wrote something for the [*Worcester Telegram &*] *Gazette*, they may print it, they may not. Talking about the C’s that we have, not the seven C’s, but the C’s of the world. Chaos-Confusion-Crisis you know in the world today ending. So the seven C’s. They may print it so you can look for that. But schools used to have critical thinking courses and they do not anymore. And children, old propaganda techniques, things like that. I made a whole kit for my Boston University, one of my courses at BU, on the push of advertising and the pressing young minds and the doctoral dissertation was on brainstorming groups and problem solving. Some of the problem solving problems these fourth graders came up with. I have tapes for all their interns. There was one that was a spit ball picker upper or detector [laughs]. It was so cute. There was some teacher alternative punishment techniques teachers could use for students that were not paying attention. I am sitting there listening and I said, “”They do not miss one thing,” and you think they are not learning but they are. And so I think teachers have a tremendous responsibility to not only model what they hope human beings will be like but also understand and be a little lenient of some of their developmental antics that they go through. That is why I think seventh grade teachers are saints. Because it is so hard to keep the dust down but I love them to death. But I do not know if I could function effectively in the classroom with seventh graders. But hey, I have to adapt, you know. You cannot be a straightener-when you are teaching seventh grade. I would have to say, “Hey tell me about it, what’s going on?”[laughs].

KL: Why do you think they eliminated the critical thinking techniques in the school?

NJ: I think we are teaching too much to prescribe ideals like these tests. I think they need small group decision making, they need predictability skills training if you have consequences. You would say, now if you do that or if so and so does that in a case study, what do you think will be the result, and of course depending on their developmental level. When they are twelve they

know everything. Because their brains are kind to (____??). There have been some studies that even formal operations is twelve and beyond only one college was inventoried, I won't say the name but it was not mine. Was 80% of the freshman had not reached that stage. Now they are 18. I said, "Wow, what did we do wrong?" You cannot teach independence. You cannot ask a child well if your mother lets you go to the store all alone that is independence. But if you ask a twelve-year-old, it is a political ideology that says blah blah blah blah. And they're more profound in their definition. It shows you that at least they know abstract words and can define them. This critical thinking, I think a lot of things went away when we concentrated on quantitative measurement. I was at a conference years ago. Howard Gardner spoke at a center, about multiple intelligence. We base all our studies on linguistic mathematical intelligence. Whether it's social intelligence, there's physical, manipulation intelligence in sports and so forth. He had about five categories. Fascinating ideas. theory of multiple intelligence. Just look around you and how do we measure, children, adults, employees. It is all based on that. So I think we need to even out our measure of human beings. IQ I do not know if it is involved or not.

KL: What support networks and mentoring have been important to you through your education?

NJ: In mentoring?

KL: Yes, like support networks and who you went to when you needed help.

NJ: Oh, I think so. Well my advisor, of course when I was starting high school was the first one. And then as I got into my jobs, I used an experienced teacher, put next to a rookie and then they were saying, "What was she like, last year? What was she-what am I going to do with him?" This type of thing. They would take a problem solving role with you. And that was fun. I remember going there when I was teaching. I taught in Auburn [MA] and it was a lovely place to be. That was before I went to Groton. Groton was an entirely different. You wonder why they even had to come. They had their own local norms which means they were two years above norm of all grades. But they were lucky to be privileged with parents who were highly educated and that is another. I do not think it was a drawback, it was a challenge to all the teachers. So I did a lot of tutoring with people. One boy I had did not read, and his mother said, "Oh, no sense in working with him, his uncle was just like him, his father was just like him, forget it." So I went down to Boston to the language clinic and they said, "He has a hard time." I said, "He is having a good day today." "What do you mean, he's having a good day?" [Laughs]. Finally he learned to read and he took the principal by the hand like a nice little boy, and took him to his room and wanted to read to him, and before he take crutch see how many first graders he could mow down the corridor because he had a clubfoot. But then he moved. So I never knew the large range of my teaching, but I knew that you don't take no for an answer and you don't stop with limitations and I think we need to watch that. We don't have time to package some saying sense of completion in today's world. And we can't allow ourselves to be that if you start something finish it, if you can't don't bother starting it. And I think that is all part of critical thinking, of assessing your capabilities and go for it. And it's sad because children are quick, we

don't realize it life a treasure. Each child is a treasure. And six year olds know a lot more than they let on.

