

Interviewee: Tanja Olson  
Interviewer: Jason Duke  
Date: March 11, 2014  
Location: Ludlow, MA  
Transcriber: Jason Duke



Overseen by Prof. Rachel Ramsey, Assumption College

**Abstract:** Tanja Olson was born in Berlin, Germany on November 12, 1938 and later lived in Worcester for a good portion of her life. As a Jew in Nazi Europe, she and her family were forced to flee their home and came to reside in Shanghai, China. During their time in Shanghai, both Tanja's mother and father passed away, but luckily Tanja's grandmother, Margaret Mendel, was there to take care of her. Once leaving Shanghai, Tanja and her grandmother came to live in Worcester. In this interview, Tanja discusses the portion of her life spent in Shanghai. Tanja also shares her family history, work and volunteer experience, and life in Worcester as a whole. Tanja also talks about the role of religion in her life, something that is obviously prominent as someone that was forced to flee from home because of religion. Tanja even reflects upon her husband's life and experience in Worcester before his death. Thus, Tanja presents a compelling personal history that is historically informative both in general and specifically about Worcester.

**JD:** We are completing a city wide oral history of the lives of Worcester women, aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences. Based on the goals of the 1850 National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on the areas of women's education, health, work, and politics/community involvement. We want to focus today on your experiences with living in Shanghai during World War II and living in Worcester afterwards. Thank you for your help in this important project. Alright, my name is Jason Duke, I am here with Tanja Olson on March 11, 2014. Tanja, do we have your permission to record your oral history?

**TO:** Yes, you do.

**JD:** Alright, so let's get going. Alright, what is your full maiden name, and, if applicable, your married name?

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

www.wwhp.org

**TO:** My full maiden name was Tanja Hamburger, and it is spelled T-A-N-J-A H-A-M-B-U-R-G-E-R. My married name is Tanja Olson, O-L-S-O-N. No middle name.

**JD:** Okay, when and where were you born?

**TO:** Berlin, Germany on November 12, 1938. And, that's it.

**JD:** Okay, have you ever married?

**TO:** Yes.

**JD:** And what was your husband's name?

**TO:** Richard Francis Olson.

**JD:** And he passed away in what year?

**TO:** 2003.

**JD:** Did you have children?

**TO:** Yes

**JD:** How many, and what are their names?

**TO:** I have two children. A daughter, Erika Olson Duke, and a son, Jonathan Richard Olson.

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

[www.wwhp.org](http://www.wwhp.org)

**JD:** Do you have grandchildren?

**TO:** Yes.

**JD:** How many?

**TO:** Seven.

**JD:** Alright, any great-grandchildren?

**TO:** Yes.

**JD:** How many of those?

**TO:** Five.

**JD:** Five great-grandchildren, ok. What cultures or ethnicities do you most closely identify with for family background?

**TO:** The German culture as well as the Swedish culture, which would be from my husband.

**JD:** Okay, and you also identify, as far as heritage, with the Jewish culture?

**TO:** Definitely.

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

[www.wwhp.org](http://www.wwhp.org)

**JD:** Okay, so with that in mind can you tell me about your parents?

**TO:** My parents were both from Germany. They, in 1939, left Germany due to the Second World War and Hitler and his German Jewish-I am trying to think of the word, I am trying to think-it wasn't then called the Holocaust, but the treatment of the German Jews and the fear that they would not survive the war. They decided to leave Germany at that point. I was six months old and they managed to get a ship from Hamburg, Germany and go to-which was going to Shanghai, China.

**JD:** Okay, and you stayed in Shanghai, China after that?

**TO:** Yes, we did.

**JD:** Were you joined by any other family members?

**TO:** In 1940, my grandmother, Margaret Mendel, my mother's mother joined us.

**JD:** And she was not Jewish?

**TO:** And she was not Jewish.

**JD:** Okay, and afterward you moved to the United States. Did you move with your whole family, or...?

**TO:** No, my mother and father both died in Shanghai. My father died when I was almost four years old. He died of cholera. And my mother died when I was seven, and she died-[talks quietly to self as if thinking out loud]-and she also died in Shanghai. So that left my grandmother and myself, who took over as the adult in the family.

