

Interviewee: Jennifer Jane Stanovich
Interviewers: Ethan Ward, Katherine Vachawski and Jordan Sweigart
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Transcribers: Ethan Ward, Katherine Vachawski and Jordan Sweigart



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Abstract: Jennifer Stanovich was born in Holden, Massachusetts in 1959. Wanting to stay close to home, she attended Assumption College where she graduated with a degree in psychology. Jennifer married in 1986 and is the mother of two children. Jennifer participated in a very beneficial internship with United Way of Central Massachusetts while in college, and after graduating worked in public relations and communications at Thom McAn Shoes, Data General, and then returned to Thom McAn. Currently she is Executive Director of Holden Area Chamber of Commerce. During her career, she took a thirteen year break from the workforce to stay home and be the very best mother she could. In this interview, Jennifer stresses the importance of doing one's best. She comments that she left her career to be with her family as she felt she was not doing either job to her fullest potential, and that all she asks of her children is for them to do their best. Jennifer discusses how important family is. In this interview, Jennifer also talks about the worth of happiness outweighing the worth of money. Jennifer mentions the positive aspects and changes that have occurred in Worcester and suggests changes that would make Worcester the "people" city that it used to be.

EW: Jennifer, do we have your permission to record your oral history using your name and today's date?

JJS: Yes

EW: What is your full maiden name?

JJS: Jennifer Jane Zook Z-O-O-K.

EW: And your married name?

JJS: Stanovich

EW: When were you born?

JJS: 1959.

EW: Have you ever married?

JJS: Yes.

EW: What is the name of your current husband?

JJS: Craig (?) Stanovich.

EW: Do you have children?

JJS: Yes.

EW: How many?

JJS: Two.

EW: Do you have grandchildren?

JJS: No, better not. [Laughter]

EW: Can you tell me about your parents?

JJS: Mom and Dad met during World War II. Mom was in England. Dad was serving in the war over there and they met and fell in love and she came back when Dad, you know, was transferred back home. She came back with him.

EW: Wow. Where have you lived during your life?

JJS: Born and raised in Holden [Massachusetts]. Next town over if you can believe that. Lived in Worcester [Massachusetts] for a year. So.

EW: Really?

JJS: Stayed close to home.

EW: Where'd you live in Worcester [Massachusetts]?

JJS: We lived off Burncoat Street (and Wood Road ??) when I got married. We rented a house there for a year, and then turned around and bought a house back in town.

EW: What was the neighborhood you grew up in generally like?

JJS: It was – we lived behind the elementary school, Chaffins School in Holden [Massachusetts], and those were the days when you could walk home from school for lunch. You know, I mean nowadays little kids can't do that. You know, there's so many other risks out

there, but I walked home for lunch and, you know, always walked to school, walked to middle school and then bussed to the regional high school. Everything was very close and convenient and safe.

EW: When was the first time that you lived in Worcester?

JJS: 1986, when I got married.

EW: Where do you live in the city now? Or

JJS: Well, now I live in Holden. Very close to the center of town, very close to where I work.

EW: Do other family members of yours live in the same area?

JJS: No, my brother lives in Amsterdam, and he also has a house in Chestnut Hill in Boston [Massachusetts], he has two homes and goes back and forth between the two.

EW: Oh, wow.

JJS: Yeah.

EW: What challenges do you think this city still faces?

JJS: Oh, I think – I think a lot could go on in this city. I love this city, I mean, I've always, always been here, but you know, I know there are a lot of projects going on now that, that need funding and the city should, should grow and keep up with the times and.....

EW: What would you change about the city?

JJS: I'd make it more of a walking city. I wish it was more like, you know, Providence [Rhode Island] or Boston [Massachusetts], more bike trails, things like that. Having been to Amsterdam, you know, I see the difference there. No one drives a car, everybody walks. Everybody rides a bike, you know, I know this city's too big for that, but, but I wish there was more of it. Main Street, Worcester isn't what it used to be. I remember when the shops were there and, you know, there were a lot of people. It was a bustling Main Street. Now, it's mainly – it's the businesses, but you don't go there, you don't go there to shop up and down and, you know, it's, it's changed.