ED: What were the different limitations you saw yourself working with when teaching?

NJ: I think I began to see the limitations the child went through at home, and in some cases, blocks to continue support of their youngster. And of course the money. Well I mean we used to design schools—they had the teachers designing the perfect school, and we went to town designing this and that what we thought. When the contractors got through we said, “Is that my sketch, doesn't look at all like it!” and that is what we felt. So you're dealing with monetary restraints and the case of budget and we can't do that, we can't have a special room, blah blah blah for that. And sometimes the parents, well for the most part the parents I dealt with—but I had a friend who taught at Harlem. Special needs in Harlem in the '60s, '50s. Her experiences were horrendous, horrendous. She went to Hunter, which caters to the gifted child of Manhattan and she went into school and thought she thought she'd have a medal by the time she was 23. Purple heart I should say [laughs]. So I take the money constraints and the philosophical conflict with the economic base of your system and sometimes the parents are successful and under cooperative as you'd like.

KL: What's your favorite grade to teach? What was your favorite opportunity at school?

NJ: Fifth grade. They are very reasonable. I won a speech contest for Toastmasters, so I went and competed the county level but anyway. I met a fellow there who was in a different category. He had two and a half [minute] condensed speech and I had to do a long presentation of eight minutes and he said, “Did you teach in Auburn?” “Yes.” “Did you teach fifth grade?” “Yes.” He said, “Did you teach social studies?” and I said, “Yup,” and he said “You changed my life”. And I said, “How can you remember, you're in your 60s?” and he mentioned it twice and he mentioned it in his speech even though he won in a different category. You know I couldn't get over it, and I couldn't remember him and I was upset. Why don't I—well of course in department of license in teaching you probably have three groups of language arts or social studies coming through the classroom.

NJ: Are you in education? That is probably isn't appropriate.

KL: No I'm not.

NJ: Well they have in the schools departmentalized teaching an organizational format where they take their little books and go to a different teacher for a different subject when they get to fourth, fifth, and sixth grade. But, I don't remember him maybe he was one of 200 students. But I thought, that meant a lot and it even made it better losing [laughs]. I don't know if that's germane to, but it did show the fact that we don't realize what impression we have on youngsters.

KL: Yeah that is amazing that he came back to you after all that time [laughs].

NJ: I know and I never went back to see my teachers because that didn't even occur to me. And I said, "Well that's your job, and I'm in sixth grade now, so I won't go back and see." And I often regret, I hadn't gone because it means a lot, and if you hear from one it really means more than one.

KL: Right.

NJ: And if someone tells you an opinion, means others think the same thing. I never accepted that law. But I think it's true.

KL: Have you kept in touch with any of your students over the years?

NJ: I have one, I had one girl, that she—her father owned a potato farm in Massachusetts. She went to teach in a Cleveland suburb, a very wealthy suburb, and we were waiting for her to complete the class because if it isn't complete it doesn't go. So she walked by and we go, "Oh! Come in, come in, come in." So the student said, "Oh you should take this course, it's really neat." Because we were in the schools that's why they liked it, they were going over to work in the library and teach reading problems and she said you know I never, and we were fast friends, she even made me a from scratch a Caesar salad and brought me to her apartment and the best Caesar salad I've ever had [laughs]. And she took that job, she was lucky to get that at that time when the pay was very low and the Cleveland area paid very well. But then she went into, she said, "I'm getting my master's at John Carroll, and I'm not going to be a teacher all my life," and I said, "That's alright." I said, "You do what you want." And she did go into business and she got her master's in it and she went right into business. But that was for her, she found out about that about herself. But she was great with the students, with the youngsters. So I think it's good to keep in touch and we have a few that would write letters. But if you have a course to teach and you say well that's beneath me, you know like remedial reading or something, and I took it. I was department chair so I signed myself up for that course. And I had a lot of students come in at 7:30 for a conference and what they didn't want to learn read better, they wanted study skills, they needed study skills. And they were from foreign countries, and they would come in they say—and I had a lovely note, I think the best thing I had was a note, "We liked your class because we didn't know what was going to happen next" [laughs]. It wasn't just taking the notes and reading and regurgitating you know.

KL: Right.

DM: Why did you choose to work in education?