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

[www.wwhp.org](http://www.wwhp.org)

**JD:** So with that in mind, can you tell me a little bit about your grandmother?

**TO:** My grandmother was-again lived in Germany, was born in Germany. She was born on July- a little town called Auf der Höhe and she married-I don't know what year-but she married a Jewish man who-that caused a little problem in her family. And she later moved to Berlin-or, a suburb of Berlin, Germany. He died in 1931 and she had one daughter, and the daughter was my mother.

**JD:** Okay, so you and your grandmother went from Shanghai to America. What was that trip like?

**TO:** That trip was quite interesting in some ways. I thought it was very exciting being almost 11 years old. We got onto a ship in Shanghai, the SS General Gordon. And we were on third class, so we had-were not in the greatest of places. But, we landed in San Francisco. The trip over was like I said, interesting because we stopped in three different places-we stopped in two different places-we stopped in Yokohama, Japan and we stopped in Hawaii and then we landed at San Francisco.

**JD:** And from San Francisco you went to Worcester?

**TO:** From San Francisco we went to Worcester.

**JD:** Okay.

**TO:** And we went to Worcester due to the fact that there were –some of the churches in the Worcester area were, at that point, getting involved in trying to sponsor people and the people that- in, it was I think a Baptist church-the family that decided to sponsor us were here in Worcester. And when we got to San Francisco we got a ticket on a train and went all the way across the country from San Francisco to Chicago, from Chicago to Worcester.

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

[www.wwhp.org](http://www.wwhp.org)

**JD:** So I want to ask about the places that you lived in your life. We have already covered the fact that you lived in Shanghai. Going back a little bit, can you tell me what it was like to live in Shanghai during World War II?

**TO:** Well, it-children have a different way of looking at things so as far as I was concerned it was my home. We were-my father had opened a pharmacy when we first came from Germany, and due to the Japanese invasion over in China, he was-had to close the pharmacy. The Japanese were-I can't think of the word-were in league with, I guess, the Germans. So they decided to intern all the German Jews, so my family, my mother, father and I, were interned in a school and we had a half of a room, which was a small room. It was not a big room, and we stayed there until after the end of the world-the end of the war, I'm sorry. And we- my father died shortly after we were there and my mother died just after the end of the war in Asia in 1945. And it was just after it, I think the end of the war was in September she died in December. And she- so then I ended up living with my Grandmother who took me in.

**JD:** So even though, obviously, that was a very hard time in your life, you don't just look back on it negatively. It was almost an adventure?

**TO:** Yes, it was. It was-like all children, you get very adaptable to whatever your circumstances are and our circumstances were such that, you know, even though we didn't have much, and we certainly didn't have a lot of space, it was kind of exciting to live with a lot of other people where there were a lot of children. I went to two different schools while I was there, one was a German Jewish school, and after that closed I actually ended up in an English Jewish school-a British Jewish school probably would be a better way to put it. And, so it was-it was-to me it was an exciting place to live and I definitely think of it as home rather than any other place.

**JD:** So, when we're talking about other places that you have lived, so can you just give me a list of, besides Shanghai, where else you have lived in your life as far as towns, cities?

**TO:** Basically, I lived in Worcester until the time that I got married. I lived in a variety of places in Worcester. Most of the Northern end of Worcester. Some in Tatnuck, and some on Highland Street, and some on little-off of Highland Street. So, it basically-all that area where Worcester-as I said, the North end of Worcester, and after I got married I moved to Holden. And, in Holden I lived my whole married life basically, which is where my husband grew up. He had lived in-in the North End of Worcester, and then ended up-his parents built a house in Holden. So he lived

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

[www.wwhp.org](http://www.wwhp.org)

his whole life in Holden-his whole adult life in Holden plus childhood. So, that's basically where I lived.

**JD:** And, so focusing on the Worcester part of your life, what was it like growing up living in the neighborhoods that you remember growing up in in Worcester?

