

Interviewee: Barbara Kohin

Interviewers: Thomas Ashe, Chelsea Gamboa, and Kaitlyn Murphy

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**Abstract:** Barbara Kohin, a former councilwoman in Worcester Massachusetts, was born in 1932 in Providence, Rhode Island. She attended the College of William and Mary, in which she graduated in 1953. After getting married to her husband Roger, she had three children, and now has two grandchildren. Barbara tells about her experiences growing up as a woman in America and the struggles she faced. She discusses these events such as not getting a job as a physicist at General Electric or as a professor at local colleges in Worcester. Barbara elaborates on the fact that she served on the Worcester City Council and was one of the first three women who did so. All three were elected in 1973. Barbara claims that her male counterparts on the Council were successful in getting her voted out of office. She spent numerous years with her family on her husband's sabbaticals, in which she traveled to Yugoslavia, Kenya, and India. Barbara maintains a strong presence in Worcester, with her vast experience from serving on numerous boards at organizations and schools, like on Worcester State College's [Now, Worcester State University] Board of Trustees, where she served as the chairwoman. Sharing advice with students everywhere Barbara said, "Try to learn about other cultures, make friends from other areas."

**TA:** So we are here to complete a citywide oral history of the lives of Worcester women, aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences. Based on the goals of the 1850 National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on the areas of women's education, health, work, and politics and community involvement. And today we want to focus on your experiences with politics and community involvement. So thank you for your help and your willingness to do this and all that kind of stuff. I 'wanna' just for clarification ask for your permission to record the interview.

**BK:** Fine.

**TA:** OK great.

**BK:** No problem.

**TA:** And the first question is what is your full maiden name?

**BK:** Barbara Jean Castle.

**TA:** OK. And could you spell out the "Jean" and "Castle" part please.

**BK:** J-E-A-N.

**TA:** OK.

**BK:** C-A-S-T-L-E.

**TA:** C-A-S-T-L-E. Great. And have you ever been married?

**BK:** I am still, once.

**TA:** OK. And what is your, oh, obviously Kohin. OK. Great. OK and do you have any children?

**BK:** I have three.

**TA:** OK.

**BK:** Daughters.

**CG:** Are they also here in Massachusetts?

**BK:** One is in Acton, [Massachusetts], but the other two, one's in Colorado, one's in California.

**TA:** Oh so...

**CG:** Oh nice.

**TA:** [Oh so] just spread it all out. Yea.

**BK:** Nice and places to visit.

**CG:** [Laughter].

**TA:** [Laughter]. And it looks like you have some grandchildren. Do you...

**BK:** Two.

**TA:** ... two grandchildren.

**BK:** There they are. (Pointing to a picture).

**TA:** [A] nice little happy birthday, little art, artist.

**BK:** That's right. (\_\_\_\_ ??).

**TA:** Yup. [Laughter].

**BK:** One of them worked on that. (Pointing to drawing).

**TA:** [Laughter]. Better than I could have done I can tell you that much. What cultures and ethnicities do you identify with?

**BK:** Well I'm a Yankee.

**TA:** OK.

**BK:** I guess I would say. Cultures and what?

**TA:** Ethnicities.

**BK:** Oh, well, I am, ya know, Yankee.

**TA:** OK. OK.

**BK:** That's it. That's a culture and ethnicity.

**TA:** Mhmm. And any, with your family background, anything other beyond that?

**BK:** One of my grandmothers was of Dutch ancestry.

**TA:** OK.

**BK:** And, one of my grandfathers was of probably French ancestry, but you know they, their families had been in this country for a long time.

**TA:** Yeah. OK.

**BK:** And they were both New Englanders also.

**TA:** OK. OK. So the next question is to talk about your parents a little bit, how they impacted you and all that kind of stuff.

**BK:** Well, my father was a biologist.

**TA:** OK. Oh OK that's interesting.

**BK:** And my mother also studied biology, although she didn't work in the field.

**CG:** Mhmm.

**BK:** My father was a biology professor. And, actually, my family had a sort of scientific tendency, gene.

**TA:** Oh OK.

**BK:** As you would say. I mean, one of my sisters is an engineer, a civil engineer, and the other one was a, had a Ph.D. in chemistry and I'm a physicist. I was trained as a physicist. And, in my father's family, there were a few, quite a few scientists also. So, (\_\_\_\_??) his uncle, and his cousins are all scientists.

**TA:** Oh OK.

**CG:** Mhmm.

**BK:** And my children, two of my children are scientists.

**TA:** Wow it's a really continuing generation. [Laughter].

**BK:** That's right.

**CG:** Where did your father teach?

**BK:** He taught at Mary Washington College in Virginia.

**TA:** Oh OK.

**BK:** In Fredericksburg, [Virginia].

**TA:** OK great. And, where have you lived during your life? Other than Worcester?

**BK:** Well I was born in Providence, [Rhode Island].

**TA:** OK.

**BK:** I spent a couple years in Ohio, and but, mostly I lived in Virginia with, with my father at Mary Washington.

**TA:** Yeah.

**BK:** And I went to college in Virginia. I lived in Virginia from the third grade through college. Oh and I also lived in Missouri for a, just one year.

