

Interviewee: Linda Raffaele-Moyen  
Interviewers: Abigail Cote and Aishea Henry  
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Transcribers: Abigail Cote and Aishea Henry



Overseen By: Dr. Carl Robert Keyes, Assumption College

**Abstract:** Linda Raffaele-Moyen was born in Leominster, Massachusetts, in 1957. She attended Leominster High School and went on to study at Framingham State, married her high school sweetheart, and had three children. She later divorced and never remarried. Although her education led her to become a teacher, she ended up opening her own business in order to better support her family. However, when she gave it up she ventured into nutrition education and outreach and continues to work in the field today. In the interview Linda shared some of the struggles and setbacks that she faced. She stated that she managed to overcome them with the help of God's messages: "Whenever I would feel like throwing in the towel, I would see a rainbow, and I used to see rainbows, and I still do today." Linda shared the stories of her journey in faith and how she rediscovered her understanding of God in the support group Al-Anon. Even though she has never lived in Worcester, Linda has done work to improve the city, especially during her time working at Women, Infants, and Children [WIC] for which she won the MA WIC Community Coordinator of the Year Excellence Award. She shed light on the importance of family, faith, and believing in your own abilities to live a fulfilling life.

**AC:** 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. Thank you for your help with this important project! So, are you willing to let us record this interview and if you are please state your name and the date?

**LM:** Yes, I am and my name is Linda Raffaele-Moyen and today is February 19, 2017.

**AH:** Okay, thank you for that. So we are going to start. Our first question is what is your full name including both maiden name and/or married name if applicable?

**LM:** My maiden name was Raffaele, so Linda Raffaele and then when I was married it became Linda Moyen and the majority of the time I tend to go by Linda Raffaele-Moyen for the last – for quite a while. I had a business and so I carried both names when I was doing that. So, I am known by all three. [Laughs]

**AH:** Okay perfect.

[Laughs]

**AC:** When were you born?

**LM:** I was born on [       ] 1957.

**AC:** Great, so I know that you have already talked about this but have you ever been married?

**LM:** Yes, I was married.

**AH:** And then ...

**LM:** I have been divorced for, oh, I think about for 25 years now.

**AC:** Okay.

**AH:** And can you state your husband's name?

**LM:** My husband's name was Raymond.

**AH/AC:** Okay.

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

**LM:** Yes, I have three children. I have Matthew, Brandon, and Marissa.

**AC:** Okay, do you have any grandchildren?

**LM:** I have three grandchildren. My youngest, my baby Marissa has three children; Tegan who just turned seven yester – two days ago [laughs] and Madison who is five and Dominick who is about 22 months.

**AH:** Ok, what culture/ethnicity do you most identify as your family background?

**LM:** Well if you ask my dad [laughs] we were all told, "You are all Italian [laughs] if anybody asks you." But, actually my two grandfathers both came from Sicily, so they did both come from Italy. And then my grandmothers – my Mom's Mom, her mother came straight from Ireland. So we are also Irish much to my father's dismay. [laughs] No, I shouldn't say that, not to his dismay, but he was proud of his Italian heritage and she was also French.

**AH:** Okay

**LM:** And then my Dad's Mom was French.

**AH/AC:** Okay.

**LM:** So, [laughs], and that little bit of Indian my great grandfather on my Mom's side supposedly was Canadian French and also part American Indian.

**AH:** Oh, Okay.

**LM:** We were told so.

**AC:** I was told the same thing.

**LM:** We never actually looked into it.

**AH:** Yeah.

**LM:** But my kids always told me I should have.[laughs]

**AH:** You should have.

**LM:** Because they could of got help with college. [laughs]

**AH:** Funny

**LM:** So, they would have no loans right now, right?

**AH:** Can you tell us about your parents?

**LM:** My parents. Okay. Well, my mom was mostly a stay at home mom. She raised the five children and made sure the house was clean and made sure that dinner was on the table, you know, kind of the traditional – how it used to be [laughs] before life got so hectic and so many two parent working families. My dad was, well let's see, he joined the Marines when he was 17 and he was in the Marines. He was one of the Chosen Few and he went through a lot, a lot of stuff during that. He was a sole survivor of his tank blowing up and he was captured and escaped and a lot of story there. When he got out, he became a policeman first and then my mom told him that was too dangerous after they had their first child so he switched to a firefighter [laughs]. But he was the only one supporting a family of five. He always worked more than one job. So he used to work for delivery services, he had his own business, a plastic factory at one point, real estate business and he kind of acquired property. That was sort of his thing that he did on the side, most firefighters do more than one thing.