**TO:** I grew up off of Pleasant Street up in the Tatnuck area, I was there for quite a few years in the beginning when we first-after we moved away from Elizabeth Street and we left our-the people that had sponsored us. I went to North High School. I had lots of friends. I enjoyed high school. I went to Belmont Prep. Also loved Belmont Prep, which I-going backwards because Belmont Prep came before high school. And, I did not go to college. I had-my grandmother had gotten sick and was unable to work anymore and I got to the point where it was not enough money for me to go to college and there were no-there were no way of getting money in those days. It wasn't easy to get a scholarship and it definitely wasn't easy to get financing. So, I ended up not going to college. I worked for Paul Revere Life Insurance Company for six years, and got married while I was working there. Before I worked there I had done some babysitting and stuff like that. Enjoyed high school. How do I go on about this? When I got married, we lived in Worcester for a little while, then I-we ended up living in-in Holden so once we decided to build a house. In Worcester-I enjoyed Worcester, I had friends there. I went to the Lutheran church-Trinity Lutheran Church the whole time. They did quite a bit for us. The other people that did quite a bit for us while we were in Worcester was the Jewish-what do they call it?-it's the organization that helped people of Jewish background in Worcester, and I can't remember the name of it. I'm sorry. I could probably find that out if you needed it.

**JD:** Not really. So, when you talk about how you ended up in Worcester and talk about the different parts that you lived in, what was your age when you arrived in Worcester?

**TO:** Almost 11 years old. I think we-we arrived in Worcester sometime around the end of October and my birthday is in November.

**JD:** And, besides your grandmother you-you didn't have any other family members that lived in the area?

**TO:** No close relatives, no.

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

[www.wwhp.org](http://www.wwhp.org)

**JD:** So, if you don't currently live in Worcester, do you still keep any connection with Worcester?

**TO:** Yes, I do. I-I have a friend that's involved in the restoration of Worcester-what do they call it-the restoration organization in Worcester and I have helped her occasionally as a docent in some of the homes they have opened up and some of the fundraising that they have been involved in. So I am still somewhat involved in Worcester. I don't have any friends directly in Worcester, but my grandson is going to college in Worcester as did my granddaughter. And, so they both are there-were there and one is currently still there. So I do get to Worcester quite a bit and I-yeah, go ahead.

**JD:** So with that in mind, what challenges do you think the city still faces or what would you change about the city?

**TO:** I think the city has a problem because the downtown of Worcester, which used to be quite vibrant when I first got there. It used to have all the wonderful stores like Denholms, and Barnard's, and Ulian's, and Filine's, and main-street was a very vibrant place to go and shop and do things. Go to the movies and so forth, which I did. We didn't have a car, so I used to walk downtown and from where we used live and or else took the bus. And basically, that worked out just beautifully so, you know, I was able-so I was, you know, I went to a lot of things including Foothills, which I was involved in by being an annual member. So there was a lot of things in Worcester that I actually did and I think Worcester needs that Main Street to be restored to some kind of a pedestrian or at least a place to shop and do things and have restaurants and stuff. Even though Belm-Shrewsbury Street has a lot of restaurants, the main street is really sad.

**JD:** So if you were to be asked about the changes you have seen in Worcester over time, it would be more of a degradation of what you remember rather than an improvement?

**TO:** I would say so. The downtown particularly. Even the mall that they put in there, which used to be quite vibrant. Like I said, Foothills was there for years. It doesn't seem like they ever get around to actually improving things. It takes them forever to improve things, and I think somebody in that politics of the city needs to take some-take the leading place and actually try to get things done in Worcester that would help the city. Other than their colleges, and even some of their factories, there is very little in Worcester that would draw people.

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

[www.wwhp.org](http://www.wwhp.org)

**JD:** So with that being said, what distinct characteristics do you think make Worcester the place that it is? Why do you still stay involved with it? What are the positives of it?

**TO:** Well, they have—they have a great amount of colleges and universities that are very good places. It—they are vibrant, and they keep the place going. The other thing they do, you do have the—what the heck do they call it—DCU Center is it? The DCU Center, which does attract certain things like the flower shows and so forth. Some concerts, some ball games. I think that's a plus. I think the vibrancy of the restaurant area in the old Shrewsbury Street, which used to be the Italian section of Worcester, is fantastic. The Swedish part of Worcester doesn't seem to have too much going for it, but they do have the new—oh, what's the river, [a third party can be heard speaking in the background] the corridor, the corridor. Yeah, the—where the river used to be in the center of Worcester, they do have the corridor there now that they are trying to improve. I don't know how much they have done on it as I am not really involved in that.