NJ: Well, it started at Clark when I was a language major and I thought I should be using this skill. And I thought I'm going to be an interpreter for the UN [United Nation] and they said

“What?” I said, “Yes I think I’d enjoy that. Well maybe I’ll teach children French.” And they said, “What do you mean? They don’t even know English. Why would you want to teach them French?” “Well maybe I’ll teach them in the grades and I’ll teach everything.” And they said, “Well that’s a little more practical.” So I saw myself evolve from the UN interpreter goal down to teaching children in English in a typical middle class town. And I enjoyed it, because you just have to dig below the surface. We had meetings and we had people who taught in urban areas, and I had my friend from Harlem and the conditions and they would allow schools like that to keep on going. I mean Brads in the back in the classroom playing with the students. You know people invading the school and shut down the whole school except my friend who went into the closet and the kid came in and he said “Ohhhhhh it’s you”! And she said “Oh that’s it, I’m done” [laughs]. And she said, “I am going I count to 10, when I count to 10” and she got up to eight and he left. And I call that very courageous. So she had her purple heart and she wore it proudly and I worked with her in Auburn. She was a delight to teach with, she probably thought she was in paradise when she was teaching wherever I was teaching [laughs]. So that is a problem.

KL: Yeah.

DM: What has your work in education mean to you?

NJ: Work-Excuse me? What does work and education?

DM: The work that you’ve done in education. What does it mean to you?

NJ: Oh I enjoy it. I’ve made the transition from retirement as a professor to volunteering on children’s trips. They would take trips to the Salisbury Mansion for example and I teach them. And it made me homesick because they were only there for an hour and then the bus came and they all went. So I think it continued and I’m now into the grant writing and doing tours in my area, and in all areas of the city, architectural tours. Mostly historical tours, and I enjoy my work on the Worcester Women’s History Project for the historical work of women and how they have progressed, listening to all of these people.

DM: How have you balanced different priorities, responsibilities, roles and your interest in life?

NJ: Well I just have to be sure that I don’t—I’d like to diversify. I don’t like to do the same thing. It’s probably a personality trait, but I do like to teach, convey information and I joined Toastmasters. And just because you can teach, doesn’t mean you’re gonna succeed in Toastmasters. Because you’re in a very competitive—it’s like working in media, and trying out for a host, a talk show host. You just aren’t going to walk into those jobs, so you think just because you teach, and you have to have very condensed program of presentation. And I seek that, I love a challenge, and I love new things. But if you volunteer, you have to think of your physical stamina too. So, and I think that’s part of education, educating yourself. I think, it’s very hard to sit down and say, “What are my assets, what are my liabilities? Why do I have those

liabilities?” And I tried to do that in my graduate courses. And mimicking the way they put us through our doctoral training there in our residency because searching for that dissertation topic. I think that was the most rewarding challenge, to think of something that hadn’t been done. And then to finish and find out that all doctoral dissertations are only 20%, reliable. And even though you go through this regression coefficient and all that research, and only 80% of them aren’t proven valid. It’s very hard to discipline the mind. And say, “What did you put me through this for?” [laughs].

DM: What do you think are the pros and cons of the path that you have chosen?

NJ: Of the what?

DN: Of the path you have chosen.

NJ: The education I think, the pros would be the giving part of it and leading the children. Because I started teaching when I was 18 with Sunday school but I did. I taught children 5 to 8. I said, “Why am I having a problem?” Well some of them could read and some of them couldn’t, no wonder we’d be making all those projects you know for the world. Sammy spoons sending them to the relief services. And then I thought, well I’ll teach the older ones and I said you know, I really want to teach young people because I want to see how they question. So I had this urge to change all the time. And then I’d teach adults and run committees, and have the usual agendas and go through it and so forth. And I didn’t like—I don’t think I felt constrictions in the jobs I happened to have. Except that I had somebody would always cut up little ads and put them on my desk. He was a visiting scholar. They want a provost there, they want a dean there, and I wanted to be a dean. And I thought, well what are you when you’re a dean? You are a troubleshooter for the faculty. What are you as provost? Dealing with budget, and so I gave that up. And I said no I think I like the students better. But he put that and said, “You’re getting old, you know.” And I was like 50, and to me that was old [laughs]. But to you it’s old too but to me it’s rather on the younger side. But I said, “I can’t,” but then I found out the way things are on these ads I thought, that is an evil, that should not be allowed, and I’ll say it loud and clear. But I don’t think I want that publicized. But that’s something at each profession they need to rule out. Is be honest. And just don’t let the bureaucracy dictate certain behaviors. Just because they dictate it, you’re gonna do it or not. So, that was a good question. Kind of explosive but.

