

Interviewee: Betsy Landry
Interviewers: Meaghan McCormack, Layal Mohammad
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Overseen by: Profs. Leslie Choquette and Christine Keating, Assumption College

Abstract: Betsy Landry is a 46-year-old who grew up in Charlton, MA. Betsy is half Irish and half English/Scottish. She is married to Richard Landry and has two daughters. Kathleen, who likes to be called Kat, is fourteen years old, and Margret, who likes to be called Maggie, is ten years old. Throughout Betsy's life, she focused most of her attention on her education and her job. She attended Assumption College for her Bachelor's and her MBA. She majored in Management and minored in Philosophy. Her main concern in life was what she wanted to do as a career when she graduated. As soon as she graduated, she was able to get a job in human resources. She's the director of human resources at Mirick O'Connell, a law firm in downtown Worcester. Although her job consumes most of her life, she is able to balance responsibilities for the house and kids with her husband. She loves her kids but sometimes wishes she had them a few years later than she did. Despite that, she wouldn't change anything about her life. She gave a few words of advice about young women nowadays. She said it's time for women to prioritize themselves and learn to put themselves first before others. In conclusion, she said she is very happy with how successful her life has turned out to be. She related her success to Maya Angelou's quote, "Success is liking who you are, liking what you do, and liking how you do it." She said it resonates to her life, and it's the best way to define success.

Q- Okay, what is your full name including both maiden name and married name if applicable?

A- Betsy Rogers Landry

Q- And when were you born?

A- [], 1968

Q- Have you ever married?

A- Yes

Q- And what is your husband's name?

A- Richard Landry

Q- Do you have any children?

A- Yes, I do.

Q- Can you tell us about your children?

A- Sure, I have two girls. My older daughter Kathleen is fourteen. She likes to be called Kat.

And my younger daughter is ten, her name is Margret, but she goes by Maggie.

Q- So, grandchildren?

A- No grandchildren [laughs].

Q- Can you tell us about your cultures and ethnicities that you use to identify you family background?

A- Sure. On my mother's side we can trace our ancestors back to the Mayflower. And on my dad's side, his parents actually came from Ireland. So, I identify as Irish ancestry and English and then also Scottish on my mother's side.

Q- And where have you lived during your life?

A- I was born in Charlton, Massachusetts. And I lived there until I was in college. And then I moved to Worcester. And I lived in Worcester until our older daughter was four, and then we moved back to Charlton.

Q- And what neighborhood in Worcester?

A- We lived on the West Side, out by the Holdon/West Boylston line.

Q- And what was the neighborhood like generally?

A- It was very quiet in the neighborhood, a lot of very kind neighbors. In fact, we've stayed in touch with them and then we have moved—gosh, it's been over ten years at this point since we've moved to Charlton. So it was a very close knit neighborhood. Tended to be a lot of older folks. There were not a lot of kids in the neighborhood. But just really nice people.

Q- And what city do you live in the city now?

A- I live in Charlton.

Q- And have you, would you say you've lived in multiple areas, throughout your whole life?

A- Not really, just Charlton and Worcester. And when I moved back to Charlton we actually—my husband and I built a house right next to my parents. So, I haven't gone too far in the course of my life.

Q- And what challenges do you think the city has or have you faced in the city?

A- As far as challenges the city faces, because I think I've worked in downtown Worcester now since 1991, I've seen a tremendous growth and a tremendous change in the downtown area. A lot of positive things have happened. I think that one thing that the downtown area really struggles with is—and that's the part of Worcester that I'm really most familiar so I'll speak about that—I think it's really struggling to still find its identity. And I think it's unusual for a city its size, the size of Worcester to have a downtown that is not as active and vibrant in the evening and on the weekends. I mean that and certainly there's a lot of people in the downtown area during the business day but I don't think that it's truly become ever described as—the hope is to have it as an eighteen hour downtown and I don't think we're there yet. I think there needs to be more restaurants and retail and more things to draw people to the downtown area.

Q- Is there anything else you would like to change about the city?

A- I don't think so.

Q- And what changes have you seen in Worcester over time?