KV: So, having said that, are there any other changes that you've seen in Worcester [Massachusetts] over the years?

JJS: Well there have been some great changes. They took the old Union Station and fixed that up and multiuse buildings. Shrewsbury Street is a great addition with restaurant row. Elm Park is beautiful. I mean, there's a lot of great things to the city, and we're so blessed to have 10

colleges. That's, that's such a boon for us.

KV: Right.

JJS: So there's an awful lot of good things going on in the city.

KV: So what distinct characteristics make Worcester the place it is?

JJS: I think, history is one. I think the fact that it has – it can have a small town feel even though it's one of the largest cities in the state. You know, it still has all those neighborhoods. You still have some of the ethnic neighborhoods that you used to have, which is nice.

KV: What do you think that women's experiences in Worcester have been generally?

JJS: I mean, I think good, for me it's been great. There's a lot of opportunities between education and, and all the places, you know, that you can be employed around here. The fact that we have a teaching hospital. I, I think that it's terrific. I mean, growing up in this area I never saw any challenges I couldn't overcome.

KV: So you said that you graduated from Assumption, and you gave us a little background about your elementary years, what were some of the challenges that you faced with your education [pause] if any?

JJS: Well, I mean at the time, I don't know why, but I didn't want to go far from home. You know, and Assumption was always at the top of my list of places to go, and then I got married here too so, it was, you know so I was lucky. I really applied to the schools locally, and was lucky enough to get in, and challenges with the high schools, I mean, with a regional school, the nice thing is you start small in elementary school, middle school is a little larger because they combine the elementary schools, and then you end up at Wachusett [Regional High School] which was 2,000 students because we had the five towns. So, growing up the education system was great because you keep moving up, and, you know, being exposed to a lot of opportunities.

KV: Upon finishing your formal education, what did you see as your options?

JJS: Well, luckily, I did an internship when I was at Assumption, and it was the best thing I ever did. If you guys can [laughter]. So I – when I was in Assumption, I interned at the United Way of Central Mass [Massachusetts], and what I had to do, my task, was to put together a booklet. I was in Public Relations and Communications, and was a psych [psychology] major, and I had to put together a booklet of media contacts. I mean, nowadays, you would just obviously Google that, you know, but then you needed to have something in front of you. So I put this booklet together and when it came time to apply for jobs, the first place I went to was Thom McAn Shoe Company here in Worcester and they had already seen this booklet because I distributed it throughout the city, and when hired based on my opportunities here. You know, so the whole

thing just kind of...

KV: Built on

JJS: It built up on itself, yeah, and you, you know, those – you gotta take advantage of those things when they come up.

KV: What are some of the support networks and mentoring that has been important to you?

JJS: Well, again the mentor here [Assumption], was fabulous Angela Dorenkamp, and I don't think she's here anymore, but she worked very closely with me and, you know, got me into this internship program, and, and that's what started my career. I am still on the same career path that she put me on, and then once you get into the professional field it was important to be in some of the groups that are out there. There are a lot of networking groups that exist, and one of the ones that I joined was the Worcester County Editor's Council, and it was all people who were editing newsletters like I was, and in communications and the contacts that I made there led to my next job. So, it's definitely a lot of who you know.

KV: At what age did you first start working or have your first job?

JJS: 16.

KV: And how much did you earn?

JJS: Oh God, [Laughter] coat check girl in a local restaurant, and I can't believe I was even bold enough to walk in there and just, at the time, tell them, you know. I don't even remember, I mean, I don't remember. It obviously wasn't very much, and since I was 16 and couldn't serve alcohol I had to wait until I was 18 because that's what the drinking age was then to move into waitressing and bartending and go from there. Yeah, I don't remember the money.

KV: What other jobs did you have either prior to attending college or after?

JJS: What would you rather?