**AC:** So, did you have any favorite memories you had with your parents?

**LM:** Memories. Well [laughs]. I don't have a whole lot of memories from childhood. One that I often think of when I was growing up – the first place we lived was the first house my Dad bought on Franklin Street and it was a two family home. And my aunt and uncle lived on one floor, they were actually my godparents, and we lived on the other floor. And I remember going

out in the backyard at that house and we had a swing set and lots of times my cousin who was close in age to me would come over and go out and we would just swing for hours [laughs]. Singing Somewhere Over the Rainbow and as adults we realized that talking about it as adults that that was kind of – you know, when you think about the *Wizard of Oz* and the words to that song. How does it go? “When troubles melt like lemon drops.”

**AH:** Yeah [laugh]

**LM:** And all that. And we realized later that we were both kind of on the same page and we both just wanted life to be happy and peaceful and you know, no fighting [laughs] and all of those things. So I remember that and I remember walking to school. School was probably only about six houses down from our house. So, we used to walk to school until I think I was about in fourth or fifth grade. My dad built a house and we ended up moving into that and that was more of a residential neighborhood. It was a new neighborhood. So, I remember crazy things like stepping on a nail when they were building the house and I don’t know, stuff like that. Being excited in high school when we ended up putting a big built in pool in the backyard and I always loved to swim so that was like...

**AC:** That’s awesome

**LM:** That kind of thing.

**AH:** That kind of leads into our next question. It is where have you lived during your life? Did you grow up in Worcester, and in what neighborhood? Like...

**LM:** I grew up in Leominster [Massachusetts], which is part of Worcester County and I have pretty much been in Leominster my whole life with the exception of when I went to college. I commuted most of the time to Framingham [Massachusetts], but the last year and a half I lived there on campus and then I did live up in Maine when I graduated that summer. But pretty much I’ve lived in Leominster. Most of our family [laughs,] extended family seems to be there except with a few exceptions here and there.

**AC:** Okay, so the Franklin Street is in Leominster?

**LM:** Yes.

**AC:** Okay.

**LM:** Yup, there is a Franklin Street in Worcester too.

**AH:** What was the neighborhood like generally?

**LM:** Once, well once we moved, we were in a residential neighborhood, so it was a lot different because our prior house was one street and then the other streets next to it were busy. So, but in

our new neighborhood it was more like a residential area. There were a lot of families, young kids growing up, so we had more friends you could actually go out with, [laughs] play until the street lights go on, or until somebody was called to go home for dinner, and that kind of thing. So it was, I think it was a lot more fun and interactive once we moved. When we moved there.

**AH:** Alright. Let's keep going. Where do you live? So, kind of what you are talking about now. Where do you live in the city now, have you lived in multiple areas, so you kind of already talked about that.

**LM:** Oh, where I live now?

**AH:** Yeah.

**LM:** I live in Leominster. I live in a residential neighborhood that is – when I got divorced, I probably should have moved [laughs] because I was in a new house and it was a nice neighborhood, but my kids were young, they were six, four and one and my two boys were old enough that their only request was that can we please stay here in our house and not leave our friends. So, I did whatever I could to make that happen and they had agreed. I can remember having a conversation with them, and saying well, I am happy to do that as long as you realize it is going to mean that you are going to have to give up things. You know, you are not going to have the Nike sneakers, you're not going to be going to the baseball games, and WWF wrestling. Because we lived in a nice neighborhood. You know their friends were doing these things but they wanted to stay and they were willing to make those sacrifices. So, I am still in that house today. I'd like to downsize and maybe at some point that will be possible, but after raising/supporting the three kids, things are different than they would have been [laughs] financially.

**AC:** So, do your family member like live around you now? Like your children?

**LM:** No, not all of them. My middle son moved to California, oh about nine or ten years ago, following his dream to get – he was into music and things, so he has been out there for several years. And then my oldest, he just got married this summer; he lives in Hopkinton [Massachusetts], so he's not, you know, too far. And then my daughter, once her husband got out of the Marines, they were in Fitchburg [Massachusetts] for a while and now they live in a house in Westminster [Massachusetts] that they bought. So, they are not right in Leominster anymore but, two of the three are relatively [laughs] close. The other one, it's a longer hike [laughs] and a bigger expense to get to, so it doesn't happen as much.

**AH:** If you don't currently live in Worcester, what is your connection to Worcester?

**LM:** Well, growing up, it was—it will sound funny to you guys I'm sure, but Worcester was sort of like the city to us then. You know, we would come out here to go shopping. There was the Worcester Mall and even downtown Worcester had some nice stores. Or we might come out to go to a concert, or go to a club, or different things like that. So, we were always, we thought of

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ourselves as being sort of part of Worcester because we were in Worcester County. You always heard Worcester County, Worcester County.