DM: How do you feel about the choices you've made in your life? Do you have any regrets from anything you have done?

NJ: No, not really. You have certain responsibilities that you see around you. You can either accept them or just flee from them and I chose to accept them. I said, “Oh, Colorado goodbye!” And that was a good job, but you go to conferences and the interview and I could have walked into that, and that was a dean’s job, with a private room with all kinds of sweet of office, and I thought, “That’s better than my little office and my little desk.” But then I decided

no, that isn't really. Suppose you get out there and don't like it or you don't ski then what are you going to do? [laughs] So that was good, I hadn't thought of that but it was tempting. You go through this period of wanting to fly away, to try something new. And you have to do some hard thinking now, if you do that there's an aversive effect. And I think that's how we make all our decisions.

ED: So besides teaching what other groups or volunteer programs have you been involved in in Worcester?

NJ: Let's see, well I've mentioned Toastmasters, which I loved.

KL: Can you go into Toastmasters a little bit more?

NJ: Toastmasters is training in speech, where they have each—we were in the Paul Revere [Insurance Company] chapter which started downtown next to their, near Elm Street there was a Paul Revere Insurance and then they moved to UNUM. And I think they stress, first of all there is a very warm camaraderie connected with Toastmasters. You have to think of a speech, and just get up and talk I mean, they'll give you and say, "I will choose you!" and of course you have to psych them out, you usually tell when you're gonna be picked on right, with people's eyes and their body language and everything. And so I get up and well teachers are very adaptive doing that, I mean they do that with the children. So I really got into that. I stayed up for quite a long while because their timing was not that great it was a new now and I got into doctory and I loved AAS, American Antiquarian Society because of the history of the printing press and taking tours and learning about it and going to Springfield for example with a 108 eighth graders, and I was alone with all of them introducing myself to the children and we had Isaiah Thomas in his white leggings and his uniform and the kids say, "Ooo," if they didn't like his looks at all but that was good and of course Preservation Worcester got you out into the education program for children. They have a very excellent program in education for children. An architect Crownhill is one of their working areas because that was actually a built up sample of life in all of Worcester. And even the houses all have history to them. And I enjoyed that thinking about Worcester families and how it was different from today.

KL: So, what major historical events in Worcester have occurred in your time here, and did they impact you personally?

NJ: I think the closing of WWII [World War II] when parades of victory was and then the death of our president way back, Franklin Delano Roosevelt who was probably an icon for the labor people and that impressed me and also the assassination of John F. Kennedy affected the children because we were in school dismissing the busses in Groton when that happened. And there were several post task conferences in the classroom even though I wasn't a regular classroom teacher I would go by or into the classrooms and the children were trying to justify why that ever happened. And of course the economics, I think during the war you know you experience a lot

of sacrificial workings with parents and Worcester, and then hearing that Worcester had such a determinate role to play, even monuments, we had a person in the Worcester Art Museum who it was reported was part of their team to save monuments from the Russians I think, of the Nazis, and finding them and bringing them back to owned them. And that was interesting to know that Worcester had that, and also the three prerevolutionary attacks made on the British from Worcester. I was surprised to learn that. And trying to picture myself in that Worcester of the yesteryear. It was not as, some parts were not as pleasant. But you know they are all personalities and you have to think, what was I like and I mean what were the people like. You judge yourself by someone living in the past. It's very hard to do.

KL: So, how do you define success in your life, and how has this definition changed over time?

NJ: Well I guess success is getting your life together [laughs]. I mean I read these and I don't understand it started when I was named Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities and it ended up with several and I couldn't believe I was in the book so and I don't have any biographical, oh yeah it is, I have to edit that one. So when you look at something like this and say what were the jobs you had and you figure everything is in line to be used, like I didn't ask to be counselor of the Kappa Delta Pi and I didn't ask to receive a key to the city. And I got on all these boards and still on the board of Trade and of Hope Cemetery try to give up a few, and it's president of the guild, I love, Lady of Providence Guild. I enjoyed that. So.