**TA:** OK.

**CG:** (\_\_\_\_??).

**BK:** Between Providence, let's see it went Providence, Ohio, Missouri, and then Virginia. Mostly Virginia.

**TA:** OK.

**KM:** What part of Ohio?

**BK:** In Granville, [Ohio].

**KM:** Oh I know where that is.

**BK:** You know it?

**KM:** Mhmm.

**TA:** [Laughter].

**BK:** Even though you're from westerly Rhode Island?

**KM:** I am originally from Ohio.

**BK:** Oh whereabouts?

**KM:** Canton, [Ohio].

**BK:** Oh yeah.

**CG:** So what caused you to holland from the different states?

**BK:** Well, I went to graduate school in Maryland and which is where I met my husband. He was also, we were both studying physics. And after that, we went to Geneva, Switzerland for a short time. Then we came, Roger got a job at Clark [University], and so we came directly to Clark, to Massachusetts...

**TA:** Yeah.

**BK:** ... in the '60s, early '60s. And we've been here ever since.

**TA:** Mhmm.

**BK:** So that's a long time.

**TA:** And you've liked it ever since?

**BK:** We've been here, 50 years, almost, well, yeah, 50 years.

**TA:** Wow.

**BK:** Oh I love, Worcester, [Massachusetts] is wonderful, wonderful.

**TA:** Yeah I like it too; it's a beautiful city, yeah especially your neighborhood.

**BK:** Well its interesting, interesting place. Just the right size.

**TA:** Yeah it's not huge; it's right in the middle. It's Boston, [MA], Springfield, [MA], Worcester is right in the middle.

**BK:** Worcester is in the middle. And this year we got more snow than other place in the country did you know that? More than Anchorage, Alaska. More than Buffalo, [New York]. 107 inches of snow.

**TA:** Something's changing... something! [Laughter]. OK. So let me see. What was the neighborhood like generally where you grew up, back in Virginia?

**BK:** Well, Fredericksburg was a very fairly town then, 15,000. It's a very stark city. It has a lot of very old houses. George Washington's brother, sister, lived there, had a mansion, Kenmore, like a museum.

**TA:** Like a tourist attraction.

**BK:** Washington's mother Marian lived there; of course the college is named after her. And she is buried in Fredericksburg. And well, it didn't have a whole lot of industry. It had one big cellophane plant, and that was about it. And it had the college, and it had usual bunch of little retail places. It was a nice place to grow up. It had a newspaper, the Freelance Star. I was a papergirl, one of... I guess I was the second girl in town. And that was kind of exciting.

**CG:** What age did you start?

**BK:** Well I was probably about thirteen, I think.

**CG:** Good.

**BK:** Usual. But now they don't have kids doing it. It's a shame. It was fun. It was a good way to earn money.

**TA:** Now, the next question is, where you live in the city now, would this be considered the kind of historic district in Worcester, or what is this area considered? I'm not from Worcester.

**BK:** Our house is about 100 years old. But it's not the oldest. I mean there are many more.

**TA:** Yeah.

**BK:** Many other older houses in Crown Hill. Even over, I think, on Salisbury, near Park. This is not one of the newest, obviously, sections of the city.

**TA:** Mhmm, OK. So somewhat historic, but not, you know, not a Washington's sister's mansion kind of thing.

**BK:** We don't have a... (\_\_\_\_ ??). We don't have a historic district.

**TA:** Let's see, have you just lived in like this house particularly since you been here?

**BK:** Yes.

**TA:** Oh OK.

**BK:** We lived in Holden, [Massachusetts] for a year or two. A couple years we lived in Holden.

**TA:** Then you came here?

**BK:** Yeah.

**TA:** To this house?

**BK:** Yea. We came here in less than two years.

**CG:** What caused you to move here in Worcester?

**BK:** Because of Clark [University]. Well we wanted to live in Worcester. We didn't want to live in Holden.

**CG:** Oh.

**BK:** When we first came here we rented, we couldn't find a place to rent in the city. So...

**TA:** Oh OK.

**BK:** This is the first house we bought.

**CG:** Well it's a beautiful house.

**BK:** Well thank you.

**TA:** Yeah it is, very beautiful. Now I remember you had said, the next question is, do you have other family members that live in the area, but your two daughters live in other states, correct?

**BK:** Yes, one of them lives in Acton. Now that's only 40 minutes away.

**TA:** OK.

**BK:** With the grandchildren.

**TA:** OK.

**BK:** With her husband.

**TA:** Now this is getting more out of the biographical kind of thing, what challenges do you think the city still faces, as a former City Councilor and stuff like that?

**BK:** First of all budget problems.

**TA:** Fiscal problems?

**BK:** And, I just, we have a little problem with schools. With, with absorbing all the new immigrants well. I mean doing well by them. I think that's a bit of a problem. But, it seems to me we have a very well run city government now, which is exceptional. It wasn't that good in the past.

**TA:** And now, I have a question. I am a political science major myself.

**BK:** Right.

**TA:** How long has Worcester had a town manager form of government?

**BK:** '49.

**TA:** Since '49. And but the major...

**BK:** It was Plan E.

**TA:** Plan E. Plan E.

**BK:** It wasn't introduced. I guess it was elected in '49. First election was in '51. I've forgotten. I think it was '49 when we got Plan E.