**AH:** What challenges do you think the city still faces? What would you change about the city?

**LM:** Well not living here, it's hard to – I guess I'm not sure exactly what I would say to that. I think observations, I mean, it has changed over the years but part of that is, cities you do tend to see a change in them over time. I remember it being more, I don't know, more pristine and not as—it was more like going to this nice shopping place kind of thing and it still has nice places to shop and some restaurants and things, but it is a little more city than it used to be than when I was younger. You know it wasn't as far a transition, you know, now it's more like getting more like a big city. I guess. I don't know if that makes sense, but you know what I mean right?  
[laughs]

**AH:** Yeah.

**AC:** So, what distinct characteristics make Worcester the place that it is?

**LM:** Well I think some people think of it in terms of you like some of the sporting events and the teams that have been affiliated with it. You know the DCU Center and having concerts and conferences and different things coming in. It's become like I said more of a big city over the years. So, it's always kind of had a place in the county that's drawn people and that's expanded and grown over time.

**AH:** What do you think women's experiences in Worcester have been generally?

**LM:** Again, I almost feel funny trying to answer that because I did not grow up in the city.

**AH:** Okay.

**LM:** I can answer it from my own perspective of where I grew up but...

**AH:** You can do that.

**AC:** Yeah, that would be okay.

**LM:** Well I think, can you just repeat it one more time

**AH:** Yeah, what do you think women's experience in Worcester have been generally?

**AC:** So, you can answer that about Leominster if you want or you can talk about...

**LM:** Okay. So I think again there has been a lot of change. Like when I was growing up, it was more a lot of people that were two parent families. Like I was saying my mom was a stay at

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home mom, raised the kids and did all that and my dad was the one who went out and provided for the family and I think there was a lot more of that years ago and then there has been a lot of transition. Things changed through the years and because of the professions I've worked in off and on I've seen it from that end. But you know now there is a lot more single parents, broken families. Just a change, two parent working families. Different atmosphere from what it used to be.

**AH:** Where did you attend school?

**LM:** Oh, as a child, I attended in Leominster, different schools there. I graduated from Leominster High School and then I made the decision to go into college and I went to Framingham State College. That was – I mean back then, I kind of – I was, I was very quiet growing up. I actually was most bashful—in my junior high yearbook, which most people don't believe anymore when I tell them [laughs] because life has changed me—but I kind of became part of a group in junior high that were, you know, the group kind of thing, the popular girls, the ones who were outgoing, and all these things that I really wasn't. [laughs] I'm not quite sure why they liked me, let me in. But, I became a part of that group, so when we were in high school I mean, they were all talking about going to college and I always loved school. I always loved school. In elementary school, I use to cry when we had vacation from school and I couldn't go [laughs] for whatever reason that was. So, they were talking about going to college and I decided that's what I wanted to do. But when I shared that with my parents I found out that wasn't really kind of on their radar [laughs]. I had been with my high school sweetheart, who ended up being my husband, and in their eyes it's like, "How come you're not just going to get married and start a family?" But, you know, part of me, because of my self-esteem, I think wanted to do it just because I wanted to be just like my friends because back then I did not have confidence and things. But another part of my heart, it was just like a goal that I just wanted to accomplish and I knew I loved school and I just thought that yeah, I want to do this.

**AH:** So, what was your major, and what year did you graduate college?

**LM:** I majored in education, specifically Family and Consumer Science Education. And I graduated in 1979. I graduated magna cum laude. I always tried to excel and be perfect at everything. I thought that would give me that "over the rainbow life," [laughs] but of course now I realize that was not the case. So that was my major which was interesting because you know my parents weren't that keen on the whole thing. So in my dad's mind I think he thought, "Oh she's going to school to learn how to be a housewife anyways." [laughs] But it was funny. I used to drive this old car that would break down all the time and one of the days that he had to come almost all the way out to Framingham to get the car. He stops to get lunch and the guy at the coffee shop—you know my dad was friendly and talked to people and so he was talking about what he was doing out there, going to get my car at school. And the guy asked what I was studying and he told him kind of, and this guy went on to tell him that, "You have no idea. Do you realize the classes she has to take?" And he started telling him, she's got to take organic chemistry and she has to take all these psychology classes and started to tell him what I was really up to. Not learning how to cook and sew or whatever. And it was funny because after that

I could see that he had a new perspective. He actually understood more and kind of took some pride in the fact that I was working and putting myself through college and doing well and all of that.

**AH:** So, you kind of already kind of touched on it but what were some of your other challenges that you faced in college or in just getting your education?

**LM:** Well, I think the biggest one was working to save to go to college. And when I made that decision I had kind of stopped what I was doing in high school and I took a job when I was 15. I got a worker's permit so that I could start working and saving because I had made up my mind that I was going and I had to pay for myself. I was going to do it. So that part was a challenge you know, just trying to make the money and then commuting the first two and a half, almost three years, was kind of challenging because I would drive to Framingham and then I would drive home and I would go to work. And then I would go home. And then I would pull all-nighters doing my class work. And my mom would get up the next morning and say, "Have you been up all night and now you going to drive to school?" And then I would be like, "Well, yup." Mom said, "You can't do that." And I would be, "Well I have to do it." You know that's what I had to do. So that was probably the most challenging, just paying it and still managing to do what I had to do to get almost all A's because I was kind of crazy and anal like that [laughs].