KL: Um so what was your role in the women of Worcester?

NJ: Well I was community watch dog I think [laughs]. Neighborhood watch dog. And I didn't like the role too much because I think everyone should have that opportunity. But I still do it and they say, "This is so and so and we're going to be working on your role." "Well how long?" They said two weeks and I said, "Good," and I have to stop doing that because I'm retired and one of the priests at church said "Ohhh no she isn't". I still see her out there working. So you label it, it is very hard, what bothers me in my retirement is not how children learn but how landlords and property owners do not consider the tenants and that, I can't imagine, the for the profit motive is so strong in them they cannot understand what their inactivity is doing to other human beings. And I don't like—I wish that it could be corrected and you think if you work by example, and I say maybe 10% did. But not too many of them, you know you go to all these neighborhood meetings and present your case, and we try but you can't—I think we have to be realistic and I remember the day when I had a project and somebody in the city said, "Well who's your committee," and I said "I'm it." "What? One person did that?" and I said "Yes." And they say wasn't that unusual. I remember that and I asked, "Why would he ask who my committee was, it's just a simple person seeing." But I had to see first. And somebody said, "Don't you see all those troubles?" And I said, "What troubles?" But after I did the job I said, "Oh my look around, what do you see?". And I think that's the key to educate and awareness of people and I find myself lacking patience as I get older, why aren't you aware. Feel we are so close. What

bothers me more is this addiction to high tech. Do you know in one country they have the spotlights on the sidewalk because no one looks up?

KL: Wow

NJ: And that's sad because the whole world is passing. I think we are in an addictive mode right now but I think it will pass. You know, look at another one. Begins with P and that was a problem. Pokemon Go is that it? [Laughing]. You know that's been around, that's an old, old game but it struck a cord in today's world. And it, you know, someone said, "My house is on Pokemon Go" [laughing].

ED: What other changes do you think need to be made in the community?

NJ: I think continued—the neighborhoods are the key to improving any city. So neighborhood activity is the best and we need to know our neighbors, but I have to remember I'm retired. I have all the time in the world to appreciate people and to walk across and say, "How's your garden going? Blah blah blah." And I'm not working three jobs to support my family coming home dead tired and saying, "Well they want you to go to a meeting." People can't afford to do that and I think the economy man is worthy of his hire, a women are worthy of her hiring. We need to recognize the worth of people so they can't be driven. That's obscene to have people working three jobs, but a lot of them do it.

KL: So how do you get through tough times? What kind of thoughts keep you going, say if you had a tough day?

NJ: Well I think your faith, your faith does and you've got to keep your health up and you have to say, "Poor that, poor that." I have a friend and she would say, "Poor him, poor her." And she'd get it out of her mind and not boil it around in her mind and nurse ancient hurts from years ago because people who miss thing, miss do, don't even know that they're doing it sometimes. If you encounter some people who are not as pleasant as you think they should be, they don't even know that they're being unpleasant. They just don't. They're so steep in their own troubles and I think that's what we have to do is get out, talk to people. If you experience grief, you go to a funeral with somebody else and sit with somebody and shiver or something that you know, can make them feel comfortable. That's what I found. And you say, "I'm not the only one that has problems." And I think that's the key to overcoming anything.

KL: Right, definitely.

DM: Based on your life experiences, what advice would you give to the women of today and future generations?

NJ: Find out what your potential is and build on it, and always have a secondary skill that you can fall back on, and go to conferences, get out, make connections, network. I can't express the importance of networking, especially in women's groups. You never know who you'll want for a speaker and even I think that's so important. I try to do that. Once you get out of your environment and go into a different, a whole different—a national conference, and you get so excited and people come back so elevated. I don't know. Students have their own conferences too. They go to conferences, they come back with lots of ideas. And so what if you're energetic? If you win a few, lose a few, you know? At least you made a start and you're a changed individual. And I think we need to know we are aware of people, other people. I think our world is so isolated now and we have to watch that. Everything is on a laptop.

KL: Right, exactly. So what was your parent's education?

NJ: They went to high school, and they went beyond.

KL: In Worcester?