KV: Both

JJS: Both [Laughter]. Alright, so then the waitressing led to the bartending and I did that all through college, which was great, money was great, and then again, when I was at Assumption did the internship, which led to a job at Thom McAn's Shoe Company. At that time, Thom McAn, which you guys don't remember, was a shoe retailer that had 1,200 stores nationwide. 1,200 shoe stores, it was incredible, and their big thing was, you know, if you don't like my shoes 20 years from now, you can send them back. And I started editing a newsletter there, and then went into customer service, and was dealing with a lot of these people who send me a pair

of shoes saying, "I've worn these for 25 years, but my heel is starting to come off," and we would literally send them a new pair of shoes. Now I hope that's not the reason that they ended up going out of business down the road, but they believed in their product that much. So, while I was at Thom McAn, that was when computers were just coming out. I mean, these were big computers. I mean, they were – it was nothing like it is today, and word was that computers were the thing of the future and this is the way to go so I had contacts from the Worcester County Editor's Council and one of the guys that I knew there said, you know, I'm at Data General who, who was one of the big computer companies at the time, and, and he offered me a job there taking my newsletter experience and doing newsletters for the different plants they had around the country. Well, Data General hit a billion dollars in computer sales during that time, and another one of my jobs was to go online, read all the newspapers every morning: Wall Street Journal, [Worcester] *Telegram*, *Boston Globe*, take anything related to our business and condense it down into, you know, little blips, these little summaries, and then e-mail this out to everybody at the company, the top managers of the company, and at the time that was a really new thing, I mean, computers were so new that the fact that we could this, was huge. So, that was a great job, and then from there I got into – just happened to move into some event planning because they would take all of their ten year employees, 'cause they had so much money at the time, everyone who had been there ten years, they'd fly them all to Disney World, with their families, all expenses paid for a long weekend. So I got involved in coordinating that every year, taking these families to Disney, and that – I mean, you know with this economy, you don't do that today. You know, I mean, at the time these companies were booming, and computer technology was booming so, I was there for a few years and then Thom McAn called me back, and said would you come back as the Director of Public Relations? And it was almost the case where, you almost had to leave to come back. You know, I think if I had stayed in communications there doing the newsletter I probably would have stayed in communications. But the fact that I left and went into high tech [technology] for a while, I was able to go back at a much higher level. So, I was there as director of Public Relations and Communications and event planning for – until '91 [1991]. So – and that was a great job, great job. And that was coordinating all the events, we had a lot of conferences around the country, and I was in charge of moving our top executives to these different conferences, and coordinating the, you know, the different shoe fashion shows that we had to do to introduce them to our people out there. So....

KV: What has this work meant to you?

JJS: Love it, I'm so blessed. Honest to God, I – 'cause I've always loved what I do, and the fact – if you guys can do something – if you can get paid to do something you love, it doesn't get better than that. You know, so, yeah. That was a great job, and I only left that because I had kids. So...

JS: All right, well. Speaking of kids, what are or were your primary responsibilities in terms of household work?

JJS: Try to do as little as possible. What are they now? [Laughter] Now, I do try to do as little as

possible. We – I, I mean, I stayed home with the kids for 13 years. You know, my daughter is in college now at Roger Williams, my son is at the high school. So now things – now I have a cleaning lady come in, you know, things, things are a lot different, but I did, I stayed home for 13 years.

JS: How do you balance different priorities, responsibilities, roles, and interests in your life?

JJS: See that was the tough thing. Here I had this job that I absolutely adored, but I couldn't travel. Had a baby, you know, and, and that was when, you know, women were trying to have it all, and it's really hard, and I desperately wanted to keep my job, and I also – but I also wanted to stay home so Tom McAn said well let's see if we can make this work, and you can just be a consultant. So for a year I tried working, and then I, you know, juggling the two, and to be honest, I just couldn't do it. Because the travel – I couldn't travel, and I really wanted to be home, and I felt like I was doing neither job as well as I wanted to. So I left Tom McAn, and stayed home for 13 years, which, which turned out to be great, you know what I mean? That was exactly what I needed to do, and it was fabulous, but it was a wonderful job and I hated to leave it. So – and now the job that I'm in now is part-time, and when I went back to work that is the perfect way to juggle family, and, and work.

JS: How would you characterize your professional or personal and professional costs of your chosen path, how about the benefits?

JJS: The personal – read that again.

JS: How would you characterize the personal and professional costs of your chosen path?

JJS: Personal and professional?

JS: Costs.

JJS: Costs?