**JD:** Okay, so more of an overview question I guess on what do you think women's experiences in Worcester have been generally? So what do you think, positive, negative, has it improved or gotten worse over time as far as women's experience in Worcester.

**TO:** Worcester does have some good things going for it for women particularly I guess. As I said, Preservation Worcester is a great venue for people that are interested for preserving the historic buildings and houses and so forth of Worcester. I have several friends that belong to that and they seem to find it very rewarding. I think the colleges also I think are a great venue for women because they do have programs for the adults that women can go to. I think the library is a good—another good thing for women. As far as women in business are concerned, and I don't really know too much about that area in the Worcester area at this point, but I do know that I think that there are places and things that could do well in Worcester for women.

**JD:** One more question about the Worcester area and then we will move on to talking about your experience with education. Do you remember or have any particular experience with any significant historical events in Worcester?

**TO:** Yes, I actually remember when President Kennedy came to Worcester. I was working in the insurance company. I think that was quite interesting, it was when he was running for President. Actually, he and his brother Teddy Kennedy came and visited where I was and that I thought was quite interesting. I remember when they built 290 because my husband was in the paving

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

[www.wwhp.org](http://www.wwhp.org)

business, and I think that's quite a good historical thing because of the fact that it made transportation in and out of Worcester quite easy. And other than that I don't really remember too much about the history of Worcester as far as women are concerned or as far as big things that happened in Worcester.

**JD:** So for your education, you already said you didn't go to college, but can you list the names for me of the schools you went to both in Shanghai and in Worcester?

**TO:** Okay, Shanghai I went to-I don't know the name of the schools in Shanghai, I do know what they were. There was a school that was run by the Jewish-German Jews that was opened, and I did go to that. And then I went to a school that was run by British Jews I guess because there was a British run Jewish school. So I went to two Jewish schools there. There were several years I didn't go to school at all because when-that was due to the fact that the Communists came and the schools closed. So I didn't go, and my grandmother didn't want me to be far away because there were bombings and fights in the streets and so forth. In Worcester, I went to many schools. I went to North High School-I'll go backwards-North High School, I went to Oxford Street School, I went to Belmont Prep, I went to Midland Street School, I went to-I am trying to remember there, there was one more school I went to. Basically because I-we moved around quite a bit and there were-that was one of the reasons that I went to-I went to-what's the name of the school on Burncoat Street before the Junior High was built? I don't remember what it was called, and I went to that school as well which was not Burcaot Street School, but it was something like Burncoat Street School. It was another school, but anyway. So I went to quite a few schools from fifth grade right through High School.

**JD:** Alright, so with the fact in mind that you didn't go to college, did you pursue any educational programs for like certain specific jobs that would train you for the field?

**TO:** Oh, yeah I did, forgot about that. I went to-[sighs and talks under her breath]-I went to a school that taught airline ticketing-that shows you how old that was because that was all done by hand at one point-so that I could go and be a person that would work for the airlines and that would work like at like an airport or something like that and be able to do the ticketing part of getting a reservation on an airplane. And I did graduate from that, and did not pursue it due to the fact that I had my grandmother to take care of.

**JD:** Okay, so what were the main challenges in your educational experience?

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

[www.wwhp.org](http://www.wwhp.org)

**TO:** The main challenges in my education. Well, I did well in school. I would have liked to go to college. I think that the changes these days that there are is that there are so many government backed loans and fellowships and stuff that you can get these days-scholarships as well-that I think people-women in particular-would have a lot easier time getting into a school. So I think that that's a wonderful thing that has happened in all these years. I did end up having a job once I graduated from High School-actually, I got my job before I graduated from High School-two years before I started working for Paul Revere and-part time during High School, so I stayed with that and it was a decent job. And then I ended up going to-getting married-getting engaged and getting married. So I would have liked to have college education, but I think I have enough lifetime experiences that I don't ever feel that I have missed anything. So I do feel that I am an educated person, probably know more about a lot of things than most college graduates.

