

Interviewee: Barbara MacPhee  
Interviewer: Vanessa Arroyo and Kaylee Miodona  
Date of Interview: April, 17, 2012  
Location: Holden, Massachusetts  
Transcriber: Vanessa Arroyo



Overseen by: Prof. Carl Keyes, Assumption College

**Abstract:** Barbara MacPhee is a resident of Holden who co-owns a real estate business with her husband. Her early years were spent in New Jersey, and she came to the Worcester area to attend Clark University where she majored in Psychology. Barbara was raised by a father who thought it was a woman's role to marry and have children, and college was not in his plan for his daughter. Barbara was able to support herself during her undergraduate years, and she states that her father was the proudest person at graduation when she earned her degree. Barbara grew up in a time when the opportunities available to women were much more limited. While she wishes this had not been so, she is very excited about the career fields that are open to the women of today. She derives much satisfaction from her various pursuits which include raising sheep, being a teacher, master gardener, and bee keeper. She is a committed volunteer in her community. Barbara relies strongly on her Christian faith on a daily basis, and states that the most important decision a person can ever make in his/her life is to follow the Lord. It is her belief that He has guided her throughout her life, presenting her with many opportunities.

**VA:** 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 Right Convention in Worcester. We are focusing on the areas of women's education, health, work, and politics/community involvement. We want to focus today on your experience with the Worcester area. Thank you for your help with this important project. So Ms. Barbara MacPhee do you give us permission to record your oral history today on April 17<sup>th</sup> 2010 <sup>1</sup>?

**BM:** I do.

**VA:** Thank you. So what is your full maiden name or your marriage name?

**BM:** Barbara R. MacPhee. That's my married name.

**VA:** Your married name. When were you born?

**BM:** May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1941

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<sup>1</sup> Mistake in date-This interview was conducted on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

**VA:** So, you're obviously married. When were you married?

**BM:** August 21, 1956.

**VA:** And what is...

**BM:** No...that's right. [laughs]

**VA:** What is the name of your current husband?

**BM:** Gordon MacPhee. [laughs]

**KM:** And how do you spell Gordon?

**BM:** G-O-R-D-O-N.

**VA:** Do you have any children?

**BM:** Three.

**VA:** Three. What culture/identity do you identify with? Like your ethnicity?

**BM:** German and Scottish.

**VA:** Can you tell us a little about your parents and your life growing up?

**BM:** I grew up in New Jersey. Very, very small town. I had a brother and a sister and we had a schoolhouse that was eight classes in one little schoolhouse. There were two grades in each room. And I don't remember how many children were in that grade, but I know that it was a close-knit group, close knit town, everyone knew everybody, and everybody knew what everybody else was doing at the time. But that...

**VA:** So what was it like going to a school that was so small, just—sort of a community like—was it a better learning environment?

**BM:** It was a great learning environment actually; everybody was very disciplined. We really didn't have problems like that, everybody wanted to learn and we didn't have a whole lot of books. I can remember getting a World Book, and I was fascinated by all the different subjects that we could, you know, go through in World Book. That was really great. We didn't have a TV until the 3rd grade, everyone else had had TV much longer—much sooner than what our family had. But we spent our time in sports and going to church was very important and, our family was very important, so...

**VA:** So you went to church. What was your religion background if you don't mind me asking?

**BM:** Born again Christian, non-sectarian church. My parents helped build the church in New Jersey and it developed tremendously, and many people came to know the Lord, which is very important to us, and the gospel was taught and the Bible was used as its main source for information and context.

**KM:** Now what brought you to the Worcester area?

**BM:** Well I told my dad that I really wanted to go to college and he did not believe that women should go to college. They should stay home and have babies. So he said, “If you wanna go to college, I’ll give you five bucks.” So I was determined to go to college. And so I applied to maybe three different schools that was about it, ‘cause it cost money and I—we didn’t have much money. So my mother and I came and visited three schools: Brown University, it was Pembroke at that time and there was another college in New Hampshire, and Clark [University]. And as soon as I got on the campus of Clark, I knew that was where I wanted to go. And it was very friendly and the man that took us around was just delightful. And I just—and he was a Christian as well, and so that was very important to me. So that’s why I went to Clark.