JS: Yeah.

JJS: C-O-S-T-S?

JS: Mhm.

JJS: Well, I mean, the personal cost is, you know, you sacrifice the income to, to stay home. That was my choice to do that. And professionally you worry, alright, now I've been out of the workforce for 13 years, right? How am I gonna get back in? So, it's not an easy decision to make. It was the best one I made, but, but it definitely for a, for a woman, it's challenging to figure out how to balance those.

JS: What type of work did your husband do or does?

JJS: He went to Bridgewater State [College] to be a gym teacher, and then you get out of school, and there are no teaching positions. At that time, you know, there were more teachers than they knew what to do with, so he found himself in insurance, and that was just a fluke, working at the Hanover Insurance Company here in Worcester, and then went to an agency and now owns his own business. So insurance truly became his passion, and because he had a degree in teaching, what he does now is he teaches insurance courses as part of his job, something that he chooses to do, which involves travelling. He travels around the country and teaches, you know, maybe twice a month he'll teach a seminar, but that's his way to use his teaching degree, and it's also – and, and he loves doing it. He thinks it really important that people in insurance keep up their skill level so, so now he owns his own business, and it's called Austin and Stanovich Risk Managers, and what he does is goes into – it's just he and a business partner, they go into mid-size companies, and analyze the companies risk in terms of their insurance policies, you know, if this catastrophe happened, which it could, do you have the insurance to cover that? And he doesn't sell the insurance, but he tells them what their needs are, and then it's up to them to decide whether or not to take his advice, and, and get insurance to cover that, but. Yeah.

JS: Alright, we're going to move onto a completely different subject.

JJS: Oh, God.

JS: Do you consider yourself active politically?

JJS: Mmm, No. See and – in, in my job – partly because, I mean, we have very good friends, you know one of my closest friends just ran for sheriff and was elected, but as the Chamber Executive we are – we try to stay out of politics because we represent businesses in the area who obviously have different views. So for us, you know – so I can't be out there on a street corner with a sign. [Laughter] It's not good. So I would say, while I keep up on it, I'm not active.

JS: Have you been involved in volunteer and community work?

JJS: Yes. Yes.

JS: What groups have you worked with?

JJS: Right now I'm active in my church. I serve at the Mustard Seed, which is a food – you know, feeding the hungry kind of thing. Our church supplies the meal and we take it down there and feed some 300 people who come in off the streets.

JS: Wow, that really nice.

JJS: Yeah, it's really cool, and then I'm on the – I'm a memorial garden trustee. You know, in the Episcopal Church they – we have a memorial garden where we actually – people who are cremated are buried in this garden. So, you know, my dad is buried in that garden. So, it's, it's – instead of having a cemetery, you kind of, you know – so anyway, I'm one of the trustees of the garden just to keep it up. It's kind of a cool thing, but no, I've always believed in volunteering, and I've always done it in some form.

JS: What, what led you to that, to volunteering?

JJS: Probably working at the United Way of Central Mass [Massachusetts]. You know, back in the day after I graduated – you know, I internshipped because there are so many organizations out there that need help, and the United Way was supplying funds to those organizations, and it gave me a chance to see what they do, and they – all of them rely on volunteers so much that it makes you realize you really need to help out.

JS: Going back to the church, what role has religion played in your life?

JJS: You know it's – I think it comes and goes. It, it has become important – you know. I hated going to church when I was a kid, and then my parents stopped going so we didn't go, and then, then you want to get married in the church so all of the sudden it becomes important again. I wanted to get married here at Assumption, and my husband was Catholic, and I was Protestant so we had one of the priests who taught here marry us and then we also brought in a Protestant minister, and then, and then we slacked off again. You know, right, it happens. Then you have kids, and then you think, oh my God, I want them to be baptized, so we started to go to church again, and actually looked for a church. I didn't want to go to, to the Catholic Church, and we weren't too keen on our local Congregational Church so we met in the middle, and started going to our Episcopal Church, which is very Catholic in its – a lot of what it does. It's very similar to Catholicism, but we've been – now we're totally committed to that church and kids were baptized and confirmed and, you know, now, now we go every Sunday. So. Yeah.

