

Interviewee: Carol A. Pappas
Interviewers: Jhoannette Arias and Arianny Diaz
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Abstract: Carol Pappas is an amazing woman from Southbridge, Massachusetts. Carol was born in 1947 and was raised by hard-working parents. She currently lives in Leicester, a suburb fifteen minutes away from the city of Worcester, near to her son, youngest sister, and grandchildren. Carol works in the Assumption College's library as an Acquisitions Coordinator. She earned a degree in teaching French, History, and English at Bridgewater University. In the interview, a recurring theme that Carol shares is how the role of women have change throughout time and how this makes her truly satisfied, that even though there is still inequality among men and women, things got gotten better. She also reflects upon how she managed to balance her life as a mother and wife, at the same time of a working woman, and how she took the best out of these situations and turned it in her favor.

JA: First we have to explain you what this is. We are completing a citywide oral history of the lives of Worcester women, aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences. Based on the goals of the 1850 national Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on the areas of women's education, health, work, and politics/community involvement. And we want to focus today in your experiences with your work, and thank you for letting us this important project.

And the first question is: What is your full maiden name and if applicable your married name?

CP: Maiden name is Carol Ethier E-T-H-I-E-R and married name is Carol Pappas P-A-P-P-A-S

JA: And when were you born?

CP: When?

JA: Yes.

CP: June 20th, 1947

JA: And have you ever been married?

CP: Yes.

CP: What is the name of your current husband?

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CP: Not married right now.

JA: Ok. Do you have any children?

CP: Yes,

JA: What...who are they?

CP: I have one son, he's living in Worcester and he actually went to Assumption [College].

JA: What culture or ethnicity do you identify with?

CP: Caucasian, white.

JA: Ok

CP: Obviously (laughs).

JA: Tell me a little bit about your parents.

CP: My father he was—he died a few years ago. He is French, his name was George Either and he worked in American Optical Company in Southbridge until he retired. And he was in the Air Force, and he worked building the first jet plane when he was in the air force, yeah. Before that was only propeller planes and when they would bring the planes out of the hangers on to the flight line to test them or to work on them, they would put (_____???) so they wouldn't know what they were working on, a top secret thing. And then my mother—there is four of us and my youngest sister started school, she went to work, she worked—everybody there worked in the American Optical she worked in a microscope lab, and she actually...a sort of interesting for the [Worcester] Women's Oral History Project, when she worked there, she found out that the man that worked next to her doing exactly the same job earned more money than she did. And she swiped to bring this big company, over 6,000 people that worked there, to court unless they paid her more. So, they went to arbitration and the whole company had to give equal pay after that, to everybody, and they had to pay her the difference of what they paid him for the time that he was there 'cause she was there first, and they cut his pay back (laughs).

AD: So, she brings out equality to work.

CP: Yeah, but went the wrong way.

AD: Have you lived in Worcester for your whole life?

CP: I don't live in Worcester at all. I was born in Southbridge...lived in Southbridge and now I live in Leicester, Massachusetts.

AD: That is near...how far is it?

CP: 15 minutes.

AD: 15 minutes?

CP: Yeah...takes me 15 minutes to get here in the morning.

JA: That is not that bad.

CP: No it's not, it's like a suburb of Worcester.

AD: So where were you born like... before coming to Worcester?

CP: I was born in Southbridge which is about half hour away. Do you know where Sturbridge Village is?

JA: No...

CP: You have to go it—is great!

JA: Ok!

CP: Sturbridge Village is wonderful, it's like an eighteen hundred's settlement that had original houses that were dismantled and brought...over there, is really a great place to visit. And I was born there and then grew up in Sturbridge, the next town over. And then, after I got married—we lived in Maine—I lived in Maine until like five years ago.

AD: Oh, that's kind of far... moving from here all the way to the North.

CP: Yeah, what happened—we lived in Maine, my son was born in Maine, went to school in Maine, but then when he was looking at colleges...not so much to pick from up there, so he came down here to Massachusetts to look and decided on Assumption, and then he stayed here. So I found out that the place I was working with was going to be sold and my job wouldn't be there anymore, so...yeah he was down here, at the time just my grandson, my parents were still living in Southbridge, so...why am I in Maine all by myself? So I sold my house, and moved down here.

JA: Do you like it?

CP: Oh yeah, cause I grew up...you know in this area so...

AD: From the time you have been here, like what changes have you noticed that had happened in

Worcester throughout the years?

CP: That's a tough one because I haven't being here for long [murmuring and laughing]. When I was here, when I was younger there was a nice downtown in Worcester that isn't there anymore. Yeah there was a nice downtown with nice stores but they are not there anymore...but they have that beautiful hospital center that wasn't there when I was here before. I had surgery there.