A- I think, as I mentioned, I think that the main changes that I've witnessed are the changes in downtown. The removal of Worcester Common Outlets, the transition to City Square, St. Vincent [Hospital] with the beautiful building that they had built, they facelifted the DCU

Center, the Uni building downtown, the Cancer Center. I mean there's just been tremendous, tremendous changes in the downtown area and it's wonderful to see that.

Q- And what distinct characteristics make Worcester the place that you described?

A- I think the neighborhoods in Worcester are something that are a big part of its identity. There's very distinct neighborhoods within Worcester, I think that's one of the things that makes Worcester a great place to live. Also I think Worcester has a great geographic location. I mean being 45 minutes away from Boston, drive the other way, 45 minutes to an area, you can be in the mountains. I mean I think it's just a terrific location. It's easy access to so many different areas in New England so I think that's a real selling point for the city.

Q- What do you think women's experiences in Worcester have been generally?

A- I think positive. As I was driving out here today to meet you, I was looking at the political signs, the lawn signs that a lot of them had and I was noticing that at least half, if not more of them, were female candidates. And I thought that was really great to see because it shows that women in Worcester are committed to being active politically. I think also that the Worcester Women's Initiative for the United Way—I just gotten an email from them again this morning before I came out and I think that that is a tremendous asset to the city and just shows it's really a group of very committed women in Worcester. The Women's Worcester Initiative has been around I believe for about ten years now. I think they've raised about three million dollars in that ten years to help women and girls in the Worcester community and I think that just says so much about the women in Worcester.

Q- So now we're going to talk about your education. Where did you attend school?

A- I attended the younger grades in Charlton and then I went to Shepard Hill Regional High School which is in Dudley regional which is in Dudley/Charlton. And then I went to Assumption [College] for undergrad and then I came back for my MBA here at Assumption.

Q- Name programs such as your major and your year of graduation if possible.

A- Sure, for undergrad I graduated in 1990. My major was management and my minor was philosophy. And then my MBA I received that in 1999.

Q- What were your challenges in education?

A- I think my greatest challenge was really trying to figure out what I wanted to do as far as a career. I wasn't sure when I started at Assumption, what I wanted to do, what I wanted when I graduated. And I took a lot of different courses, trying to figure out what it was that I really liked. And I ended up going into management, thinking that it would give me a lot of options and it took me quite a while to figure out what I wanted to do. And it was probably not until I was late in my junior year, maybe even senior year when I decided that I wanted to get into human resources. So that was a big decision for me and it was difficult to try and plan the classes I wanted to take because, again, I just wasn't sure what I wanted to do. So I was trying to go for as broad a base as the classes as I possibly could.

Q- Were you able to graduate on time, since you like-

A- Yes, I did. I did. [laughs]

Q- Upon finishing your formal education, what did you see as your options?

A- I was fortunate enough to find a position in human resources very quickly after I graduated. So I was—I ended up going right into human resources right after graduation and I stayed the whole time that I've been in the work force.

Q- What support networks and mentoring have been important to you?

A- I think my family, first and foremost, has been an incredible support network. My parents, my siblings, now my husband and my children and I've also been very fortunate to have two incredible mentors in my work life. And they have supported me and pushed me and educated me and just have been— they've been my friends, my coach— just again, they've been such, such a tremendous asset to me and I would wish for you that when you get into a career that you enjoy and want to get into that you're fortunate to find mentors as good to you as those two have been to me.

Q- Thank you. What was your first job?

A- My first job was—well other than babysitting— my first job was working at an apple orchard doing sales when I was young. And then, what I would call my first real job was working in a retail store and I started that when I was in high school and I ended up working the whole time that I was in college at the retail store.

Q- So what do you do now?

A- Right now, I'm the director of human resources at Mirick O'Connell, which is a law firm in downtown Worcester.

Q- How did you come to do this work?

A- Well as I mentioned, I struggled a little bit in college as to what I wanted to do and when I was working at the retail store, one of the responsibilities I had was interviewing potential employees. And then I also had the opportunity to have some management responsibility of the particular department that I was located and I really enjoyed that and so I started to explore human resources in some of the classes that I took at Assumption and found that it was

something that I enjoyed and so I—to some extent—I sort of fell into it. I'm not sure that I would have thought of it as career option had I not done some of that work when I was at the retail store. But I really enjoyed it.