JS: A lot different from my Sunday.

JJS: Yeah.

JS: I don't go to church.

JS: (Laughter) I don't know how to ask this question.

JJS: Oh god. Are they really bad? Like what?

JS: How have health issues impacted your life or those in your family?

JJS: My health is good (laughing), but let's see, health issues. Well, Craig and I both have

parents that died of cancer so we are very aware of screenings and you know I mean. My dad smoked, Craig's parents both smoked, and all three of them died of cancer. Well two- two out of the three passed away from cancer so you know that's a real wake up call, but you guys don't smoke? No, none of you smoke. See, no one does anymore thank God! (laughter) It's not the cool thing to do, but I smoked in my day because it was the cool thing to do, you know? I was smart enough to quit when I was young, but still.

JS: That's good.

JJS: Yeah

JS: How do you feel about the health-care issue?

JJS: And the new health care reform? I think that still needs to shake out a bit, you know. I think it's great that everybody needs healthcare, but I think the cost and the insurance it's gonna- it's gonna impact insurance. It's gonna have its challenges. My mom grew up in England where everybody got healthcare, and they had that system down to a science, but we're not there, yet.

JS: Couple questions then for, mostly for our project. How do you define success in your life? Has this definition changed over time?

JJS: Success to me is like I said, if you could get paid to do something you love, that's great, you know? And so, if you're enjoying what you're doing and you're healthy, right. So yea, I'd say I'm successful. I mean, you know, everybody wants to do well and make money, but that's not the be all and end all. You make those choices. I gave up the money in order to stay home with the kids, you know. So...

JS: Oh, okay. That answers the next question.

JJS: What was the next question?

JS: How do you feel about the choices you made in your life?

JJS: My choices were the right ones for me, and they're not for everybody! And I'm not saying, you know, that women can't work and have kids. They can. I just couldn't. It involved travel, and it was just too much.

JS: Based on your life experience, what advice would you give to women today and future generations?

JJS: Well, a great education is key. That's so important, and take total advantage of those opportunities, you know. The internships, the networking groups. Whatever you guys can do to get out in the community, I would say, do it because I truly believe a lot of the times it is who

you know. It helps you in your next career path, that's always been my case, so yea. Get a good education and- and follow your passion.

JS: Do you feel you have a legacy?

JJS: (Laughter) Tsh. No not really. I mean-I think, you know, if the kids- if my kids are good kids, and they do well, and are successful, I guess that's my legacy, you know. I think in my job, I'm making a difference now in what I do today, but 20 years from now are they going to remember that?

EW: What major historical events in Worcester have occurred in your time here?

JJS: Seriously? uhhh (Laughter). What major historical events? (Pause) God.

EW: You don't have to remember any.

JJS: Well, I'm trying to think, you know. In Worcester?

EW: Mmhmm, or surrounding areas.

JJS: Alright I'm blanking on that one.

EW: (Laughter) That's okay.

JJS: What are other people saying? Do you know? You don't know because I'm your first one! (Laughter) Ahhh

EW: How old were you when you were allowed to date?

JJS: Probably, (Pause) probably 15.

EW: And where did you go on dates?

JJS: That was-we would mostly-it was hanging around. We would just-we would hang out, you know. And I remember a lot of times there was a picnic table at the church in our neighborhood, I mean, and again we weren't straying too far from, you know, home, we'd hang out there, we'd go to the movies, or we'd go to Friendly's, you know, until you could drive. Then once you could drive, then all hell broke loose. (laughter)

EW: What was considered fashionable when you were a young woman?

JJS: I remember the jeans with holes in them. Which came back now, right? Yeah see! That used to be really cool, and we used to sew patches on our jeans. How queer is that? (Laughter)

But we did. We sewed patches on our jeans, and I remember wearing peasant skirts to school, long skirts were in. Things you don't want to think about (Laughter), you know. I tell myself what goes around comes around, so you might be ending up in peasant skirts again, you never know.

EW: What was your favorite music group?

JJS: (Pause) Oh, God. Trying to think in high school. (Noise) Am I going to have to make one up? Alright, I remember thinking The Monkees were pretty cool. Davy Jones was hot.