**AH:** So, after you graduated, what did you see as an option for you after you finished college?

**LM:** Well, basically getting into teaching I guess is what I would say. I sort of multitasked when I was in college because I actually wanted to go to design school and when I was in high school you go and talk to your guidance counselor about what you wanted to do. I told him what I wanted to do and his response, which has become kind of a joke for me, but he said, "You are too smart to go to design school. You need to do something different." So then because of who I was at that point, "Okay, well let's see, my best friend is going to be a teacher, sure, alright, yup, I'm going to be a teacher, that sounds good, I agree, you're right, I should go become a teacher." But I wanted to, in my heart, be a designer too. So when I was in college every elective I could take was design based. I took housing and design, and I took art, and I took 3D, 3D design. So, in the back of my mind I think I always wanted to do that and at one point I actually did end up having my own kitchen and bath business for a number of years. But when I graduated, it was more—my mindset then was okay, so now I'm going to find a job teaching, and now I'm going to get married.

**AH:** What support networks and mentoring have you been, have been important to you throughout like your...?

**LM:** Probably, the two biggest, would be, well the first biggest that would come to my mind would be Al-Anon [program for families and friends of alcoholics]. I had people in my life who had some issues with alcohol and drugs and that's how I came to be a part of Al-Anon, which is a support group for people who have people in their life with issues like that. And that probably had one of the biggest initial impacts in my life because I was raised Catholic and always did the

right thing of course. You know what you're supposed to do and all that. But, when I got in Al-Anon, it's a very spiritual program and they do—they have twelve steps and God is in those twelve steps and all that. But there is where I kind of – it changed my whole perspective of who God was. Growing up he was this big guy upstairs. He was sitting there writing down, “Oh, Linda did this.” And even though I always tried to do the right thing you, worried about what you were doing wrong. You know, I would go to confession and sometimes I would make up some sins just because I felt like I had to have something to say to the priest. So in Al-Anon I came to understand God as a totally different being, that someone who actually cared about me and loved me and wanted what was best for me and that just made a really big impact on my life. And I also learned a lot about just myself and little by slow through that program, that's where I started to develop self-esteem. Started to figure out who I really was and what Linda really wants. And learned amazing tools like the Serenity Prayer. You know, “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” And I started really living my life like that because I went through a lot of unexpected things following my divorce and that really kind of carried me through. I don't go to the program regularly anymore. I haven't for a number of years, but I still have friends I made during that time who I'm in touch with regularly and get together with regularly and so that would be one of the big ones. And I think the other would be Christian friends that I have developed along the way. Those are probably my two biggest support systems.

**AH:** Okay.

**AC:** How would you, how do you spell Al-Anon?

**LM:** A-L-A-N-O-N.

**AC:** Okay.

**AH:** So I know you started talking about your first job. So what was your first job?

**LM:** So my first job was in a bakery. Roma Bakery. It was an Italian bakery of course because... [laughs] God knows if I tried to work at a French bakery then I would have been in trouble with my dad. [laughs] But yeah, it was an Italian bakery and I just was one of the sales girls. We frosted cupcakes and sold things to people and that's actually how I put myself through the first couple of years of college. And then I started waitressing. I waitressed at Howard Johnsons. I waitressed at Oak Hill Country Club, because you can make more money waitressing and I needed more money to get myself through school. So that was my younger days.

**AH:** So what do you do now?

**LM:** Okay so. I kind of went through a—when I first got out of college, I got a job in the school system in Leominster as a sub [substitute teacher] and then from there I quickly got a teaching position. And then when Proposition 2 ½ came along, a lot of teachers were going to be let go.

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And the principal actually called me in and gave me a head start. He called me in halfway through the year and told me that I was doing a really good job and he didn't want me to be stuck trying to find a job when everyone else was so he let me know and said, "You look for a job and if you find one just give your notice and don't worry what time of the year it is." So I went to work for Head Start as the Director of Education. So I worked a lot in human services for a number of years and then after I got divorced I was teaching in West Boylston [Massachusetts], but it was hard to support my three kids on a teacher's salary. So, that's when I ended up getting into kitchen and bath design. And I did that for a number of years and that's kind of how I supported my kids through a lot of the years of their childhood. And now that they are all adults, a few years ago I decided that I wanted to get back into nutrition and I've just always had a passion for young kids and helping them and I took a job with W.I.C. [Women, Infants, and Children food and nutrition service] in North Central Mass. And recently I changed jobs to a Yours for Children which is a food sponsor. So it's a similar program which provides a way for children.