**TA:** OK.

**BK:** We passed it.

**TA:** Now do you think that's... would you rather that? Do you like that idea of government?

**BK:** Yeah I liked it. I like it.

**TA:** Yeah. It's different. I've never really seen it before.

**BK:** A city manager type?

**TA:** Yeah, with a mayor at the same time.

**BK:** Well there were... At that time, at the time it was quite fashionable to have a city manager type.

**TA:** Mhmm.

**BK:** Government.

**TA:** And the mayor is more of just a ceremonial kind of post right?

**BK:** Right, right.

**TA:** Is there anything you would kind of change about the city?

**BK:** Well, I didn't like when they had the charter change. And they put in the district representation. They applied district councilors and six at-large.

**TA:** Oh like ward representation?

**BK:** Yeah. (\_\_\_\_ ??).

**TA:** That's what Springfield is.

**BK:** Yeah I don't care for that. I would rather have... my ideal form of government would be at-large councilors. We had nine when I was elected. We had nine at-large. At-large and have proportional representation [PR], as the voting system. Do you know what, how that works? So that you vote one, two, three, four, like your preference.

**TA:** Oh , OK, so like what you want.

**BK:** It turns out... it's a complicated system. But, it turns out you elect a more diverse council generally if you have... Cambridge, [Massachusetts] is the only town, city, in Massachusetts that's proportional, PR. And they have more minorities; they've had more women in history, historically.

**TA:** Mhmm.

**BK:** And they have a more diverse, and I like the at-large system because I like having each councilor answerable for the whole, to all the voters rather than to such a segment. So that you don't have these tradeoffs.

**TA:** Mhmm. Yeah I see what you're saying. And it's interesting to me personally because my Dad's an at-large City Councilor in Springfield where they have a ward system, where they just got that a couple years ago.

**BK:** Yeah.

**TA:** So yeah it's changed over time. It definitely has its ups and downs.

**BK:** But, we'll never go back I'm sure.

**TA:** Yeah. That would be a big charter change.

**BK:** But actually when we had PR, they throughout PR first, and just had regular voting. They threw out proportional representation. And when they had proportional representation, they really had more diverse geographically and ethnically. They didn't have any women until we were elected in 1973. They had no women at all.

**TA:** Mhmm.

**BK:** But, they did have more geographical representation. Now of course we got the geographical representation by this district type thing.

**TA:** Yeah.

**BK:** But, I wish we had PR.

**TA:** Mhmm.

**BK:** Of course we'll never get it.

**TA:** [Laughter]. Yeah no, it's not coming back.

**BK:** There's a (\_\_\_\_\_??) called FAIR VOTE, you could look it up on the web. I've been supporting [it] for a long time. It works for proportional representation or instant runoff voting. Now, that's another good way to do it. You don't have to have a prim... well you'll have to look it up.

**TA:** Well I think I understand what you're saying.

**BK:** I could explain all this, but it would take a while.

**TA:** It's where the top two advance to the final.

**BK:** Well, yes. If you, I mean, yeah.

**TA:** Yeah.

**BK:** You have, you vote 1, 2, 3, say for three candidates, you vote.

**TA:** And then whoever the top two is would advance.

**BK:** Well, the third candidate; those the second choices are the people who voted for the third candidate are distributed between the first two.

**TA:** Mhmm.

**BK:** So the person who wins is not necessarily the winner.

**TA:** Yeah, the third could go with the second and then the second could win. Yeah.

**BK:** That's right. Marian Robinson was, was elected President of Ireland and she didn't...

**TA:** She just came to Massachusetts, recently.

**BK:** ... yeah right, she didn't... she spoke at Assumption a few years ago. Actually she didn't get the most first, top votes, but the person who, the people who lost, the people who voted for the people who lost had her in second place. So she picked up enough votes that way to win, even though she wasn't the first choice.

**TA:** Mhmm. Yeah, yeah. It's interesting way it works.

**BK:** If you're a political scientist you should really study this. There are quite a few books about proportional representation.

**TA:** Yeah there is.

**BK:** Somebody in western Massachusetts from UMASS, [University of Massachusetts at Amherst], I've forgotten his name wrote a good book about that.

**TA:** Oh really, hopefully we can learn that. So, glad we covered that huge topic. So let's see, what, other than the government side, what changes have you seen in Worcester over time, besides the government changes.

**BK:** Well of course, the immigration...

**TA:** Yeah.

**BK:** ... I mean the change in the ethnic, ethnic situation in Worcester is really rapidly changing. I mean in a few years most of the maybe even now, most of the schoolchildren are not, I mean they may be Hispanic or Puerto Rican so their citizens but also a lot of other ethnic groups.

**TA:** Yeah it's definitely becoming more diverse.

**BK:** Oh much more diverse -- it's so interesting.

**TA:** Mhmm.

**BK:** It's wonderful.

**TA:** Mhmm.

**BK:** And of course we have these, like Latino celebration in the summer...

**TA:** Oh really?

**BK:** ... it's very interesting.

**TA:** Oh cool. And personally, what do you think, other than those two characteristics, make Worcester the place that it is? What attracts people to come here?

**BK:** Well the thing is it's just the right size. It seems to me so that one person can feel they make a difference. They can feel that they know the city, you can learn the city fairly well, and one person can actually make a difference. Also, Worcester has a strong, a strong group of non-profits.

**TA:** Oh OK.

**BK:** And organizations. I think they have a good range of services for people who need it.

**TA:** Mhmm. Wide range.

**BK:** Right. Right.

**TA:** That's good.

**BK:** Right.

**TA:** And, the last question for me is what do you think women's experiences in Worcester have been generally? Have they progressed over time or what's your...