**JD:** So, you kind of touched on this a little bit, upon finishing your formal education what were your options? I know you said you got married and you kind of worked a job, so what did you do? Like, was there a point after your education where you kind of took stock of your options and made a choice of what to do?

**TO:** Yes, my first choice was I became a mother and I stayed home for quite a few years and volunteered. I volun-as I said, at that point I wasn't living in Worcester, so I volunteered at Holden Hospital. I ran their gift shop and I ran-I went and worked in their emergency room for quite a few years. Enjoyed every minute of it. When my kids grew up and there was family problems, I decided I would work-I would go take a regular job, and I worked in the surgical intensive care unit of Memorial Hospital in Worcester, and I did enjoy that. I stayed there for about a year and after that I decided I would do something different. I happened to have a friend who wanted to open a shop, and she and I became partners and we opened a shop in West Boylston. I had that for six years. Gave that up, worked for another friend in a-she had a curtain shop and then she was an interior designer and worked with that, and then decided that I would do something different again and worked at-got a job with the bank. Worked with that until I decided to retire, but went back to work part time.

**JD:** Okay, so you kind of led us into this question, but you didn't really go into the work history. Obviously, you have worked outside the home throughout your life.

**TO:** [Laughs] Off and on, yes.

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

[www.wwhp.org](http://www.wwhp.org)

**JD:** Okay, when did you begin, specifically, to put an age or a year on when you started working, and what was your first job?

**TO:** Well, as far as a first job getting money, I think it was when I decided I didn't want to just volunteer anymore and decided to get a job. Well, decided to open a shop, and opening a shop in West Boylston which was a doll and bear shop called Dollworks. It was in existence for about six years. After that, as I said, I worked with my friend who was an interior designer, and worked there a few years. Then decided I didn't want to do that anymore, so I worked in a bank as a part-time teller for another six years. So I guess I really never did make up my mind what I wanted to be [laughs]. I just went from thing to thing, and most of the time part-time. My husband-I was lucky that my husband had a good career, and I didn't have to work.

**JD:** So you mainly, kind of, in a way worked for yourself most of your life. You never really had a boss. You just kind of went from one thing to another doing what you wanted to do with your life.

**TO:** Pretty much.

**JD:** Okay.

**TO:** My boss was my husband.

**JD:** Yeah. [Both laugh] So what did-what did this work outside the home mean to you?

**TO:** Independence.

**JD:** Can you elaborate a little on that?

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

[www.wwhp.org](http://www.wwhp.org)

**TO:** You want to know about that. Well, I always felt that from the day that I got married that everything that we had as far as money was concerned was my husband's money-I mean it was ours as a family and I felt that I should have something of my own. That if I wanted to-we wanted to go on a trip or I wanted to give a gift to my husband, that I wasn't just taking money from him and then put-giving it back to him. So I basically wanted to have money of my own that I could use for those things so that we could have extras-little extra things that we wanted to do like take a trip, or I bought him a car, or things like that. So, those are the kind of things that I wanted out of the career of doing things on my own, making some money, and it was in-I probably started working in probably in the '80's, maybe in the middle or lower '80's that I started working for money. Other than that, I volunteered before that pretty much.

**JD:** Okay, as far as housework, what-what right now-I mean, you live alone in the house, so what right now are your responsibilities as far as keeping up the house?

**TO:** Keeping it clean and paying the bills, [Laughs] and anything else that goes on in my home.

**JD:** Okay, so that's obviously changed from other points in your life. When you were married and you had a family, how much of the responsibility fell on your shoulders for the housework?

**TO:** All of it.

**JD:** All of it?

**TO:** All of it. My husband worked long hours, and we were still of the generation when husbands really didn't do anything around the house. Basically, he did very little around the-house did the outside work, and he would fix things, and he would build things. He was very good with his hands, and, you know, he would-but I mowed the lawn and did that most of my married life until the kids were old enough to mow the lawn. And he-he did things like repair things, and as I said he built things, and whatever else it took in the house, but basically the housework was my responsibility as well as the cooking and the cleaning and everything else.