**AH:** So, what has this work meant to you?

**LM:** It's very rewarding. I mean when you can see that you're helping other families. I mean, I went through a lot when I was trying to raise my children on my own and one of the things, the way I actually came to get involved with W.I.C. is, I had my kitchen and bath design business at the time and someone close to me was going through some challenges and was told about W.I.C. and wasn't going to get involved in the program because of the same reason years ago I never tried to get help because you have that kind of mentality that there are people who need it more than me. And I can do this. I've just got to work harder. And you know that kind of thing. And I knew myself the impact that can have. I mean yes, I made it, but personally kind of paid a price because you know I wouldn't change—I made my kids priority and I would do the same today, but you know everything is a domino effect. So when I saw the way that person was treated and the mentality that people have and she had good reasons for being in the program, I happened to see an advertisement for W.I.C and I said, "Okay, maybe I'm supposed to do this." And that's how I got back into human services.

**AH:** What were, are your primary responsibilities in terms of housework and childcare?

**LM:** Well, pretty much [laughs] it was mostly all on me. I mean when I was married, I also worked part time. Most of the time when I was married, even after I had kids I worked full time until I had kids and then when I had children I always worked. I used to work at a florist and I did different things. I was a cake decorator for a while and I did interior design. People laugh and always ask me, "Is there anything you haven't done?" [laughs] "Because I'm getting married." "Well okay. If you need any help with the flowers, the cake, planning, whatever." So I did whatever I had to do to get by. But, say the question again. I warned you. [laughs]

**AH:** What were your primary responsibilities in terms of housework and childcare?

**LM:** Okay.

**AH:** How has it changed over time?

**LM:** So pretty much, most of that was all on me. And then after that, after my divorce it kind of became, because pretty much, except for a short window of time, in the beginning I ended up being tasked with raising and supporting them on my own. So, I mean it pretty much stayed the same. I raised my children to be responsible and they did have little chores and things and I had a job jar I used to use if they wanted to earn extra money. But I always felt like I didn't want to ask them to do too much because I felt like their life had already been impacted enough because they didn't have a dad there helping. So I kind of tended I think to take on more. I could of asked them to do more, but I tended not to because I just wanted them to enjoy being children. And that pretty much continued. They're all adults now and they're on their own, but I pretty much did all that stuff.

**AC:** So was your ex-husband ever involved, like after your divorce or was he just like completely separate?

**LM:** Because of the specifics of what went on there, he wasn't involved. Initially he was involved to a degree. Initially he provided some child support, for I don't know maybe the first year or so, a brief period of time, but then because of you know things in his own life that changed and then the support wasn't there and the kids saw him, at the beginning some. But it became kind of a on and off, and eventually at young ages they decided that it wasn't the best situation. So they don't, they don't really have—haven't really had contact with their dad for a while.

**AH:** How have you balanced different priorities, responsibilities, roles, and interests in your life?

**LM:** Well I always, I mean family was always important to me. My children I'd say probably became the most important thing in my life so I always put them first. And, I don't know, I guess it was always kind of a juggling act [laughs]. You know, because I worked. There were times when I worked—I pretty much always worked a couple of jobs at a time and then tried to each let them still have some interests in things. So pretty much, as they were growing up, the majority of my focus was on them and giving them what they needed and getting them to where they needed to go and just trying to give them the best life that I could. So, I think now. I don't know. I think they'll always be a number one priority. But I think now that I'm older and they're adults I think that I'm trying to put a little bit more focus back on myself and trying to start to do some things for myself and still support them, but also be a little bit more self-caring [laughs].

**AH:** What do think the pros and cons of the path you have chosen?

**LM:** Pros and cons? Well I think pros, I mean I think from the nature of being in human services, you hear a lot about you know, single parents, and boys raised in single family homes with just a mother, and there are all kind of statistics out there. It used to be more so when I was raising my kids, I mean, I think some of that has changed more with opportunity and things.

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There is still a lot of it, there is a lot cyclical poverty and abuse and different things that families face. I think for me the biggest pro would be seeing that didn't have to be the case. You know, I mean realistically, financially I probably should have made different choices when my kids were young and they would have grown up low income, or in an apartment, or very different environment from where they did. It was kind of a choice, sort of like "them or me" and I choose them, [pause] but it just became a big pro, because I think that gave them a different, I don't know, a different starting point, or at least a better opportunity in some ways. They have all gone on to be successful in different ways: my oldest son got a scholarship to go to college and did very well, he is kind of like his mom [she knocked on the table] which is good to a degree [laughs] [pause]. But I look at it as they kind of proved those statistics wrong, because neither of my boys ended up in jail. Because of my profession, I would see those statistics and things all the time and it's like it doesn't have to be that way. So I think that the biggest pro seeing that, you know a [pause] love and just dedication and hard work, or just not getting trapped in that "poor me"—not that everyone gets trapped in the "poor me." I think what I'm saying is, that's not necessarily the only alternative, it's not black and white. Kids can [pause] grow up in hard times and still succeed and become good people. I remember people used to say, "Your kids are so polite." I just think it's not necessarily about money when you're raising kids, I think a lot of people think it is and so many people now, will say like, "Well we both have to work because you can't raise kids in a world like this on one income." Sometimes I'll say a little bit more, sometimes I'll just think to myself, "Yeah you can." [laughs]. You know, you sacrifice what you can, so I think that's the biggest pro, just seeing that it is possible to succeed even when life slaps you in the face, kind of thing.