Q- What has this work meant to you?

A- It, it's a huge part of my life. It's brought me a lot of fulfillment, a lot of satisfaction. I've learned so much. I've been at the same place now for almost 23 years. And they've given me a lot of opportunities through the years. I started there very junior, as a secretary to the executive director, which is kind of like a CEO, and then the manager of human resources and ended up just having a lot of opportunities to grow over the years and I work with really great folks. I work with a number of labor and employment attorneys that have taught me so much. It just, it's been a great experience. I've developed a lot of friendships, both in the office and outside of the office as well. The colleagues that are also human resources that—I mean, it's been a huge, huge part of my life.

Q- What were or are your primary responsibilities in terms of housework and child care?

A- [laughs] I'm fortunate in that my husband is very much a partner when it comes to that. And we tag team a lot with respect to childcare and the housework. I would say as far as the housework goes, pretty much whoever has a few free minutes is the one that ends up doing the work, whatever it might be whether it's the dishes, whether it's the laundry, that type of thing. We tend to split the cleaning with respect to the childcare. Again, it's whoever's schedule has the most flexibility is the one who tends to bring the kids where they need to be when they need to be there. My husband's position tends to be the one that's a little bit more flexible. Usually as far as his schedule, he does some telecommuting. So he tends to be the one that does the brunt of

the chaffering, which is very, very helpful for me [laughs]. But again, it's just, we've kind of made it work by, again, whoever has the time to do the work, does the work.

Q- How has this changed for you over time?

A- I think it's certainly gotten more challenging once the kids arrived, there's no question about that. I think time management has gotten much more difficult once the kids arrived. Just trying to keep up with their schedules and what we find to be the most difficult is that once we get into a groove and a rhythm with respect to the kid's schedules then something will change and it'll be moving to a new grade or a new school and they'll be starting to take on new classes. Or something will change and we have to start from ground zero and really figure things out all over again. So, we're constantly shifting gears and we've learned to be incredibly flexible over the years with respect to our schedules.

Q- What do you think are the pros and cons of the path you have chosen?

A- With respect to my career, I think that human resources has the possibility to be a very fulfilling career. I think because you can make a tremendous impact on people's lives. I think that human resources as a profession though has evolved even in just the time that I've been part of it and it's very different from when I first started. It is much more about regulation and compliance now than it was when I first started. And I think that someone going into human resources now has to understand that that's a big part of it. And I've often asked myself if I would still go into human resources as a career if I knew then what I know now. And I think that I would. But again, it's very different. It takes a different skill set now I think to be successful than it did when I first started because now it's a lot more— you need to have incredible organizational skills and be very detailed oriented and just have a logical perspective on things

just because of all the compliance and the regulation. With respect to the personal path that I've chosen, I certainly have never regretted my decision to come to Assumption. I think that Assumption gave me a great foundation in many ways and it gave me a great education and a lot of great friendships. I still stay in touch with a number of my classmates. And I think as far as choosing to have a family—and we may talk about this a little more later on, but it's, it's really hard to juggle work and family—much harder than I ever anticipated it to be. Would I change that? Absolutely not. I mean, my girls are everything to me and I would never change that, but it's incredibly difficult to try and juggle and you—at least in my experience—you can't have it all. You almost feel guilty. You feel guilty when you're not around work because you're not at work and you feel guilty when you're not with your kids because you're not with your kids. So it's just, it's very, very difficult and you've got to have a great support network. It's got to be—the whole thing about it takes a village, it truly does. We were very fortunate that my mother-in-law watched our girls when they were younger so they were with somebody that cared about them when they were younger and they—we never had to give that a thought. And now we still call on my parents and my in-laws sometimes to help us out if the kids need to get some place and my husband and I are working. So it—I don't know how people do it when they don't have that great support network because it's just, it's very difficult, even with that support network.

Q- Did you get married and have kids as soon as you were through with college or—

A- No, I did not. I was 26 when I got married and then Cathleen was born when I was 31 and Maggie was born when I was 36. So no. I had made a decision that I— when I decided that I wanted to go back for my MBA, my husband and I talked about it and I decided that I— we decided that we were going to wait until I finished my master's before we started a family and I

was actually pregnant when I graduated. I don't know how I would have been able to juggle everything with having a child and going for my master's and working. It was hard enough just juggling work and school. So I'm glad that we made that decision.