**BK:** Well, they certainly have progressed politically. I mean we now have, what three women on the city council, I think. Well we had three women in '73 and then we didn't have, and that was out of nine. We've never had one-third of the council as women, since that period.

**TA:** Mhmm. Well see that might be one of the downfalls of the...

**BK:** Well, it was rather a fluke, our election was rather...

**TA:** Oh it was? Oh OK.

**BK:** ... quite a fluke. I mean we all lost in two years. It was, we sneak up on them.

**ALL:** [Laughter].

**BK:** We scared the guys and they all, I mean the Irish always used to vote for each other.

**TA:** Yeah.

**BK:** But when they saw how well we did in the primary, the women, they panicked and they told their, their, it's very interesting, they told, all the Irish guys told their supporters just to vote for them and not for the other Irish people.

**TA:** Mhmm.

**BK:** So the five of them lost. Because of course they didn't vote for each other. There were four, four incumbents lost. I mean this was unheard of.

**TA:** Yeah.

**BK:** Unusual, very unusual. Never happened again.

**TA:** Mhmm.

**BK:** But of course the next election, it was funny, because so many incumbents had lost the time before, there were 47 or 49 candidates. Was obscene. The ballot was so long. And one of the things I did when I was a city councilor, to be fair. They used to have a ballot where all the incumbents were listed first.

**TA:** That's how Springfield is. Yeah.

**BK:** I got, I got an order passed for ballots position by lot. So they pick them by lot.

**TA:** Oh by random?

**BK:** They pick them out of... And the time, the second election I chose number 49 or 47.

**TA:** Figures right.

**ALL:** [Laughter].

**TA:** Figures.

**BK:** (\_\_\_\_\_??).

**TA:** Yeah Springfield's is incumbent[s] alphabetically, and then alphabetically non-incumbent[s].

**BK:** Well if your father is still on the...

**TA:** Yeah he is.

**BK:** ... council...

**TA:** With the last name "A" of course so there's no...

**BK:** ... oh he's an incumbent so he's not...

**TA:** ... so there's no way he won't be number one.

**BK:** ... he's not going to have them do it by law.

**TA:** Yeah.

**BK:** Yeah.

**TA:** But that's an interesting way of doing that. I've never heard of it that way.

**BK:** Oh I think it's not unusual, but it's so much fairer.

**TA:** No it does sound more fairer.

**BK:** Oh it's much more fair, especially if you have a whole lot of candidates.

**TA:** Yeah like you said 50 is quite the number of people.

**BK:** Well, it never had that many since, since the first election under Plan E, when they had a big bunch of them under PR, but.

**TA:** Mhmm. So, any other experiences for when you think about Worcester, have changed over time? Other than political?

**BK:** Oh I think we have a much more professional city council than we did when I was in office. It was like a family business then.

**TA:** You do this for me and I'll do this for you kind of thing.

**BK:** There were, there were, there wasn't much budget problems, many budget problems. So they didn't have a good budgeting system.

**TA:** Mhmm.

**BK:** And, and, well it was like a family business I should say. I mean it really was not...

**TA:** I mean call it what it is.

**BK:** It was not a well-run city, in many respects. But it is now. Much better.

**TA:** Much more professional.

**BK:** Much more professional yes.

**TA:** OK. And you see more women getting more experiences in Worcester, and all that kind of stuff now present, than back then?

**BK:** Well I think there are more women active in politics.

**TA:** More women active OK.

**BK:** Yeah. I mean we have a woman senator and we have a women representative now, you know, Mary Keefe.

**TA:** Oh OK.

**BK:** And, in the state house. And I don't remember ever having, we never had another legislator.

**TA:** Yeah that's interesting.

**BK:** Although we had the first woman senator, she's been there for a long time.

**TA:** Yeah.

**BK:** We had the first women representative from Worcester, I mean this is incredible.

**TA:** Mhmm. Yeah that's quite the...

**BK:** It is.

**TA:** ... progressive achievement.

**BK:** It is.

**TA:** Over time.

**BK:** Of course Massachusetts has never had a woman governor, which is unlike many other states.

**TA:** Oh other than Jane Swift, who technically wasn't...?

**BK:** Well right.

**TA:** Yeah.

**BK:** You're right. Right.

**TA:** But she really... you're correct.

**BK:** Acting [Governor].

**TA:** Acting, you're correct. Really wasn't.

**BK:** [Governor Paul] Cellucci left and she got in.

**TA:** The last five have all done that really. [Laughter]. OK so I think that's my part of the interview and now Chelsea's turn.

*Tom Ashe ends his part of the interview here.*

*Chelsea Gamboa begins her part of the interview here.*

**CG:** So we are moving onto education, and just basically the title says, education and then we will be talking about work.

**BK:** Well, I went to William and Mary as an undergraduate and I majored in Chemistry. It was a smaller school back then. It's gotten real big. It's been a lot bigger. It has a big department. But anyways, I graduated in 1953 and I went to Maryland. I was sort of recruited by Maryland. They were building a Physics Department.