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

[www.wwhp.org](http://www.wwhp.org)

**JD:** Okay, so with the amount of housework that you had in mind and you have talked about the amount of work that you did outside of the home, how did you balance all of these different priorities, responsibilities, roles, and interests in your life?

**TO:** I guess I only worked part-time, that's one way, and when I did work it was when my kids were beyond the age when I had to drive them places. So, basically until my kids got their licenses, I would volunteer once a month or something at the hospital or do something like that, or work for the-you know, do girl scouts and boy scouts and all that stuff, but that was basically with the kids. And once I got old enough, I decided I would like to get paid for all my work and that's when I decided to do the other things that I mentioned prior.

**JD:** Okay, so what would you say were the personal or professional costs of your chosen path? So you mostly volunteered while also doing work in the home, what do you think you gave up by doing that?

**TO:** What'd I give up? Well, I guess I never thought of it as giving up anything because I still did the things that I enjoyed. My favorite things to do are still the same as they were then, and that's to-reading, and theater, and doing things that gave me pleasure. And I was able to do that while my kids were growing up as well as later, but I think what I basically gave up was the feeling that I have now is of independence, of being able to do what I want when I want to do it. I had the responsibility of the family and I wanted to make sure that they grew up to be the kind of people that I would like them to be. And I-we did a lot with my husband's family, and I didn't have any family by the start-obviously, my grandmother died when my children were young. So I really didn't have any family, so it was basically my husband's family that we spent a lot of time with. So I don't think I gave up anything, as such. I made some choices, and I think the choices I made were the right ones. You can always look back and say the what-ifs, but I think as a woman I basically did what I felt was the right thing to do at the time and I don't regret them.

**JD:** So you would say you benefitted in that you still got to do all the things you loved, but also balancing family life.

**TO:** Yes.

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

[www.wwhp.org](http://www.wwhp.org)

**JD:** Okay, one last question about work. What type of work did your husband do?

**TO:** He was in the paving business. He worked for a couple of companies throughout our married life-well I guess three compan-four-four companies I guess in all. He was in-he worked for Henley Lundgren Company, he worked for Beyer and Mingolla, and he worked and-for a landscaping company for a short time, and then he worked for Amorollo. He loved his work. He loved doing-being the boss and working as a –in the paving business as the boss and he did that for many, many years. And that’s what he did basically, that was his life.

**JD:** Alright, so moving on to kind of a combination of politics and community involvement. Would you consider yourself active politically?

**TO:** [Laughs] Yes.

**JD:** Can you elaborate on how you would consider yourself active politically? Without going into any details about your political affiliations?

**TO:** I have always been interested in politics. I think right from when I was a little girl, I loved the idea of it. I loved the way-the fact of the country and what it was like, and coming to this country and seeing the opportunities that people had, I think that kind of pushed me in that direction. As far as being active, I think while I lived in Worcester and Holden, I used to go to get involved with people that were running for office, and we would donate monies, and get-go to fund raisers, and do a variety of things as far as the politics are concerned. It wasn’t until I actually moved away from Worcester that I got a little bit more active and actually joined a political party and got involved in that in my town at this point.

**JD:** Ok, so as far as volunteer work or community work, you have definitely talked about that to this point. Why don’t we just go with one example of what’s-what would you say is the biggest thing you became involved with as far as volunteer work?

**TO:** Volunteer work, I think-what I-the biggest thing that I got involved with was the hospital. I volunteered for many years at the hospital. I started when my daughter was a very young child

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

[www.wwhp.org](http://www.wwhp.org)

and I kept doing it until the hospital in Holden closed, and I was involved in the—I was president of their auxiliary. I worked on their fundraising. I worked on-as I said, I worked in their gift shop. I worked in the emergency room, and I did that for many, many, many years.

**JD:** And what would you say led you to join that organization?

**TO:** I think I've always been interested in hospitals. I don't know why. I have a thing about helping out, and helping out with the hospital was one of the things I could do without getting-at the time, when I first started-without getting too involved. In other words, I could go once a month and just volunteer at the hospital for a few hours. Because-and that wouldn't take me away from the kids for too long, especially my daughter who was younger.