Q- Okay now we're going to move onto politics and community involvement. Do you consider yourself active politically?

A- I don't because the way that I would define someone that's active politically is someone who volunteers on political campaigns or runs for political office. And I do not do that. But I feel that it's very important to vote and I always make sure that I do that. And I try to stay current with the issues so that I can understand the issues and understand the positions that the candidates have taken.

Q- What role has religion played in your life?

A- Faith has always been very important to me. I've always believed in God and felt very strongly that God has a path that he has chosen for me. I did not, growing up, attend church very often. When my husband and I were first married, we went to church fairly frequently. We have not gone as often now. So, I think as far as going to church, that hasn't been as important a part. I don't necessarily think you need to go to church to have faith and to be a religious person. So I would say, certainly my faith has been a big part of my life.

Q- And now moving on to health, how have health issues impacted your life or those in your family?

A- We've been very, very fortunate that in my immediate family, my husband, my children and myself, we've overall been very healthy. And certainly some members of the extended family have had some health issues. I've had some very close friends that have had some health issues

and I think it just puts everything into perspective when somebody is going through a difficult time with regard to their health and it makes you appreciate the good health that you have and it makes you realize that it's not something you could ever take for granted.

Q- And what are your experiences in accessing quality, affordable healthcare?

A- We are so fortunate to live the way we do because we have access to amazing hospitals and health care providers here in New England, specifically, and Massachusetts. And I think just that there's been a number of hospitals in this area that are world class hospitals. I mean again, as I was driving out here today there was a huge banner on the front of St. Vincent's Hospital saying that they were voted as one of three top one hundred hospitals in the country in the fourth year in a row. And that literally is across the street from where I work. So, again, we are very, very fortunate. We've never had any concerns when I need access to all the health care, I've always had that.

Q- How do you get through tough times? What kinds of thoughts keep you going?

A- I think that just by focusing on what is the most important to me, which is my family and trying to keep things in perspective. I think sometimes that it's really for us to get caught up in our day to day lives and sometimes I think we just have to take a step back and remember what's truly important.

Q- How do you define success in your life?

A- Maya Angelou had a great quote, let me see if I can remember it, "Success is liking who you are, liking what you do, and liking how you do it." And I think that really resonates with me.

And I think that that's probably the best way to define success that I've heard.

Q- Has this definition changed over time?

A- Yes, very much so. I think the older I get the more perspective I have on things. I think that when I was younger, it was more of a focus on the short term and just getting through the day, getting through my next class, getting to the next exam. That was just such a focus for me, but now I think it's easier to take in the long term view and to, again, just having an easier time to take things in perspective and feeling more confident in myself, more confident in what I want out of life, knowing what makes me happy and just really being able to focus on those things.

Q- Based on your life experience, what advice would you give to women of today and future generations?

A- I would say as a starting point to have confidence in yourself. I think that's something, as I mentioned, that you grow into as you get older and you have more life experiences, but I think it's important especially for young women to have that confidence. I think also I would suggest that young women learn to prioritize themselves first, which sounds selfish but I don't mean it in that way. I think that as women we are daughters and sisters and wives and mothers and employees and we can't do a good job at doing all those things if we don't take care of ourselves. And if we don't carve out the time to exercise, even if it means getting up extra early in the morning or making sure that we can somehow fit in, literally even if it's ten minutes a day just for yourself just to take some deep breaths or just to do something that you enjoy because again it's so easy to get caught up in—and just constantly running from one thing to the next and you're going to wear down at some point. And I've been through that and I know what that's like and I just had to learn to take a step back and realize that you can't be all of those things to all of those people if you're not taking care of yourself first.