**KM:** Now what did you major in? Did you major in...?

**BM:** I majored in psychology. But I had enough credits so that I could teach school in case I needed to.

**KM:** Now you didn’t go to graduate school then did you or...?

**BM:** Unfortunately, I was too tired. I did get scholarships, but still I had to work hard to make enough money for the books and everything else. And I was just tired because I worked a lot of jobs to pay for anything. I didn’t have any debt when I got out of school. I worked my way; my father gave me that five bucks, but he was the proudest man at graduation. [laughs]

**KM:** Now did you face any other challenges when you were in school besides that?

**BM:** Mostly the money was the important thing. I had to have enough money to go to school. That was very important. I always wanted to pay my bills and I didn’t want a lot of debt was important to me.

**KM:** Now when you graduated did you see any kind of options or did you know exactly what you wanted to do after you graduated or...?

**BM:** Well my professor, he was the superintendent of the Elliot School system, and I realized that I didn’t have enough energy to go to grad. [graduate] school this time. But he said, “You’d make a great teacher. I want you in my school system.” So he gave me a

job right off the bat. And so that's when I taught for two years in Ellington Connecticut. And that was a great experience for me.

**VA:** So did your experience... you know how you said your school was really small and like a community... did you bring that when you were teaching and try to have the same environment for your students?

**BM:** No. I really wanted more. Much more. [pause] Growing up I felt really limited actually in what we could do and in high school. Actually I wanted to take mechanical drawing and the school committee wouldn't allow it. They said only boys take mechanical drawing, so they wouldn't allow me to do that. So I went before the school committee and all and they would not allow me to take it. That was a boy's—a man's—or a boy's course. And I really wanted to be a mechanical engineer. But all through my high school it was not accepted for a girl to do that. And I was really mad that I was a girl throughout my education cause boys had so many more opportunities. And I'm just excited for you girls cause now today anything you can do anything you want. But way back then I wasn't allowed to, and if you were a nurse or a teacher that was acceptable. That's what you kind of had to agree to. You were a teacher or a nurse. So that's when I did go into teaching finally and I did love teaching, I loved the kids, I did. That was fun I loved that but still I was frustrated, I'm still frustrated. I always wanted to be an engineer.

**VA:** Is that something you'll think you'll pursue maybe a little bit on the side?

**BM:** Now, well now of course I'm a realtor. And we own a lot of property and we manage a lot of property so if I had to do it all over again, I would be either a plumber or an electrician. Absolutely. I love either one of those, especially electricity. That is fascinating to me. I would be an electrician. And when you go out and try to hire an electrician, they get \$95 an hour. That's pretty good. That speaks to you. [laughs]

**VA:** Back home we have two different tech. [technical] schools in Connecticut and there are a lot of girls who do electrician and plumbing, like that and. It's always sort of weird because they sort of have dressing -- hairdressing and day care and then they have electrician. You see a lot of more girls going into that and it's really interesting to see.

**BM:** We know a young girl who's going into plumbing and I applaud her. I said, "You know that's wonderful to do." It's a very acceptable occupation, and a good career.

**VA:** And something that's always needed.

**BM:** Absolutely. Yeah so many people today get a B.A. degree and can't get a job. But yet we need the trades so badly and I'm really aware of a good carpenter, electrician, plumbers, all those people are really needed today and there's not many people coming up thorough the ranks. So that's why they can command such a great price of their hourly wage.

**VA:** Mhm. So did you do any work between your work as a teacher and as a realtor today? Any other jobs between the two?

**BM:** Well I had learned how to do a lot of plumbing and electricity myself, carpentry as well, cause my husband if you give him a hammer to fix something, it's good I mean but if can't be fixed with a hammer, someone else had to do it. So I'm the one who does it. [laughs] I grew up with a dad who fixed everything and we didn't have a lot of money to hire anybody. So we had to learn to fix things ourselves. So I worked with him and learned how to fix everything and anything you—that breaks you can fix it like a washing machine, or a dryer or anything like that. You can fix it yourself. You just have to learn where to get the parts.