NJ: In Worcester, yes. And I think what they did is my mother wanted to be a nurse, but in her generation, get out, get the job and bring in the money, help the family. So she did and she went into civil service and she took a test and was a hundred in it. And my father was in business and had a partner in the machine tool industry. And partnerships are alright, it could be also not alright. But yeah, she had a hundred on the civil service. The top you know, the head clerk, that's the word for purchasing. And she did a lot of interesting work on bids and so forth for our city. It's a big office at that time. But I think they enjoyed—they went through hard times. They had a baby in thirty-two which was the beginning of the Depression, and high paying jobs goodbye. I mean that's awful. And then you went to that and I can't imagine and making do you know with a child. And I remember roller skating all Sunday. "Where's my father?" Well he's working, he's probably working outside or something. And you never know, they never told you what you were working on. So that was a trial. So I think only children, they said, "Oh you're a brat." And I said, "Well I don't think so." [laughs] But, I think it's a high bar because they don't get any sibling to compare you to. And that you can't help your birth order or your lack of order. Just go through and say, "Well do what you can." But it was a very close family that was one attribute of it, very close family.

DM: What memories do you have of significant historical events that took place when you were growing up?

NJ: Well I think of course the wars. The Korean War just happened after we graduated from high school, and we have classmates that were killed. It was like three weeks after graduation and the Korean War started. Then we had the Vietnamese War and because I came to teach at Worcester State and Kent State and the students were off the wall, and I don't blame them. If they passed a test, they didn't do well, they'd be down at the student lounge checking selective

services and seeing where their rank was. Because they'd say, "Oh I got a C on a test." You know and they were conscious of that and I think mostly political disturbances affected the way I acted. And now we may come back to that, I don't know. I was thinking of Kent State the other day and in 1970 and we had a new president and he had a big confrontation. He said, "Oh my." And he dealt with it lovely. One of my students was out on campus, he had band (_____??). "Hi Ms. Johnson." I said, "Who is that?" [laugh] Then the next day, it's funny, I was his student teacher supervisor. When I walked in, he said, "Oh my, it's you." And he was a sweetheart, but I can see him that day in his jeans, and that headband and his hair was long and I said, "Okay." I said, "How you doing?" And we had a lot of different meetings, students would open up. They were so upset with that Kent State, I think that and I was new at Worcester State. I had been there two years and I had taken a big jump in ages of students. I mean I came from fifth grade. So that was very influential for that.

KL: So there's an important work, home life divide between the two. So what are some things you like to do on your free time?

NJ: Well I like theater. I should of really gone into drama, but I think it helps in teaching. We were in a few plays for the PTO in Auburn, and I found out I loved it. They said, "You ever picture that in a movie? And I said, "Are you kidding? Back in the 50's." I wish we had because we had a good time, we had a good director too. And I tried to, I would like to have gone into it but I seem to favor social service agencies kind of thing, and I like gardening. I love to read and I love to travel. I been down to Mississippi and Columbia, Missouri, Ohio, more times than I care to think. And I've met all kinds of people and notice the diversity and culture and social mirror of that.. Then in Europe you have the British schools is part of my residency. I went with a group, the BU consortium, with a group of students to study the educational system. Of course I was in charge of the social committee. I had to get all the party plans for the University of London students, and all the personnel for the city of London. So I was in charge. You start with nothing, and hopefully with the den mother or whatever they call it, the dorm, the RA, whatever, it was an older lady. But we invited all the people from the—they called it her majesty and specters, similar to assistant superintendent. You know that's what they called it. The kids in Isle Dogs of London would say, "Do you know Donny Osmond?" And I'd say, "Not personally." And they'd say, "Of if you see him can you give him these?" Their names and addresses. The Isle Dogs is a center school in London.

ED: So now that we are working to tell a fuller story of history in women in Worcester, what should we be sure to include?

NJ: I think we need to include the women who have made a historical mark in suffrage. I think we have so many. We have [Elizabeth Cady] Stanton, and of course we have Abby Kelley Foster in the slavery issue and she invaded many different fields and we're studying her in fact. We have an interpreter of her in costume and she does a great job in special programs. And we need to find out what women coming from other countries think and do in Worcester. We have people

coming from Syria, people from Egypt. How they're being sponsored, how they—you know the big thing with immigrants or displaced, I call them displaced because I was at a place where we had to deal with post World War II displaced persons from Germany, Hungary, Poland, and tried to get them jobs and residents, but now it's a new thing. It isn't new, it was around and it really enriched my life because I hadn't spoken. I guess from an early age I was internationally focused. So I find it very hard to adjust to extremely localized frame of mind. And it's very boring to me. You have to reach out to international lines and find out what other people international center get to know other students from other countries. Clark certainly had graduate school students from all over the world and I'm sure Assumption has the same. It makes a big difference in how you think. And some people have that advantage and some don't so I think we need to adjust that and not be so inwardly focused—I don't want to talk too much.