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

A- I think that just how far women have come in a very short period of time. When my mother was growing up, it was situation where women were essentially steered toward a career as a secretary or a nurse or a teacher and I think things have changed to a significant extent by the time that I moved to college and I had a lot more options. I think that still at some point some careers were considered more male dominated, but I would like to think that for my daughters, by the time that they start thinking about the careers that they want to choose, that they will feel that they can do whatever it may be and there's no careers for women and careers for men, it's just careers. And they have that opportunity to do whatever they want and they will find themselves in a relationship that's more of a true partnership. I think I've seen, even just amongst my friends and my colleagues, that often times with child care there's not that the woman has the primary responsibility, unless the woman and the man have made the decision that that's what works best for their family, but I think women just have so many more choices at this point than we've ever had in the past and I think that sometimes we can lose sight of that because we're always thinking of how far we have to go and we certainly have a ways to go, but, again, it wasn't all that long ago that women's lives were so different than they are now and so structured and women didn't have the choices that they have now.

Q- What major historical events in Worcester have occurred during your time here? Did they impact you personally? If so, expand on this memory.

A- I think probably the biggest things that stand out to me just because of being in downtown is when the Worcester Common Outlets Mall was taken down and the City Square Project started

and just how excited I was to see the revitalization of downtown. And thinking that it was such a positive thing for Worcester and how happy I was that I was going to be located in literally right in the middle of that project and would really be able to have the opportunity to see it hopefully come to witness it in the near future.

Q- How old were you when you were allowed to date? And where did you go on dates?

A- [laughs] Well, I have two older brothers and an older sister, so, it was almost as though I had three dads and two moms, when it came to that so probably a little bit older than my siblings were. But I think it was probably junior in high school and it was just the typical going to a movie, going out to eat. I think much more so when I got to college, but it was high school.

Q- And did you get along with your siblings?

A- [laughs] I did actually because I am so much younger than my siblings. My brothers are fifteen and twelve years older than I am. And my sister is almost eleven years older than I am. So, my brothers were pretty much gone by the time I was old enough to remember much and my sister was in college and working that sort of type of thing. So there wasn't that sibling rivalry that I think that there would have been had we been closer in age. They were and they still are very protective of me. And I think we've gotten even closer as I've gotten older and I think we've had shared experiences regarding our families and I think we've just— we see each other more as friends now than siblings and I know they're always there if I ever need them. They would be there in a heartbeat for me.

Q- Now what was considered fashionable when you were a young woman?

A- [laughs] Oh boy. Big hair. Really, really big hair. Gloria Vanderbilt jeans.

Q- What are those?

A- They were just— they were a particular brand of jeans. Gloria Vanderbilt was a designer that had put those out. You know everybody had to have those Gloria Vanderbilt jeans. Other than that I think—it was the eighties, so pretty much everything went. Members Only jackets, but it was the thing that really stands out to me was the big hair. I mean all of the girls just teased as much as you could possibly imagine.

Q- Now, nowadays, when you look at the media, women have to be skinny; did you guys have that in the past, too, in the eighties? Like did you have to be skinny or curvy, or like the fashion?

A- Yes, although, we didn't have to deal with the Photoshop issue that I think is something that is a real concern now for young women because when we saw models in magazines or actresses on TV, granted they were very slender most of the time, but they weren't Photoshopped. We were seeing them as they actually were. But now, I think there's even more pressure because when you see these women, again, in magazines or on TV or whatever else, yes they are slender to start with but yet any potential—what an editor might see as a blemish or anything is typically Photoshopped. So I think we're just seeing, at this point, unrealistic photos of these women I think are a perfection that is basically unattainable because it's not natural. It's enchanted by technology. And I think that is just really dangerous when young girls see that and that's what they think they need to look like and it's impossible for them to look like. So we didn't have the pressure, I don't think that young women have now.

Q- What was your favorite musical group or song?

A- [laughs] I would say my favorite musical artist, growing up, was Billy Joel. I loved Billy— still do— Billy Joel. But I think particularly when I first started dating my husband he liked Billy Joel as well. So we've been listening to Billy Joel a lot.

Q- What was your favorite song from Billy Joel?

A- There's so many. I don't even have one particular one that sort of jumps out at me because I just I loved all of them.

Q- How were girls treated when you were in school?

A- I think that they were treated as equal to the boys by the teachers, particularly when I got to college. I think that the girls were really encouraged. I had some excellent female professors who were incredibly supportive of the girls in the class and were really committed to helping them reach their goals. So I think that I was very fortunate to have some really strong role models when I was going through my education.

Q- What were your most significant extracurricular involvements?