**VA:** That's good versus going out and just buying a new one every time it's broken.

**BM:** Oh yeah. Too expensive.

**VA:** Very much.

**BM:** And the new ones aren't made as good as the old ones. [laughs]

**VA:** So how did you start your realtor business?

**BM:** Well my husband went to school and he came home and gave me the notes and I said, "Okay Lord if I'm suppose to help him and be with him, I'll pass the exam too." So we both passed the exam so I said I knew I was supposed to help him so that's how we started.

**VA:** That's really great, that you guys could do it together that it wasn't sort of just his or her, but something that you guys did together.

**BM:** Plus, we have our office in our home and I had three little children at the time, three little ones and I wanted to be home for them. So that's why we had it in our home. And we did purchase property on Main Street but we never have gone there because everyone finds us here even though there's no sign. We're a referral business and if people are satisfied, they come back and people keep coming back. So we never moved our business it's always been here even though the kids are grown. [laughs]

**VA:** Do you have a particular sale or something that stands out in your mind among your favorite as the most or do they kind of blur together?

**BM:** Anytime that, especially that I can help someone who is maybe a first time home buyer, who's really has to struggle a little bit to get that home, that's very satisfying to me. I feel like I helped them to get their dream.

**VA:** That's always something nice to have. That you know you helped someone's dream.

**BM:** Absolutely, helping people is so important.

**VA:** That's really nice.

**KM:** Now when you were in school in Worcester, were there any like historical events in Worcester while you in school that really stood out in your mind that you can remember?

**BM:** Well, I... when I was in Clark, at Clark, I also went and got an cosmetology degree at Leo's Beauty Institute, because I thought that every woman should have not only an education but also something to fall back on if she needed to. And while I was in Leo's, I can remember walking down Main Street on my lunch hour and I heard that Kennedy had been shot. That always remains in my mind. Always. And I just burst into tears at that time. It was very moving.

**VA:** Oh wow. I always read books like that. I read a book when I was younger how they sent all the kids away from school and I guess I always think of September 11<sup>th</sup> how they took us out of school, but like you never really hear people talk about it and that's really cool to hear. That's really interesting. So you said that you really like to help people, to achieve their dreams so do you do any community work in the Worcester area?

**BM:** Well I'm a beekeeper. And I've been a beekeeper for over 36 years. And through my bee keeping I am able to help educate people. I go into a lot of schools and bring in my observation hive with me and teach kids about bee keeping and the importance of bees and the pollination that they do. That has been very rewarding to me actually. And plus I am very involved in a four year study with the USDA [United States Department of Agriculture], when the Asian Longhorn beetle came into Worcester County and devastated a lot of the maple, the hard woods...maples, especially the Norway maples in Worcester, and all and they started to want to use that chemical imidacloprid to inoculate the trees rather. And we thought that that chemical would be very toxic to the bees. So, in conjunction with the USDA, we set up research study. And there are five hives on our property, and there's 25 hives all together at five different sites that are testing the bees, the wax, the honey. We're sending samples to the Beltsville Lab to see if the imidacloprid is toxic to bees. So we're very involved in this study. So...

**KM:** That's really cool.

**BM:** And one of my hives has a scale on it, a \$800 scale on it, that records the environmental factors in this areas every 10 minutes. And once a month someone comes from USDA comes and plugs their computer into the scale and reports all this information to NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration].

**KM & VA:** Wow

**BM:** It's amazing the information that's being collected. And will be used one day.

**KM:** That's really cool.

**BM:** Yeah, it's really neat. [laughs]

**VA:** That's a great thing to be apart of.

**BM:** And we also raise sheep, and so we, our club put together with project, our wool wasn't worth anything, like four years ago. So we decided, well we have to do something with, for the wool to increase in value. So what we did, we collected 2,000 pounds of wool and we sent it out to be scoured and then to Millbury [Massachusetts] to be spun, one of the oldest mills in the county and then we send it to South Grafton Mill [Massachusetts] to another mill to be woven into blankets. So we have a Baaaaay State Blanket Project. [laughs] And that has been really great for this area so that's another thing that we do and a lot of people from Worcester buy our blankets.