**AC:** Where there any cons that you experience?

**LM:** Well I guess for me it would be, I mean, [pause] I have always and still kind of have this sadness of not being able to give my kids what I thought I was going to be able to give them and I [pause]—I was blessed years ago, because my oldest son called me at one point and we were talking—this was when he was in college I think; and I was going through some situations with and he said to me—he use to hang with friends that have a better situation and he said something like—how did he say it? [Pause] "Mom I'd pick you alone over my friend's two parents any day, so don't ever feel like you didn't give us enough," and that just really struck [cries] and that just really struck me, because it really spoke to the fact it isn't about what you give your kids materially. It's more about what you give your kids from your heart, what you teach them, the examples you give them, whatever and all those other things. Because you know that just really meant a lot to me. My other kids at different times have said similar things too. And granted there were plenty of times, when they wished they could go—my son was a big baseball person, and his first game I brought him to, he was older. I brought him to an Orioles game, because that was his team and you know his other friends used to go all the time. But [pause] I don't know, it's like those aren't really, when push comes to shove, those aren't really the things that matter, I found. I think that it's probably one of the bigger things—cons, I mean, you know, my life is different now I don't have a saving account, retirement and all those things that at one time I thought I was going to have. Because I was supposed to have that white picket fence [laughs] life, that's the way things started out; but I kind of remind myself that's not what really matters. I

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have made it to this point, a day at a time by God's grace and I trust that I will continue, you know, so there are pros and cons to everything, right? [Laughs].

**AH:** [laugh] What a twist. Do you consider yourself active politically?

**LM:** I wouldn't say majorly. Growing up when I was younger Dad was very active politically. He was involved in campaigns for governors, presidents and different things like that. And I used to be involved a little bit in that arena, because sometimes they would host a function for a governor or something at a friend's house and he would ask me to [pause] sometimes you know, to help with serving, or just welcoming people in and things like that. So back then, that was kind of a little bit. I was involved in politics through him and then different times I had a couple friends who have been in offices and I helped them. But I try to stay abreast of things going on, but I have never been really—didn't have the time. [laughs]

**AH:** [laughs]

**LM:** Never dedicated too much time to that arena. [laughs]

**AH:** Have you been involved in volunteer or community work?

**LM:** You know I have some. Again my time was pretty absorbed with working two jobs and everything, but I have been involved with different things, through churches I belong to, different things happening in the community. Like years back we had a really big fire, where a big building in Leominster burnt down and I volunteered and went down and we had food, and we had a warm place for the fire fighters to come over and kind of get a break while they were working [pause] and all the stuff you do when you're young, volunteering things when you're involved in CYC. Probably as far as community impact, I would say maybe my biggest period, where I had a significant impact is in my position with WIC. I was only there for a few years, but I did a lot throughout the Worcester county community. My position was community outreach, so I went to a lot of different organization and places. I actually ended up getting the Excellence Award for MA WIC Community Coordinator of the Year that after I was there a couple of years. I got involved in things like Leominster had launched a farmer's marketplace and I was involved in the initial planning of that and the launch of that first one [pause]. Hopefully, they are going to do the second one this year; I wrote and got a grant for a community baby shower and last year was the first one. I did everything with that and it ended up being a really big success, people at work would kind of laugh at me, because the woman who was supposed to partner with me, had an unexpected serious health thing come up so it ended up being pretty much me doing the thing and I was like a nervous wreck. I was like, "Oh my God, I hope people show up, what if no one shows up," and my co-workers at WIC were like, "Don't worry, you worked hard, you have all these great things, people are going to come people are going to come." But I was so nervous, and I can remember that day I was in there, everybody had their jobs and I told them what to do and one of the women I work with came over to me and she said, "What do you want me to do about the people lined up at the door?" I figured that she was teasing me because they had been listening to me for weeks, and I said, "Get out of here, go back and do what you were

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supposed to be doing, they are going to be coming soon,” and she was like, “No seriously, what do you want me to do about the people standing at the door?” And when I turned around—and it was being held at the Knights of Columbus and the whole entrance was full of people with baby strollers and stuff. And I went out and there was a line all the way down the stairs and out to the road and the door didn’t open for another half an hour. [Laughs] I was like, “Oh my God, I hope I have enough stuff for all these people!” But I think that some of those things I did when I was with WIC were part of some of the big impacts I’ve had on the community most recently; because I had that long time in between when I was in the design business.