EW: How were girls treated when you were in school?

JJS: I don't-I never had any issues. I mean, girls, you know. But girls were cheerleaders. Girls weren't into the sports they are now, you know. I was a cheerleader. It was-it was different. Now girls sports have taken off. But I think in terms of education-that never-that never affected me.

EW: What did your parents' education consist of?

JJS: High school diplomas. Dad came back from the war, you know, went to high school in Worcester, Commerce High, and then had to serve in the war, so that just changes your life, you know. And then Mom came back here with him and so she didn't go to college in England, you know. They were so busy trying to get their lives together here after the war there. It just didn't happen.

EW: When you were not at home, where did you usually spend your time?

JJS: As a kid you mean? Working a lot of times, working.

EW: Do you have hobbies or do any regular leisure activities that you that take you outside of your home?

JJS: Golf. Yeah, I enjoy golfing. I belong to a ladies golf league. Gardening, definitely. Yeah, I'd say golfing is my big thing right now.

EW: How do you get through tough times?

JJS: Besides getting weepy? (Laughter) You just have to take it one step at a time. I just, everybody goes through it, we all have. And, it's just one day at a time basically. And the support of friends and family.

EW: Well, I believe that we have covered everything, unless there's something, you'd like to add. (Laughter) Anything you'd like to add.

JJS: No, I think this is a great project, but I can only imagine what other people are going to say, too, you know. But it's all good. I don't have any, you know, I've had a good life so far, no issues. Nothing you need to add? You're going to be able to pull this together?

EW: Well...

JJS: Like she's too happy, she's just (Laughter) you know. We need issues, do you need drama? Are you okay?

EW: Well what do you think, this might be a difficult question, but your purpose in life is? Your life goal...

JJS: You know-I don't know. I suppose contributing to society whether that's through-I do it through volunteering, and I do it through my job because I believe in what I do, you know. So if you can help people along the way or educate or you know. And just do your best. That's what I always say to my kids, just do your best.

EW: And I don't know if we asked this, do you work currently?

JJS: Yes.

EW: What do you do right now?

JJS: So now, when I went back to work after 13 years, I'm the executive director of the Holden Area Chamber of Commerce. So what that means is, I'm the only employee in an organization that is basically a volunteer organization. There are-my role is-our role is to support the businesses in the area. So I cover the towns of Holden, Princeton, Paxton, and Rutland, which are, you know, right up the street. We have a hundred and fifty businesses, who pay a fee-they pay a membership fee to belong. And our challenge is to get those businesses to network amongst themselves. So we hold monthly events-networking events so they can exchange contact information, that sort of thing, you know. We do a lot of community events. We raise money for scholarships for kids who are going into business in the hopes that they will then replace us someday, you know. We do Holden Days, which is an enormous community event in town that draws probably 10,000 people from the surrounding area, and that's a way to promote our businesses because they have business booths, and then we also have crafters and artists. It's up and down Main Street. It's just an enormous event. But basically my job is to promote businesses. We do a TV show every month. I'm the host of a TV show, which is on Public Access, and we go to, we visit three of our members every month. Last month we had a quilting shop that just opened in Holden, and-or we'll go to Verizon, or the local newspaper, and we'll spotlight each of those businesses in their place of business. So area residents who are you know channel surfing and they go by their public access station they'll see someone that they know or they'll see a business, and it gets them to shop locally, because they realize what's in their own backyard. So the TV show is great fun, it's one of the best parts of my job. It's a great

way to meet people, and it helps the community, and it helps the businesses. Businesses will say, I was on the show, and my sales increased, you know, and we go to a restaurant. We go back in the kitchen. We cook with them. People see, you know, what goes on back there, and they-we just did that with the Thai food, Thai Island. And you know, so it works. It helps everybody.

EW: Do you guys have anything you want to ask?

JS: I think I'm good.

JJS: Boy you guys, this was painless! (Laughter) Let's chat some more. This was fun! No it was great.

EW: Thank you very much

JJS: No problem

EW: It helps a lot.

JJS: Well, if you have any-if you need anything, just call me. I can fill in the blanks over the phone, okay?

EW: Okay, sounds perfect.