**CG:** Well, that's nice.

**BK:** They came into our school and recruited some of us Chemists to do Chemical Physics.

**TA:** Mmm.

**CG:** That's interesting.

**TA:** That's not my cup of tea but kudos to you.

**BK:** Well I, I sorta, I had applied for a job in my senior year. We went up to... I had a friend who worked for GE. [General Electric]

**TA:** General Electric?

**BK:** ... And I went up to synecdoche for an interview, because I saw this program. It was a program that of trading in a nuclear power and I thought that sounded great. You know, they had this kind of a fellowship or trainingship, so I went to GE. Well, this is like the dark ages and I sort of pushed myself in for an interview to the department but he said, "We don't take women in that program at all." And I was like...

**CG:** That's terrible.

**BK:** ... I was a little taken a back. But, that is how it was back in those days. They just get married. You know, we just spend all this money on training and they just get married. And he was just awful. And I mean I said, "Well I'm serious!" Because you know I was a serious student. And he said, "Oh just come back when you get your Ph.D." and I always thought to myself, that I would go back because when I got my Ph.D.

**CG:** Mmm Hmm.

**BK:** Physicists were very much in demand. And, I would go in there and get the interview and they would offer me the job and I would say, “I wouldn’t take your job, if it was the last....

**ALL:** [Laughter]

**BK:** (\_\_\_\_??) thing in the world.” But it seemed like a lot of trouble just for revenge, so I didn’t do it.

**ALL:** [Laughter].

**CG:** Well, that would have been one heck of an event if you were there.

**BK:** Well those were the days. I’m sure you’ve read about this for women. You know, it was very different for women. But, they had help wanted [ads] for women and help wanted for men. You know.

**CG:** True.

**BK:** Yeah.

**CG:** So.

**BK:** I was the only woman in Physics at that time. Of course, there are more physicists right now - I mean graduate school.

**CG:** Oh Wow!

**BK:** Well, the year I graduated from William and Mary in 1953, there were 80 women in the United States who were undergraduates of Physics. Of course, I got it in Chemistry. There were more in Chemistry. There were 80 women in the whole country.

**CG:** Oh Wow!

**BK:** I once thought, that I knew all the women, Ph.Ds. in the country. I mean it seemed that there were so few of us, of course now there are lots and lots.

**CG:** Hmm.

**BK:** So, well.

**CG:** What are some challenges that you had during your education?

**BK:** Well, I mean in graduate school, was, I had some difficulty points, some difficult points.

**TA:** Yeah?

**BK:** Yes, some difficult courses. But, it was so much fun. I mean it was a blast. I thoroughly, we all thoroughly enjoyed it. I mean, when we get together, if we get together some of us, we can just reminisce about how great it was.

**TA:** Oh you guys still get back together to this day?

**BK:** It was really fun. Well, of course most of the people that I was in graduate school with, I haven't seen a whole lot. I've seen him a couple of them we visit each other every once in a while. There were 25 in our class.

**TA:** Huh [Said in agreement].

**CG:** It's nice that you still all keep contact with each other.

**TA:** Yeah.

**BK:** Well, it was important. And of course. Haha, it was rather funny that I was the only woman in the class. I became sort of a matchmaker. I had my Sorority sisters come up and three of them married Physicist.

**CG:** Wow, you are quite a matchmaker!

**BK:** Well I think the guys didn't have a lot of girls there at all. So it was. They were easy.

**ALL:** [Laughter]

**TA:** Easy Targets?

**ALL:** [Laughter].

**CG:** What about some challenges in like, challenges in your surroundings?

**BK:** Well, when I first came to Worcester it was. The colleges didn't hire women. I sent my resume to WPI, Holy Cross, Assumption. I didn't, I mean Clark was accepting women, but my husband already worked there so that didn't work. I sent my resumes around and they didn't even answer.

**TA:** Did they respond?

**BK:** They didn't respond or acknowledge. I remember, I thought I'd call up WPI and talk to the Physics guy and he said, "Well, we do have an opening for a Molecular Physicist" and I said 'I am a molecular physicist!'

**ALL:** [Laughter]

**BK:** And he said, “Really?” I, you know, I never got an interview. So I did get a job finally, at Worcester State. Back then it was bad, they didn’t have enough Ph.Ds. Even the president back then didn’t have one.

[Inaudible]

**BK:** And Worcester State back then was basically a high school.

**TA:** But, it evolved right?

**BK:** Oh my gosh, yes! It’s a great school now.

**TA:** It’s such a good school

**BK:** Magnificent! I mean, but it was a really bad. Worcester State was not as bad as it is now. And I had a really terrible load and I had like four courses and two labs.

**CG:** Oh wow!

**BK:** I had a very heavy schedule, I mean. - And the college, the faculty never had, I mean the faculty never really had meetings and I don’t know. So I really... I got myself elected to the state college.

**TA:** Board?

**BK:** No, not the board. What was it? [Speaking to herself] Kinda. The Worcester State. The association had somebody from each school.

**TA:** Each School? What did they do?

**BK:** ... And they finally! We went to the trustees meetings. You know, we observe the trustees meetings and so I started having my own meetings at Worcester State you know the President didn’t really enjoy this too much. But you know, it was sort of riling up the faculty a bit. But, I didn’t stay a lot. I only stayed three years. I quit actually. My husband, every time my husband had a sabbatical I quit with my job. So, I had a series of different jobs. But I quit the job in the Worcester State because there was a job at Clark [University] for a year you know filling in for someone. Then we went to Yugoslavia for sabbatical.