KL: [Laughs]. No, everything you're saying is awesome. So what kept you in Worcester for so many years?

NJ: Well I have responsibilities to family, so I stayed. But then we say you have two choices: you can stay and be a martyr or you can say, "Well this is what had to happen, it was nobody else's." So I did that for twelve years and I don't regret it, but bye bye Colorado, bye bye Virginia, but it wasn't to be. Then you learn to look around you and say there's a reason and once you determine that there is a reason then you try to find out what that reason is. And you say, "Oh yes I wouldn't of done that if I hadn't been here." It wouldn't have happened if I hadn't been here. And I think as we balance out the long list it should be our blessings and what we're privileged to do and the short list should be almost insignificant because I think the older you get, the shorter the list gets. The short list, unless you have health problems, but that's not in your control, that is a cop out. It's not my control.

KL: What would be some advice for women today, say us, for our future?

NJ: Don't limit yourself to any field. Read as much as you can about the field that you seem to be aiming at and then decide what will happen if you get into that field. And if you think consequentially or contingency, I think contingency planning is sad and neglected in our country, and I think you have to start young with the children. If you do that, what are the consequences? I like Kohlberg's model, moral levels and we teach on the conventional levels. We don't teach post conventional behavior. I had to teach that to students who probably didn't like it. Now, if you say, "You touch a stove and you burn yourself, well that's level one. That's strictly pre-convention level." And if it's post, you'll steal drugs from a pharmacist because your wife is dying. And then you go to post saying that's pretty important you know. That's better than following the rules of the pharmacy although you shouldn't of stolen, but anyways. They go into all these discussions and I love it. And I think we need to get out of the conventional mode of thinking and into the grace of thoughts. The grace of humanities because we have to realize we're only one little speck sample in humanity and we make our own problems. We make our own situations because I don't know whether it is something in the human spirits that does that

or they're bored or want to create a movement. There are a lot of movements in our country that are completely unnecessary, but I want to sound like Dr. Spock or Mr. Spock. Is it Mr. Spock?

KL: Yeah [laughs].

NJ: But we do, and I think that's what I found. Then things happen. That was the way it's supposed to be and then you say, "Well I'm twenty years old, I'm gonna take bring up the world." Well we don't know until we face our first disappointment, you know I think that was hard. I didn't go to the college that I wanted to go to. I wanted to go away, away to Maine, but I didn't go and I stayed and I commuted. So what?

KL: What kept you from going away to school? Money?

NJ: Money. I remember I had all these requirements for scholarships except the date for filling it was after-before my college boards. So I could qualify for the scholarships and I had every item. And I remember saying, "Oh I'm not gonna go to Bates, what am I gonna do?" They said, "Well you can go to Clark." And I said, "Well where's that?" [laughs]. So, but I worked a year, to find out where I was going. Today the parent would say, "You gotta find yourself." So I found myself and I worked and I learned a lot about people at my first job. And I thought it was clerical, nice to make a game out of it. They said, "Do you like math?" I said, "I love it!" They put me in the annuity department and at the end of the year I said, "I'm going to school." So I picked up and I went, but that was hard for me to accept that. And it was just going away and I probably would've been homesick. [laughs] I think -I really wanted and, qualify for it. You know it's expensive to go away, just to live in the dorm. That takes half of your money. So but I enjoyed it. I use to stay with the international students all the time because I figured that was a form of escapism. They were fascinating, they were from Iraq, Iran, and Egypt. As the professor called it "the Muddle East" and he called it the Muddle East and he was a Dutch. And he couldn't say middle and he said muddle. I thought how true because they were in a muddle even back in the fifties and sixties. So we talked. We changed the world. We sat at seminars. I said, "Well this is great."

KL: So we want to thank you so much for coming in today.

NJ: You're very welcome. I enjoyed all three of you.

KL: All of your experiences were so interesting.

NJ: Well I appreciate that and I hope it was of help.