**VA:** So you really care about animals and everything?

**BM:** Yes.

**VA:** That's really nice.

**KM:** Based on your experience what advice would you give to women today and future generations?

**BM:** Oh I think there is so much out there. You can do anything you want to do. [pause] I wish I was back where you are because you know I would probably have more opportunity to do what I really would like to do. [telephone rings in the background. husband can be heard talking on the phone.]The thing is you have to know in your experiences what you really like to do. It takes time to know where your talents are and where your goals might be, but also I don't know if you're Christians or not, but the Lord will guide you. If you know the Lord, the Lord will guide you and direct you. And rely on Him, that's so important. He has guided me. He has given me so many opportunities. He has fulfilled my life. It is so wonderful to live with him day by day. I would certainly advise anyone to know Him. I really do. Yeah. Does that help?

**VA:** It does. It really gives good advice for us. We also have a Theology class that we can share with other people too, so that'll be great to connect.

**BM:** That's the most important decision you ever make in your whole life, is to follow the Lord I think. And he never lets you down. He's always there watching your back. [laughs, husband can be heard in the background]

**VA:** So going off your business as a realtor, how do you think the real estate market has been affected since the recession in the last past few years?

**BM:** Well fortunately for us, through my experience, Gordon and I, we have a referral business. And we've never had a downtime; we are so busy all the time. And that's because we're a referral business. If you treat someone well, they will come back to you. They're loyal. And that's been wonderful to us. We've been in business for what? How many years?

**VA:** 75

**BM:** 35? No. 75 right. And how many years is that? It's a long time.

**KM:** 35 years or 40 years.

**BM:** And people come back! They keep coming back and it's just a wonderful thing. So I never, we never go out and look for business...

**VA:** It just comes to you.

**BM:** It comes to us. But, you know that's really a blessing. It's really a blessing.

**VA:** So do you get like generations? Like have you ever sold a house to like a parent and then you get their children later on?

**BM:** Yes.

**VA:** That's also really nice as well.

**BM:** Yes, Absolutely. Yeah, cause they already know us. They know we'll be truthful, that we'll steer them in the right direction. Yup. [ambulance in the background]

**VA:** I guess this won't really go to your real estate business, but maybe just in general have you noticed more people not moving because they can't sell their house? I guess...I know recently paying the taxes have been more of the problem is what I hear my aunt.

**BM:** Worcester has big taxes, yes. Well, with our business, [telephone rings] we have a niche market about what is a lot of people don't want to take a 40 to 60 thousand dollar hit on their property, they couldn't afford to do that. But they had to maybe change jobs, or go to a different part of the country. So what they did was say, "You take them over, you take care of them and when the market gets better you sell them." So we have 235 different homes that we manage for people, and so most of them we rent out and we take care of them for them. Some people don't need the rental coming in. We just take care of them, we just watch over them. And then when the market gets better and they feel like it's good, then we'll sell them for them. But we manage a lot of properties.



**VA:** That's a great connection that you seem to have with your—I don't know what you would say, I guess clients? What would you call them?

**BM:** Yes, we would call them our clients.

**VA:** That's a great business that you really have going.

**BM:** Yeah we do. That's amazing.

**VA:** That people like trust you so much. It says a lot about your company.

**BM:** And a lot of people, a lot of realtors don't want to rent, but you know it's a niche market for us. You know it's been good and I'll tell you a lot of people who have lost their homes, foreclosure, are the best tenants because they know the value of having a home.

**VA:** Mhm.

**BM:** And so, you know a lot of people don't want to bother with them, which is too bad because they're good people they just something for some reason either lost their job or had illness in the family or something. So, you've got to give them a chance.

**VA:** That's always good to hear. That's you're willing to give chances to people.

**BM:** Yes. [shuffling of papers]

**KM:** Oh alright. Do you consider yourself actively—active politically?

**BM:** Yes, we are. Very much so. [pause] We were on the Republican Town Committee. And there's 35 different ones on our committee in Holden. And Gordon and I got the fourth and fifth top votes 'cause people know us, I think. Above us was Lou Evangelidis, he's a sheriff, Kim Ferguson she's a Rep. [State Representative] and Mary Jane McKenna she was a former Rep. [State Representative] and then my husband and I. So we are known for being politically active. We feel it's very important.

**KM:** Now what led you to join, was this something you just...?

**BM:** Well the Bible tells you, you should be active and I take that seriously. I really do. And I feel it's time that I stand up for what I think is right, because it's so easy to sit back but then when things start going contrary to what's right you know you ought to feel responsible for that because "I sat back." I've got to take a stand, and speak up for what is right. I feel. Yup.