**CG:** That’s nice.

**TA:** Wow. That’s good!

**BK:** Yugoslavia, then we had India.

**CG:** So you've been in India before?

**BK:** So we also spent a year in Africa... in Kenya. It was such a good experience. And of course we spent a year in Geneva. And back then I went to Holland for a bit. I left William and Mary for a year and went to Holland because it was my first year to Europe and I had a blast. I could not just hardly wait to see the world.

**CG:** And you did! Which was your favorite out of those sabbaticals?

**BK:** Well everyone asks me that. Well I'd have to say well all of them, each were unique. Maybe India was the best.

**CG:** Ooh India!

**BK:** Because it was, well we had, the children enjoyed it so much. They were, when we were in Yugoslavia, the kids were too young to remember. Like in the nursery school or second grade you know. But when we were in India the girls were 12, 14 and 16 so they really. And we traveled all over the country. We had such a great time

**CG:** That's nice!

**BK:** Of course they didn't want to go. They said they had made arrangements to stay with their friends. They weren't going they told us.

**CG:** Yeah it's usually like that.

**BK:** And we told them, 'That is not an option.'

**TA:** Yup you're coming.

**ALL:** [Laughter]

**CG:** And they must be glad that you did,

**BK:** They said yeah! I use this as the mother knows best story. Remember when you said you didn't want to go to India?

**CG:** And then you loved it?

**BK:** Yeah.

**TA:** Oh yeah.

**CG:** I'd love to do that.

**BK:** Well teenagers are very conservative because they do not want to leave their friends.

**TA:** Oh, yeah it is what it is. I would probably agree with you.

**All:** Oh yes.

**CG:** Oh yeah, it's usually always like that.

**BK:** Yes.

**CG:** So what is support works and mentoring have been important to you?

**BK:** Oh mentoring was extremely important to me. My adviser was really great. And after I came here I had a mentor who just died recently. who was just extremely wonderful. I mean he helped me a lot he helped me find, he got me a couple jobs and yeah he was a good advisor. I had a couple advisors actually.

**ALL:** Oh no I'm sorry.

**BK:** He was such a good mentor. He helped me find. He helped me get a couple of jobs. He was just a great adviser. I've had a couple of really good mentors actually.

**CG:** That's good.

**TA:** All of them? Throughout the journey and all that stuff?

**BK:** Oh yeah, right.

**CG:** OK in terms of work, do you still work? Do you work outside the home?

**BK:** No, I mean the only thing I'm on the board of the [Worcester Women's] History Project you know the Oral History Project it belongs to and I've been in huge numbers of boards and committees

**ALL:** [Laughter].

**BK:** but all I have left is the History Project. I mean we go to concerts.

**CG:** Oh really? Concerts? Here In Massachusetts?

**BK:** Oh yeah. In Worcester. Yes and maybe 50 a year a lot.

**CG:** Well, at least you get to go all over Massachusetts!

**BK:** And we go to museums, we're doing a cultural event. and reading a lot. Well, I mean everything just piles up and there's just so much to read.

**CG:** Well, do you have any concerts near? I mean like coming up soon for you?

**BK:** Oh let me think, actually we're in a bit of a low. We are going off to Washington for a week. But we had a concert -- two concerts last week.

**CG:** Mhmm, mhmm.

**BK:** The Bon Symphony in Mechanics Hall and then a cafe concert with the chamber music society and. I guess the next concert we have is going to be Zach Kerr sing you know the Indian drummer you probably don't know but he plays the Tobla. We were going to go there but we were going there but, that on Easter and I will probably have my grandchildren over so

**TA:** Yeah.

**CG:** Oh.

**KM:** Awh.

**BK:** ... And I'll probably not go.

**CG:** Well at least you will still have fun.

**ALL:** [Laughter].

**BK:** Of course I went to, we went to a concert at Assumption last week.

**TA:** Oh!

**CG:** Really?

**BK:** Harpsichord concert.

**TA:** Ok

**BK:** You know they have that harpsichord you know that makes you wanna go and make you all globally and bought and she has arranged a lot of the harpsichord concerns. But this was the last one it was at noon you know at lunch time and this was the last one in the series. You know. And

just before that we went over there for the Salisbury Singers that Michele [Graveline] did in the Chapel [of the Holy Spirit at Assumption College]. That was the week before so that was very nice.

**TA:** Oh yeah.

**CG:** Yeah that's very nice. I love our chapel.

**BK:** Oh yes.

**CG:** It's very beautiful. Yes. How are you able to balance your different priorities, responsibilities and your like interests inside, in your life?

**BK:** Well it was very difficult at the time because I was working of course and now I just have plenty of time and what I do now, I spend awful amount of time exercising you know water aerobics or whatever.

**CG:** Ooh aerobics! That sounds like fun.

**BK:** Because I have neuropathy and I have very bad balance and if I don't spend a lot of time exercising I get you know I can hardly move and I go to the Jewish center five days a week and then I read for hours and hours.

**CG:** Oh, I love reading.

**TA:** Oh yeah?

**BK:** I love to cook - and I was in several different boards a few years ago and I've retired from those. Now all I have is the history project and I think I am gonna go off that board next fall. My term is up. So that will be -- I must have been in 35 boards and communities.