**JD:** So you kind of said which areas you worked in, what would a general day be like? I guess, kind of like a short description of what the work would consist of there.

**TO:** In which?

**JD:** In the...

**TO:** In the hospi...

**JD:** Just any normal day in the hospital.

**TO:** In the hospital. Alright, I would-well, I'll pick the part of being-of running and taking care of the gift shop in the hospital 'cause that's probably the more interesting. I mean, I could go also into the emergency room part of it, but I'll go into the gift shop. When I first started volunteering in the gift shop, I would go in probably around 10 o'clock and I would open the gift shop, organize everything in the gift shop, make sure everything was in-make sure the money was correct, do all the stuff that needed to be doing, and then kind of hang out basically and wait for somebody to come in. And then I would-somebody would come in, and you suggest something that if they wanted to give to a person that was ill then you would try to suggest the right thing

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

[www.wwhp.org](http://www.wwhp.org)

and-that would work with that particular person. Or, if it was for a child then you would, you know, come up with a toy or something. I would basically reorganize everything before I left. I probably worked there only about three hours, usually about three hours was it, and then would go, you know, again, close out the cash register-we didn't have a cash register-but other, a box, or close out the box. Make sure the money I had equaled the sales I had and so forth, and then make sure everything was put back the way it was supposed to and that was about it for the gift shop. I will just mention that the emergency room that I worked in. I did all kinds of things in the emergency room. I took vital signs, I did-I would talk to people when they had a prob-you know, people would come in, and they would be upset, and you would kind of try to calm them down. I even held down people, so when they were trying to stitch a little person and that kind of stuff, so I did a lot of things in the emergency room. Again, it was-I would do it once a month, and I would stay probably three or four hours. So basically, I never really worked a whole day of each-either of them, but it was enough so that I got myself out of the house and I did some things that I enjoyed.

**JD:** Just, would you mind listing the other organizations that you might have volunteered for since then. Just a short list, I know you went into some of them earlier, but just for reference in this area.

**TO:** Since-since-after I quit the-after the hospital closed?

**JD:** Yeah.

**TO:** Sure. Organizations. Garden Club. I did some work at the library. I'm involved in-do you want them up to date now or...

**JD:** Doesn't have to be perfectly up to date, just kind of a generalized list.

**TO:** Alright, okay. I used to-I don't know, I guess that's-for a long time, that was about it because my husband got very ill and I couldn't do much of anything except take care of him.

**JD:** Okay.

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

[www.wwhp.org](http://www.wwhp.org)

**TO:** So I kind of backed away from that, but I, you know, when I did work in the hospital, or during the time until the hospital closed, I also was president of their auxiliary and did a lot of stuff like that. So, I did work on that for quite a long time, and after that, I really wasn't doing too much volunteer work as such. When my kids were growing up, I was a den mother. I had a Girl Scout troop that I had a, you know, meeting, and stuff like that. So, I'm kind of running around in different areas now, maybe I shouldn't-I should probably leave it at that.

**JD:** Okay, clearly it just played a very-volunteering just played a very large role in your life. Throughout-throughout your whole life.

**TO:** Yeah, it did. It did.

**JD:** Okay, so one more thing kind of about the community. What role would you say religion has played in your life?

**TO:** I've always-I think religion has played a big role, not only directly but indirectly. Obviously, the Jewish part of my life-my family-played an immense role in where I am, and what I am doing, and where-how I got to this country and to Worcester. Without the Jewish part of my family, it would not have happened. So, that way religion played in immense role in my life. Oh I did go to church too, years ago I went to Trinity Lutheran. I think I mentioned that. But anyway, the-as far as the Lutheran part of my religion, which came about because my mother did not want me to become-to remain Jewish, and that she felt she didn't want me to go through what they had gone through in Germany, and that's the reason that that changed. And, so I-yeah, I was active at-I was active at Trinity Lutheran Church. I was confirmed there. I went to Sunday school there. I did all kinds of things, so religion did have a large part in my life for many years. I am not, and have never been, a person that goes to church every single week. I don't think that's a necessity in my life, and-or anybody's life to be honest with you because I think as long as you have a belief in something and are a good person, I think that's really all that matters as far as religion is concerned. I do belong to a church. I will admit, I don't go very often, or hardly ever is more like it.