**AH:** I know you kind of talk about this throughout, but what role has religion played in your life?

**LM:** A very big and important role. Like I said that kind of changed in Al-Anon and it continued to grow and develop after that, but I don’t know, I guess I really feel like I am here by the grace of God [laughs]. When I look back in hindsight, when I look back on some of the crazy stuff I have been through, He has always made a way [pause] and it is kind of funny; you guys might take this funny, but it came to my head so I will share, but I guess it goes back to Somewhere Over the Rainbow, because it is a rainbow thing. But when I was going through my divorce, I went through a lot of very unexpected things and [pause] and it got to this point where I would be really discouraged and how am I going to do this? Alright where is supper coming from tomorrow? Or whatever the situation might be. Whenever I would feel like throwing in the towel, I would see a rainbow, and I use to see rainbows and I still do today, but I used to see rainbows in the weirdest places. Someone would hand me a check and it would have a rainbow on it [pause]. I would get up in the morning and there would be a rainbow on my wall, and I would be like, “Alright there is no sun coming in the window. Where is that coming from?” But they would just show up in crazy places and that kind of got to be my—I looked at it as my message from God, because it would always come when I was feeling desperate and somewhere a rainbow showed up in my life. [Laughs] And so my faith has been very important in helping me get through. And the people that I have met. I have a group of about half a dozen women now, the church that I go to, we connected years back and we sort of get together now once a month and about a month ago I started to refer to them as my Angels of Hope [laughs] and it just got me thinking that whenever things got really bad, it just seemed the right thing would show up. And that is sort of how I look at my life right now, and hindsight is good because when it gets bad I kind of look back and kind of remember where things went bad, so very, very important piece of me and how I made it to this point [laughs].

**AC:** What church have you gone to?

**LM:** When I was younger I went to a Catholic church and that’s how I raised my children until when my daughter was in high school. I actually had a family member who she and her husband were pastors and started a church; Christian Life Center, in Leominster. And my daughter used to go there for youth group. My cousin had asked me if it was alright if she came, and she wanted to go, and I was like, “Yeah, sure.” She used to go there every week and every Sunday morning we would wake up and this was when her brothers were older so they were moved out,

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and she would say, “Mom can’t we go to Robin’s church?” And I would say, “Marissa we are going to Saint Ann’s, that’s where we go to church,” and that’s where I grew up going to church and that’s where I brought them to church that was that. Well one week I was just beat down tired of listening to her and she asked me and I was like, “Alright, this is the deal; we will go there today and I don’t want to hear about this again.” [laughs] Well we went and I never went back to Saint Ann’s which was much to my mother’s dismay because she was raised as a very strong Catholic and some of her family had left the Catholic church prior to that, but she has very strong views on that. But now I currently go to Hope Chapel in Sterling which I really like. I connected with, I happen to go there when I ended up out of work, I started to go to their bible[study] there. I had seen the sign out on my way to Rota Springs [Ice Cream]. I am a big ice cream fanatic [laughs]. One day my daughter and I were going by and I saw Hope Chapel sign and I said someday I have to check that place out. And when I was out of work I found out they had a bible study and I started going and I just really—it was a good fit for me. There were a lot of women who I just kind of connected with right away and I just have been going there ever since. Church was always a part of my life, but I think it’s a different experience now in some ways a healthier experience than when I was growing up, it was more just following the rules kind of thing and now it’s more a relationship thing.

**AH:** How has health issues impacted your life or those in our family?

**LM:** Health issues [pause] well I guess a big one would be when I was raising my children and back then we weren’t—at least I wasn’t in my situation aware of things that were available. When I went looking and became aware, the way you could qualify for different things was very different. We went because I couldn’t afford health insurance, we went many years when my kids were young without health insurance and thankfully, by the grace of God, they were pretty healthy years. So that’s something that I always, I hope now that families are able to, that something so important for kids to have health coverage, so that would be one way things were impacted, I mean we weren’t always able to you know, go to the doctors when we should have and like I said luckily they were pretty healthy most of those years, but the only other; the next big thing as far as health issues is when my dad got sick. He’s been gone now for over ten years, but when he got sick I kind of made a choice to get more involved. [pause] They used to go to Florida for the winter and he had come home. When I looked at him I knew something was wrong, I just had that feeling, but I couldn’t—I didn’t know what it was, but it was just like I had this feeling, this gut feeling that something was different. It was so dramatic, but then we ended up finding out. I felt something was going on and I ended up getting him to the doctor and we found out that he was having mini strokes and he had different stuff going on. So that had a pretty big impact. That was when my daughter was in, let’s see junior high I think. But he got progressively worse and I did a lot of bringing him to the doctors, and chauffeuring my mom and trying to be involved in what had to be taken care of—my mom is legally blind for a long time so that kind of had an impact because it was sort of like one more, one more thing I was adding to the plate. So I think that was probably the two biggest things that come to mind.