**CG:** Oh wow, that's a lot.

**ALL:** [Laughter]

**TA:** Oh several, several and several haha.

**CG:** You were very active, That's good!

**BK:** Well of course, I joined a lot of stuff. Maybe because I was interested in politics, or because people knew I was in politics and they asked me to join things so you know I was head of the ACOU Chapter and founded this Soviet Sister Project when I was at Holy Cross.

**CG:** Mhmm Hmm

**BK:** Sorta a peace nic kinda thing. And I was on the trustees board at Worcester State which is interesting, because the president was rolling over – it's great the idea of me being a trustee. But, I was head of the trustees at Worcester State and I was trustee at the public library. I was the chairman of the trustees at the public library. So I have been in a lot.

**TA:** Yeah, A wide of different topics.

**BK:** Yes, Yes.

**CG:** Exactly, in terms of like, your parents what did they work as? What were they?

**BK:** My father was a professor of Biology and was the head of the department. And my mother,

**TA:** Studied it but didn't.

**BK:** [Nods head] She studied biology and taught it before she was married; she taught in high school. She taught just a year or two I think, in Chemistry, she taught in high school. She was near us. She wasn't extremely healthy. So she wasn't fit to work but she was a bridge player and a woman's clubber

**CG:** Oh.

**BK:** Yeah.

**CG:** OK. And last question for me also, and then it will be Kaitlyn. What type of work does your husband do?

**BK:** He was a Physicist at Clark. A faculty member at Clark and he is retired now.

**CG:** OK. Alright, so Kaitlyn.

*Chelsea Gamboa ends her portion of the interview here.*

*Kaitlyn Murphy begins her portion of the interview here.*

**KM:** Alright, so what major historical events in Worcester have occurred during your time here?

**BK:** Wow.

**TA:** Probably a lot.

**BK:** Well, I don't, I can't think of any historical events, major historical events, I mean you know people die I guess.

**TA:** Prominent figures you know.

**BK:** Prominent figures die, I guess the the growth of the colleges is pretty important, I mean Assumption was not extremely big and prominent when we first came and it's- all of the colleges have gained a lot of ground, WPI has taken off, all of the colleges have grown.

**TA:** And that just overall you know contributes to the economy.

**BK:** It does, oh of course, one historic event was the creation of the Massachusetts Medical School.

**TA:** OK.

**BK:** That had a great deal to do with the rise of Biotech.

**TA:** Biotech industries is a big thing in Massachusetts.

**BK:** That's right, that's in Worcester even. The establishment of the Mass. Medical School was a great historical event. Let me think of what else? Refurbishing Mechanics Hall meant a lot to me because of the concerts, I mean, it was used as a wrestling.

**CG and KM:** Wow.

**TA:** Who knew...

**BK:** It fell into disrepair and they had wrestling matches there. I mean, you know and then they redid it and it's gorgeous. What else? I can't think of any major historical events.

**TA:** Well that's a couple and those-

**BK:** The newspaper-

**TA:** Those are significant

**BK:** The newspaper was sold...

**KM:** Yeah.

**BK:** ... the newspaper was sold a couple of times, I mean that made a difference.

**TA:** Has The Telegram and The Gazette gotten more?

**BK:** Awful, its always been awful, ugh yeah, its worst. I mean well it's-

**TA:** It's a pretty conservative paper isn't it?

**BK:** A very conservative, but it's struggling more now because you know it's not as big, it doesn't have as many reporters, it doesn't cover as much.

**BK:** It was always...

**TA:** A lot of smaller newspapers have that problem.

**BK:** ... it was you know always terrible I thought, you know compared to other newspapers.

**TA:** That's the real only one in Worcester.

**BK:** Well they had The Gazette and The Telegram but they both had sort of the same management because The Gazette was in the evening and The Telegram was in the morning.

**TA:** And now they've just combined.

**BK:** They've merged, right.

**KM:** Alright so how were girls treated when you were in school?

**BK:** Well, I thought we were treated quite well at William and Mary, I mean I didn't notice anything, but of course then when I discovered that I wasn't, you know, G.E. was not gonna give me a job or that all the colleges in Worcester weren't hiring women, I mean you know it was pretty bad.

**TA:** It was an eye opener huh?

**BK:** My sisters and I were just sort of brought up to think- not to think about sexual stereotypes. I mean one of my sisters is a civil engineer that's very unusual for a girl. And the other one has a Ph.D. in chemistry so you know, we didn't conform.

**TA:** You weren't.

**BK:** We didn't conform to the usual. It was always the sense that we were going to get an education I mean- of course because our family you know was very educated- all my grandparents went to college, most people can't say that.

**TA:** A lot of people you know even now still say 'I'm the first one.'

**BK:** One of my grandmothers was a nurse so she might have gone to nursing school, but all four of them.

**TA:** Very much valued an education.

**BK:** Yes, yes, there were quite a few professors in my father's family, my grandfather's brothers you know a couple of them.

**KM:** What difficult transitions did you go through in moving from childhood to adulthood?

**BK:** Well I was a terrific wallflower in high school, and I went to college when I was just sixteen.

**KM:** Oh wow.

**BK:** Because the schools in Virginia, the school in Fredericksburg at that time had only eleven years, not twelve, so you got done earlier. There were even a couple of girls in my class who were a couple of months younger than I you know.

**CG:** Wow.

**TA:** Quite unusual.

**BK:** So I went to William and Mary when I was sixteen and I was probably socially a little backward, but I didn't have too much difficulty with the academics actually, I was a good student in high school you know and I was very competitive and I entered all these contests like the French contest and the science talent search and the spelling bee, oratorical contests I entered all these things and I usually did pretty well at things like that, and I was a good student I was valedictorian.