JA: Surgery of what...if you can say?

CP: Oh I had an open heart surgery. They found out right after I started work here. I started working here in December of 2007 and right after Christmas that year I got sick and they did all of these tests and couldn't find out, until finally [they] figured it out. I had pneumonia, and they were doing all the tests for pneumonia. They said, "You know, there is something wrong with your heart, you know, it's just not right." So I did all these further tests and as it comes out I had a birth defect 'cause all my life they told me, "You have a heart murmur, you have a heart murmur." "So what do I do for it?" "Oh nothing people just die at an old age with a heart murmur". Well it turns out that it was getting bad, it was getting worse, so they had to replace a valve for my heart.

JA: And how did that affect you or your family?

CP: Well, I was very, very tired all the time and I couldn't do a lot of walking and that really...for two years afterwards, they said, "Oh you will bounce right back," but I didn't. For two years I couldn't do a lot of walking.

AD: How do you feel now?

CP: Good now. Like I said I just walked for an hour and a half all around campus and all the things can be fixed, they fix anything now [laughs].

JA: That's great!

AD: Exactly.

JA: Do you remember your first job? Who did you work for?

CP: Yes I do! I do remember my first job. I worked in Boston for a printing company, they are the ones that used to have a commercial in number two, *We Try Harder*, and they were the ones that did that ad campaign, and I used to do the purchasing for them.

AD: What years was that? How old were you?

CP: What year was that...like 1970?

AD: Ah...long time

CP: Yeah, it was nice though, it was right on the water in Boston, right in the area where the Children's Museum is now...it's right over there.

JA: I imagine you liked it.

CP: I did like it. But I ended up getting married and moving away so I didn't stay. But it was so strange [laughs]. The guy that owned the company, his girlfriend worked there too, she had this job [laughs] company nurse, right we need a nurse. I think that the only time I saw her was when he used to bring his yacht up to the harbor and park it outside and tell everybody you know, "We gonna have a party on the boat tonight, so everybody in the 8th floor come down." Get in the limos, go in the boat, go cruising around the harbor so he could spent the night with his girlfriend [laughs].

AD: Did you met your husband over there in Boston or...?

CP: No, in college

JA: What college did you go to?

CP: What is now Bridgewater University.

JA: Yeah, I have a friend that goes there.

AD: So you guys went to college together?

CP: Well we meet in college my senior year actually.

JA: Almost at the end.

JA: Well, you are a working woman and you also have a family, how do you balance that?

CP: It is not too bad now 'cause like I said, I bought a duplex with my son and my youngest sister, she used to live in Boston but somebody bought her building and tripled the rent, so she couldn't afford to stay there anymore. So she moved in with me, and then my son and daughter-in-law and their two kids lived right next door, so between us all, we juggle everything around. It works out though, there is always somebody around. Like school vacation week my sister is there so she can take care of the kids. We just all help each other out. It was harder when I was alone in Maine with my son.

AD: It's always harder when you are alone.

CP: Yeah

AD: And more with a little kid probably.

CP: Well he wasn't so little, but he did a lot of things in junior high in high school. He did football, baseball, kick club, peer helper, honors society, he was in a lot of different things. And transportation... we weren't near anything up there. Nothing is near up there.

JA: I mean, Maine is very beautiful...[laughs] nothing like a city.

CP: I couldn't get milk without a car [laughs]. Yeah, like arranging transportation all the time, so it's tough...football practice its over when it's over, if the last bus has left, well..

AD: You gotta have to wait for someone else...

CP: Yeah, it was like a three-mile walk, he is not gonna go to school all day, go to football practice, walk home for three miles and then do his homework., not reasonable, but you do what you gotta do.

JA: Do you consider yourself politically active?

CP: I used to be. Not so much since I moved down here because my time is taken up more here than when I was alone up in Mine. I did a lot of things in the town. I was on recreation committee, the library board, board of appeals, planning board. I did a lot up there. I don't have the time to do that.

JA: Well, do you do like some voluntary work?

CP: Not here, no. it's harder here, I don't know why.

JA: Yeah.

CP: Up there it was just so easy.

AD: It's probably because there is like a lot of population compared to Maine.

CP: Yeah more there's more people here and I'm new in the area, they all know each other, nobody seems to leave their towns too.

JA: If you go to Boston there is like a lot of voluntary work to do. Yeah in Worcester it's kind of harder.

CP: Yeah, in Leicester, in Leicester there's nothing, we don't have any hospitals, we don't have anything.

JA: Has religion played any role in your life?

CP: Not a whole lot, I went to a Catholic school, from kindergarten throughout high school, nuns...yeah.

AD: How was the experience for you, with nuns in a Catholic school?