**VA:** So you said you were well known in the community, does, is that a good feeling that you have? To know other people trust you, with your realtor business as well as in the community?

**BM:** Yes, absolutely. I've been president of the Holden Garden Club, five different years and we're very involved in all kinds of things. My husband is too. We feel, you know, if you live in a town you should be active with the town. And when the kids grew up, we were very active with sports and school committees and, you know, PTA [Parent-Teacher Association] and all that kind of things. That was important to do that. You know, when you have kids you're with your kids and we always were. And plus we have farm and the kids were all into 4-H, very active with that and active in the agricultural community and we were very active for 18 years in agricultural promotion in the state. And everyone sort of knows us, so we're very active with that.

**VA:** Do you have a particular favorite hobby or activity that you do outside of your home out of the many that you've told us?

**BM:** Gardening.

**VA:** Gardening.

**BM:** Gardening. We have... I have an organic garden where we grow most of our own food, chemical free. Do not want chemicals. [laughs] Love gardening. And I'm a master gardener from 1978 something like that.

**VA:** What does it mean to be a master gardener?

**BM:** Master gardener...that's when we had, oh what do you call that? Oh—we don't have anymore in this state. [to husband] Gordon, what do you call that in the state when we had that, Master Garden Program Sponsored by...

**Gordon MacPhee:** Extension Service

**BM:** Extension Service. Other states have Extension Service. Connecticut had a good extension service. But we don't have it anymore. And they would give you professors from college and give you kind of like a degree in basic gardening and it was wonderful. So we got, 55 different credits and then we would have to give back that time to the community. So we would teach the community how to plant, or we'd start a special project at a school and teach the kids how to have a garden and how to be able to maybe grow something quickly like lettuce when they were at school and so they'd reap the benefits of what they planted. So—we'd answer phones if people had problems with this plants or gardens. We'd answer their problems on the phone, and just did a lot of stuff like that. That was great. Unfortunately we don't have that anymore.

**VA:** I know. But at least you can still do it in your free time.

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**BM:** Well, I do have to say there are three Master Gardener programs in Mass right now; one is on the Cape, Barnstable County [Massachusetts]. One is through UMass [University of Massachusetts], out in Amherst [Massachusetts]. And there's another on in the Horticultural Society has been putting one on in Wellesley [Massachusetts]. So it's very valuable. Yeah.

**VA:** That's really nice. How do you get through tough time? Like what keeps you going?

**BM:** Good Lord. [laughs]

**VA:** That's the best answer if any.

**BM:** Absolutely.

**VA:** How do you define success in your life?

**BM:** Success [pause] well I don't know. Being able to give to others, and help others. To have my to help my family, support my family that's very important. Success is [pause]] hmm I don't know. Success. I don't know. What is success? Achieving your goal that's probably good. I do achieve a lot of my goals, but always hmm. [pause] Success in beekeeping is keeping your bees alive all winter. That's success.

**VA:** You've done that!

**KM:** That's really good.

**BM:** Gardening. Harvest you know! The harvest you know comes in and we can, can and store the food that's success to me. Having my family all together is wonderful. I love my kids and they're very successful. Those kids are successful.

**VA:** That's good. How do you feel about the choices you made in your life? Do you have any regrets?

**BM:** Any regrets... well I told you I regret not being a boy. [laughs] When I was going up because they had all the benefits growing up, [laughs] but when you grow up and you have children then you really think that. Because after I had my children, men cannot have children and that was the most wonderful thing. To be able to have children, and nurture them and see them grow. That's a really great... it's a great benefit to be a woman. Now I enjoy being a woman. It took me a while I have to say.

**VA:** Now they have programs like this that women get to talk about themselves and men don't. [laughs] So there's a benefit.

**KM & VA:** So thank you very much for your time.

**BM:** Well thank you very much.

**VA:** It was very fun.

**BM:** I hope I fit into this goal that you had.

**VA:** I think you're a very well rounded individual in Worcester and you've impacted the city very much.

**BM:** Yeah. Thanks.

**VA:** Thank you.

**BM:** Thank you, very much.