**KM and CG:** Wow.

**BK:** Well it was a tiny school so I mean it wasn't hard to be-do well.

**TA:** Still quite the talent.

**BK:** There were only eighty students and I went back to my twenty-fifth and fiftieth it was such fun. And last year I went to a reunion in my high school too, I mean there weren't that many people, I mean many had died off of course but it was a lot of fun going back to Fredericksburg, which has grown. Fredericksburg-

**TA:** Yeah it's a vibrant city.

**BK:** It was awful well too much traffic compared to what it was, you know. Have you been there?

**TA:** I just know of it reading in history books, that kind of thing.

**BK:** Well of course they have a famous battlefield.

**TA:** Yes the Battle of Fredericksburg.

**BK:** Yeah it was yeah- quite a sight.

**KM:** Ok, how do you define success in your life and how has this definition- changed overtime?

**BK:** How do I define success? Well, it's changed when I had the children of course because it became -- their success became important to me.

**KM:** Yeah.

**BK:** So that's having kids who never did drugs and you know I didn't have any unwed motherhood that was kind of- maybe it was just lucky but I felt that was a mark of success. And having successful marriage is important; I mean we celebrated our fiftieth wedding anniversary a couple years ago.

**TA:** Congratulations.

**KM:** That's great.

**BK:** I mean we had a big celebration, a concert, we hired the-the chamber music people to play for us, we had a lot of guests it was fun, it was great. I don't think I did terribly well at my jobs. I mean I was- I did- I really did well at Worcester State, which there wasn't much competition. I-when I think back I can think of mistakes I've made. I wasn't a terribly good teacher really. I didn't teach a lot. Well I taught at Worcester State but I didn't teach a great deal. Well I didn't teach at Holy Cross I was an administrator. But I can think of mistakes you know, I made you know, but I did work hard on all these committees you know. I think I was an excellent councilor for city council but of course I didn't get elected again. None of us women did. But I lost worse than most people, I wasn't a very natural politician. I mean I was a little stubborn about a lot of things. Civil liberties was always very big for me, and that wasn't too popular. Censorship -- it bothered me and you know. Police abuse, I mean these things sort of got to me. So how has success changed? My feelings of success? Well as I said I was also very competitive. I terribly, I was really annoyed that I didn't make Phi Beta Kappa in college. I had a couple of weak courses there. But I managed to get through graduate school with some few slowed down periods. I don't know I guess I never thought about success much.

**TA:** Just try to do your best.

**KM:** Yeah.

**BK:** I wanted to win always, that's for sure. I mean success and winning that council seat that campaign was so much fun, it really was. It was a lot of work but it was great to win. It was much better to win than lose.

**TA:** Typically it is.

**KM:** Alright.

**BK:** And then I ran for charter commission and I didn't win that was very- I was very embittered then. I really knew a lot about the charter.

**KM:** Alright, how do you feel about the choices you've made in your life and do you have any regrets?

**BK:** Do I have any regrets? I guess I don't really, I was- I've been very lucky let's put it that way. I was so lucky to get the husband I have and I think we were lucky to come to Worcester, it's a wonderful place and my children are all doing very well-they really are. So that's good.

**CG:** That means you did a very good job too.

**KM:** Yeah.

**BK:** Well it is a matter of luck I mean you know I really- because I was really- you they had this business hour where kids are really programmed into the family and parents are so onto them. We let our kids ride their bikes all over town, it was benign neglect was our method- my method. My husband is a little more nurturing but mine was benign neglect because they're very independent. My kids are very independent. We let them go their own way, make their own mistakes

**CG:** Did you have any brothers or sisters?

**BK:** I had two sisters. I have two sisters still-.

**CG:** Were you the youngest?

**BK:** Talk to them today.

**BK:** What?

**BK:** Oh no I'm the oldest.

**KM:** Alright so last question.

**BK:** Finally

**KM:** Yeah finally. Based on your life experiences what advice would you give to woman of today and future generations?

**BK:** Hmm.

**KM:** It's a hard one.

**BK:** Well I think it's important to seek an education. But I think it's important to be open to new experiences, you know, and I think it's important to seek variety and diversity in your life. You know, don't get in a rut so to speak.

**KM:** Yeah.

**BK:** I think that's important. That's the advice I would give to people. I mean education is very important.

**TA:** It's crucial.

**KM:** Definitely.

**CG:** Especially now.

**BK:** But I also think it's important to try to learn about other cultures, make friends from other areas. We went to a seminar last fall for the Mass. Humanities Foundation and one of the panelists who teaches at Amherst said that his students are so incredibly ignorant of life and they're so upper class, they're so sheltered they don't know anything about how most of the people in the world live and most of the people in the United States live. They've never been exposed to anything except the upper-middle class people. He said he also teaches in a prison and he said in a sense the people there, the students there are so much more alive and interested in a whole range of things. I thought that was so interesting. So you have to be careful not to get in a rut, I mean it's true that you spend most of your time with people who are really just like you. So you have to sort of...

**TA:** Reach out.

**BK:** Yeah, yeah reach out that is important.

**TA:** That was the last one.

**KM:** That was the last one.

*Kaitlyn Murphy ends her part of the interview here.*