**AH:** Whose health are you responsible for other than your own, like right now?

**LM:** Currently just my own and my mom I am her power of attorney and the one who oversees that, so I do get involved with her medical bills and some of her medical care. And when she had surgery a few years back on her knee I took time off and then I would go there in the morning and on my way home from work and plan out her medication and all that, so that's pretty much it.

**AC:** So do you have access to health care now?

**LM:** I do through my job, I have health care now, yep.

**AH:** How do you get through tough times? Like what kind of thoughts keep you going? You kind of touched on that a little.

**LM:** Yeah, pretty much my faith and just years ago I saw this plaque and it kind of became the family motto in our house, it says, "Everything happens for a reason, just believe," and that sort of was inspired from my Al-Anon days. The philosophy of the program was that everything you go through there's a reason for, it's part of your journey kind of thing so I try to still look at life that way. As I was saying earlier the Serenity Prayer, trying to [pause] you know accept life for what it is even though sometimes I'd prefer to just change it! [laughs] And just take it a day at a time. And I learned in Al-Anon to look for the blessings in every day and that kind of helps me to get through.

**AH:** How do you define success in your life? Has this definition changed over time?

**LM:** I think—how would I define success in my life? I guess for me [pause] my biggest marker for success I would say is just looking back to years ago—who I was years ago—and seeing how the journey has changed me and how it has enabled me to, you know, bringing my children through to adulthood. If anyone had told me years ago my life is going to be what my life was, I would say, "No, no, no. I am not that person, I am not strong enough or smart enough. I don't have the endurance to go through that kind of life. That is someone else's life." So I guess to me success isn't about money and how much you make. I think it's more about how you face life on life's terms and figure out how to get through it one day at a time [pause] and how you impact and hopefully have a positive impact on others' lives.

**AH:** So based on your life experience, what advice would you give to women of today and future generation?

**LM:** [pause] I would say to [pause] not be so hard on yourself, to realize that we are all a lot stronger than we realize we are and to know that you are capable and you can change life. You know, I grew up, I was raised one way and my parents did the best they could and made the best choices, but as an adult I knew some of the choices they made in terms of how they raised us weren't the choices I wanted to make with my children. And so I kind of made a conscious decision to break some of that cycle and do things differently. I can remember, my dad used to tease and harass me because the way he did things he believed were right you know, he would

say sometimes, “Well, you want to borrow the belt?” [laughs] and I would be like, “No, I don’t need the belt Dad.” But he always, you know, I always felt like he thought I wasn’t doing things the way I should. Many years later I can remember he told me I did a good job. He said, You did know what you were doing.” He used to tease me, because I had psychology, “How is that psychology working?” And my kids grew up and I did it. Did I even answer that question? [laughs]

**AH:** You did [laughs]

**AC:** You did [laughs]

**AH:** You did. This is kind of our last question. 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 sure to include?

**LM:** Well I think again, like I said earlier, the whole piece about—not that I am an advocate for raising children as a single woman, I don’t think that is necessarily the route you should take—but unfortunately, as I have learned in my own life, sometimes the journey we plan isn’t the journey we end up walking. I think that we hear so much about [pause] single women and as I said earlier all the statistics and all the negative stuff, so I just think it’s important for them to hear stories to have more focus on women who have walked that journey and their kids have come out okay or excelling or whatever the case may be, so that they can feel confident they can do what they have to do too for the sake of their children and always. I mean for me it was just about trying hard to accept the journey and focus on the good part [pause] and remember they say—how do they say that—hindsight is twenty twenty. I have kind of a different perspective on that, yes you can look back and say, “If I had never married him,” but I would never do that, because I love my three children. I wouldn’t change that. But for me hindsight and looking back was about that and when you are going through life, that can be one of the biggest things that can help you in life in a tough spot, like I used to look back, “Remember when this happened and you thought, that’s it I can never do this, we are not going to make it.” And then I got through and we came to this point. And so I do still even now when I am facing a challenge or a low spot or whatever, I will look back on something I have been through and remind myself, I went through this, but at least these are the gifts I got from that journey, as much as I hated it. Now I have more confidence than I used to have. I have accomplished things I never thought I would, so you have to remember to give yourself credit, you know, because that is something I never used to do. I used to think I wasn’t ever good enough, I wasn’t strong enough, I wasn’t pretty enough, I wasn’t, I wasn’t, I wasn’t and now I try to remind myself that I am who God created me to be and I have overcome a lot and I hope to continue to do that in the future. [laughs]