A- When I was in college, I didn't do a lot of extracurricular activities because I was working full time. So I had made the decision just from a financial perspective to help defray the cost of college that I was going to be working. So a lot of my extracurricular activities were something that I kind of really had to put on hold just because of working full time. So I mean I was certainly involved in some clubs but in looking back I wouldn't say that any had a huge impact on my life because I didn't have the time to be able to commit to them in order to make them have a big impact on my life.

Q- Did you ever play any sports?

A- Not well. [laughs] I liked sports and I liked to run and I liked to swim and skate, that type of thing, but I didn't play a lot of sports in school. Just through some town leagues and some leagues that were just purely for fun. I didn't play in school.

Q- What did your parents' education consist of?

A- My mother went to a secondary school, after high school. And my father got a degree in horticulture from Clark.

Q- And what difficult transitions did you go through in moving from childhood to adulthood?

A- I think that the most difficult transition I had was when I turned 25, which sounds kind of odd because I know that most kind of people find this struggle with 30 or 40 and I haven't had any issues with those, but 25 was when it really hit me that I'm out of college now, I'm in a career, I'm going to work every day and this is pretty much what my life's going to look like for the next however many years. At that point I felt like I need to grow up, I'm an adult and I really need to start focusing so 25 was a really tough year for me.

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

A- Well the thing that, immediately jumped out to me is not something that really happened when I was growing up, but I think 9/11 was the event that's had the biggest impact on me and I think that changed a lot of my thinking about life and what's important and it was just an incredible wakeup call as to knowing what my priorities are and to just realizing that none of us know what's going to happen tomorrow and we just need to focus on now and really try to live in the moment, which is something I've always had a tough time with—living in the moment. I tend to be a planner and tend to be one that's looking ahead but that's changed after 9/11. That was just such a horrific time and just realizing how many people's lives were changed so dramatically just because of that was just, again, was just such an eye opener for me.

Q- When you were not at home, where did you usually spend your time?

A- There's a lot of things that I like to do as my husband and I love to go to amusement parks, we love roller coasters, we love to take day trips to explore different areas in New England. I like to garden so I sometimes will go to visit different gardens. When I was in college I spent a lot of time at the Worcester Art Museum. I really enjoyed that.

Q- And were there particular areas of the city where you spent a lot of time?

A- Not really. I think that when I was at Assumption I lived off campus my senior year, just a short distance from the campus. So I spent a lot of time on this side of the city including, as I mentioned, going to the art museum. Now I spend most of my time in downtown. So those are probably the two areas that I am most familiar with.

Q- Do you have hobbies or do any regular leisure activities that take you outside of the home?

A- Yes. As I mentioned, my husband and I love amusement parks and roller coasters. Probably my biggest relaxation as far as a hobby is reading. I love to read. Also, as a family we like being outside. We tend to go kayaking, getting my girls involved in hiking. I like to do different 5-K runs for charity.

Q- Do you ever travel?

A- We do, but a lot of our travel is closer to home. We do a lot with day trips. We've been to a lot of different places in New England. We've gone to Hershey Park, we've gone to Niagara Falls, that type of thing. I have not had a lot of opportunity to travel outside of the country which is something I hope to be able to do that at some point.

Q- Where would you want to go?

A- Oh, I have a list. [laughs] I would love to go to Europe. I would love to go to Ireland, I think, just to see Ireland. Love to go to London, I have a niece who lived in London for a while

and she really enjoyed it I'd love to go there. I'd love to see Paris. I would love to go to Austria and Switzerland. But also I'd love to go to China. This past summer we hosted three Chinese exchange students and we learned a lot about China from them and I would love to have the opportunity to see where they live and just get more of a sense of their culture. I'd love to go to Australia. Really I'm not fussy. [laughs] Anywhere would be great.

Q- And would you say you're happy with your life?

A- Yes, I am. I'm very blessed. I have a wonderful family. I have a very supportive husband. I have two incredible girls. I have my parents, my in-laws, my extended family. I have a great job, a great network of friends. I've been very blessed to be healthy. So I have been very fortunate in many, many different ways.

Q- If you could, would you change anything?

A- Other than winning the lottery [laughs] no. Nothing within my control, no.