CP: It was ok...you know, some of them were very, very nice, some not some nice, just like everybody else, they are just like regular people.

JA: So do you consider yourself more as a spiritual person?

CP: Not really, no.

JA: Ok. And when you were growing up, was there any historical event that you remember that was imprinted in your memory?

CP: Historical event? Like a big world war?

JA: No...it doesn't have to be really important, but important for you that hit you really.

CP: Well my ex-husband, he went to Vietnam. He had [laughs]—that's what I tell people, he had it so easy, he lived in the city of Saigon. He lived in a hotel that had a restaurant and a movie theater; they ate at the restaurant, they put their laundry out at night and come out clean in the morning...yeah.

AD: So he didn't really go to Vietnam...

CP: No, I don't think he went out and shot anyone.

AD: He didn't really go to the war [laughs].

CP: But he was there, he would tell you, but he didn't really have part in it. He taught English to the soldiers, he was an English teacher so...

JA: Was your family strict? Like at what age were you allowed to date for example?

CP: High school.

JA: High school? Like sophomore year, freshman?

CP: Yeah, probably sophomore, turning 15, 16.

JA: Was there anything you loved to do while in high school like an extracurricular activity or

something...or like a hobby?

CP: I liked ice skating, roller skating, I was in the basketball team. I'm not very tall but wasn't very good at it, but it was fun.

AD: But you enjoyed it, that's important.

CP: Yeah, just for the fun of it, but the whole team was pretty bad [laughs]. We never got anywhere; we had only one good player, the coach's daughter.

AD: What about now? What are yours hobbies and activities? Like what do you do during your free time?

CP: Now? I don't have any, I have two grandchildren that live next door [laughs] I don't...lack of free time, they are three and six so from the minute they get up in the morning they are in my house, until they go home for bed at night. They are with me 'cause I don't put any stress on them, you know, they come over and play with what they want.

AD: Do what they want...

CP: Yeah, I don't put any stress on them.

JA: Based on your life experiences, do you think you did good or do you have some regrets that you...or some things that you would like to do differently?

CP: Well, when I graduated from college, I really had gone to college to be a teacher but with my ex-husband in the military we always seemed to be moving at the wrong times of the year, you know, moving in October, November, and nobody is hiring teachers at that time. So I never could get a teaching position, and this was for many, many years, so by then I started working in offices—somebody fell asleep over there [laugh] [she sees outside the window someone sleeping] so I just never got back into the teaching, and I kind of wish I could have done the teaching.

JA: In what area would you like to teach?

CP: My degree is in—I have a license in Massachusetts, one of those lifetime certificates that they don't give anymore—I can teach French, History and English.

AD: Can you speak French?

CP: I could, it's gone by the wayside.

JA: Yeah I could never learn French I don't know why [laughs].

CP: Yeah my son never did either. He did Spanish when he was in high school, he took four years of Spanish. He didn't do the French either. But it's being so long since I've done anything with it, you know, I can pick up a book and can pick out words but that's about it.

AD: They say that French is the language of love so...[laughs].

CP: [laughs] yeah.

JA: Do you think you have any legacy in your children...your future grandchildren?

CP: What do you mean? I don't know what you mean.

JA: When you die...what do you think is going to be like the main thing that they are going to remember about you?

CP: Just coming to my house and [being] taken care of and not having any worries when they come to my house. That is very easy for them.

JA: Is there anything else you would want us to include in this interview?

CP: One thing, when I did graduate college, I applied for a job at Southbridge Savings Bank and they had a program that you could start out and you could work for six months and then move up and move up every six months until you were finally like a manager in the bank. And I applied for that and I was told it was for men only.

AD: Wow, so how did you feel about that?

CP: I was kind of upset about that, but I had no recourse at the time. There was just no recourse, what are you gonna do?

JA: So you must feel happy that things have kind of changed now?

CP: Oh yeah...

JA: I mean, not entirely but, things are getting...we are getting there.

CP: Yeah, we are much better. You know, when I was in school, you were either a teacher or a nurse and that's pretty much it, that's all there was. A few brave—actually everybody I knew became a teacher. One of my cousins became a physical therapist, but you know, everybody else were either teachers or nurses, and now they are doing everything. Now what can't you do? You can go into anything, medicine, architecture...

JA: And in fact the majority of women...sorry, majority of colleges are filled with women so...[laughs].

CP: Yeah and that's good, they can do anything. My little granddaughter, she's only 3 now, so she can be anything she wants to be, and that's really good.

JA: It's been such a pleasure to talk to you

CP: Nice to talk to you, I don't feel like my life was anything to...

JA: No, it was!

AD: You will be surprised!

CP: You are going to turn things around? [laughs].

JA: Well thank you so much.

CP: Thank you!