**JD:** Okay.

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

[www.wwhp.org](http://www.wwhp.org)

**TO:** That's being honest.

**JD:** Kind of switching topics a little bit to health. How would you say health issues have impacted your life or those in your family?

**TO:** I don't have many health issues. I have one health issue that has probably influenced my life at this time in my life, and that is-I have poor eyesight in one eye. I have a problem with that eye, and I think that has kind of limited me from maybe travelling as much as I might. At least travelling by car as much as I like because I find that I am limited from driving on highways-certain highways and the speed of it and that bothers me. So, that-that way-that is the only thing that, as far as I can tell, influences my life as far as my health is concerned. As far as my husband's life is concerned, his family had-was-had diabetes in it, they had heart problems in it, and he had hypertension since he was a young man, so his health is probably influenced more of my married life than mine did. I had no problems when I was younger, and therefore it really doesn't bother me as far as-it has not influenced my life or changed my life except taking care of him that year when he was-had cancer.

**JD:** So what are your experience in accessing quality, affordable healthcare?

**TO:** Repeat the question Jason 'cause I don't get it.

**JD:** So have you ever had any trouble getting the type of healthcare that you need? Have you ever had any issues, at any point in your life, getting the type of healthcare that really took care of you and was exactly what you needed?

**TO:** I had no problem getting healthcare throughout my life. I-most of my younger life, my husband's job covered my healthcare, and when-as I got older, we had private healthcare for a long time, and when I worked for the bank they covered my healthcare, and then Medicare came on and I'm fine. I have no problem getting my healthcare from Health New England.

**JD:** So nothing but positives things to say about the healthcare system in this country, right?

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

[www.wwhp.org](http://www.wwhp.org)

**TO:** Well, at least at this...

**JD:** Up to this point in your life, yes. [Laughs]

**TO:** To this point in my life, [Laughs] and I will not talk about Obamacare.

**JD:** Okay, so one more thing about the health topic. At this point in your life, are you responsible for anybody else's health?

**TO:** No.

**JD:** But obviously, as you have noted, you were responsible for your husband's health at various points in your life.

**TO:** Well, I was-as his wife, I was responsible to make sure he did the right thing with his health, but he had his own health insurance if that's what you're asking.

**JD:** I think we were more concerned here with just kind of caring for him, which you said you had to do when he had cancer.

**TO:** Yes, I did care for him, and I was very lucky that he had a wonderful daughter who would come and help quite a bit.

**JD:** Okay, so kind of to wrap things up, some more general questions. Now that we have been 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?

**TO:** I think you should be sure to include what you had-what women's roles were when I was young, which was basically as a wife and mother and maybe working part time in my case. Sometimes, not all the time. Or, generally I think, these days, I think the women's roles are much more complex. I think that women are not just the wife and the mother, they are also, a lot of

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

www.wwhp.org

times, the bread winner. I think that you don't find everyone that has help in their families. There's an awful lot of single mothers in this world, and I think it's changed the dynamics of this world because of the way the home has changed.

**JD:** Okay, so one last question and then we'll be done. Is there anyone in connection with Worcester that you would suggest that we talk to that would help illustrate these things that you are talking about right now that should be included?

**TO:** In Worcester...

**JD:** Or with a connection to Worcester.

**TO:** Yeah, I know. I'm thinking about it. Yes, I think you could probably talk to Bonnie Prescott. She is very involved in Preservation Worcester. She is involved in the city more so than anyone else that I know at this point, I think. I am trying to think of anyone else in Worcester that would be, you know, that would be involved in some of these things, but I think most of the people that I know have either moved away from Worcester at this point or were never in Worcester. So I don't know anyone else in Worcester that I could possibly tell you to contact.

**JD:** Okay, well thank you very much for your time and sharing all of these very interesting things that have gone on in your life.

**TO:** You're welcome Jason.

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – 508-767-1852 – info@wwhp.org

[www.wwhp.org](http://www.wwhp.org)