

Interviewee: Erin Williams  
Interviewers: Maya Ahluwalia, Christine Kang, and Jasmine Lumasag  
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Transcribers: Maya Ahluwalia, Christine Kang, and Jasmine Lumasag



Overseen by Professor Carl Robert Keyes and Professor Arlene Vadum, Assumption College

In this interview Erin Williams, born in 1957, discusses the many challenges she faced throughout her life, and how those challenges molded her into the woman she is today as the City of Worcester's Cultural Development Officer and also the executive director of the Worcester Cultural Coalition. As an "artist embedded in city hall," Erin helps find ways for people to express themselves openly, and bring communities together through the use of art and culture. One of her biggest accomplishments, she says, was being able to work with a variety of programs, such as volunteering on school boards, art commissions, local cultural councils, and more specifically, the New Salem Arts Council. Erin thinks of herself as a creative catalyst. "I have been fortunate to be able to work with many different types of groups. And I like to think that I can find a common language for people to be able to be comfortable to express their opinions with each other." Erin discusses the importance of surrounding yourself with people who support you and make you happy, and concludes with her advice to, "Take the leap, follow your heart, and educate yourself so that when you do leap you can feel confident and strong in it."

**MA:** So, 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're focusing on areas of women's education, health, work, and politics and community involvement. With you, we're kind of focusing more on community involvement, but we're going to touch on all of the topics, all of the topics there. And then we'd just like to get your permission to record the oral history today on October 14<sup>th</sup> for the project.

**EW:** Mhm.

**MA:** Okay, awesome.

**JL:** Should I start?

**MA:** Yeah.

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**JL:** Alright, so the first couple questions are just basic questions. So, what is your full name including both maiden and married name?

**EW:** Erin Inge Williams.

**JL:** And when were you born?

**EW:** [ ] 1957.

**JL:** Have you ever married? If yes, what is your husband's name?

**EW:** What if it was a woman?

**JL:** Ooh.

**MA:** I like that question.

**CK:** That is a very good question.

**JL:** Okay, so what is your spouse's name?

**EW:** Spouse's name, Adam Laipson.

**JL:** And do you have any children?

**EW:** Yes, we have one son [Eli Laipson-Williams].

**JL:** And grandchildren?

**EW:** No.

**JL:** And what cultures and ethnicities do you identify with?

**EW:** Well, I am Caucasian, but I come from a lineage of Welsh and German on my father's side and German. My mother is a native of Germany.

**JL:** And tell me about your parents. Like what did they do as a career?

**EW:** Sure, well my father was born in Norfolk, Virginia, and when he was 15 years old—it was during the war—it was actually near the end of the war—and he lied about his age and enlisted in the military. So...

**CK:** Wow. [Laughs]

**EW:** ...that he could get out of Norfolk. And his father was in the Navy. He came from a very large family as well, and he was really an explorer. So he had second thoughts almost before he left, and as he got older in his age, he actually shared that he almost backed out. But his father, he was a military man, said, “No you made this commitment. You’re going.” So he was sent during the occupation, to Germany and in West Germany, in a city called Stuttgart, where they actually made the Mercedes, and Mercedes was a company that also made most of the military vehicles for Germany. So that was an area that was bombed quite a bit. And my mother grew up in Stuttgart in a smaller area, called Sindelfingen, which is where the Daimler and the Mercedes companies were formed. So, she grew up during the height of the war and she was sent to Bavaria when it was at its peak. She was a Catholic, and they split the family up and sent her to more of a forest area in Bavaria where she spent her young adolescence, teen years, and it was very difficult. And her father was also separated, and her brother, so her mother and her younger sister were moved to one area and she was sent to live with her aunts.

**JL** Wow.

**EW:** My father was stationed in Stittgart during the occupation—my mother became an au pair for an American military man, a general, after the war. And my father was under his jurisdiction and he met my mother there. And they fell in love, and they were married, and they traveled through Europe and spent some time living there. My brother was then born a year later and that was in 1949. And then they moved to the states two years later. So moving from Germany right after the war to where my father’s family now lived, Kentucky, and if you can imagine...

**MA:** The difference.

**EW:** Yeah, huge. Talk about being a Syrian immigrant or something.

**CK:** Right, right.

**JL:** Oh, my God.

**EW:** Not an easy thing, and my mother was still very young at that point. Both of them were. She was what? 20? 19. So they lived with my father’s parents for a while, and with my brother. And then my father has always been very artistic. And he remembered the GI Bill, completed his degree at the Cincinnati Art Museum Art Academy, where he began to teach. And then my sister was born. They had another child. And then, my father moved into a career, still as an artist, painting, and worked for General Electric as a graphic designer, as a consultant essentially. Then went on to found his own company. I was born seven years later in Cincinnati [Ohio], they lived in Cincinnati then. And so, I have two older siblings that are eight and seven years older than me and then there are four other sisters who came along.

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**MA:** Oh wow, big family.

**EW:** So, there was a big gap. So I'm considered the immaculate conception. [Laughs] And I have—so there's seven siblings. And my father then, having seven children, really became much more entrepreneurial and this was in the height of the sixties, the swingin' sixties, and he started investing with three other colleagues and acquaintances to purchase real estate in a really run down area that overlooked the whole city. It's called Mount Adams. And he began opening coffee houses, running graphic design business, movie theaters, kind of like turning what would be an old deteriorating neighborhood, into Charlestown [Massachusetts] now in Boston[Massachusetts] —he really brought the city back to life. And he spent his whole career doing that. My mother, was an excellent sewer, true homemaker. I mean this was during the height of the sixties, when I was born in [19]57, when fast food was first coming out and frozen food, but my mother never made any of that kind of food. And in fact it was even forbidden in the house. So she would make full meals every single night and so we all had to participate in a formal dinner every single night. We would have a conversation, and she made all of our clothes. She made everything from baby clothes to prom dresses.

**JL:** Wow.

**EW:** In the seventies, I would go and get Indian tapestries and bed spreads and she would cut them and make them into my hippie dresses for me. [Laughs] and so when they moved out of this huge house that we lived in. There were hundreds of patterns, hundreds of patterns, and that's one of my fondest memories: before the school year would begin. She would take each of us out separately, so you got special time with her, number one. And you'd go to the fabric store and you'd sit up on these high benches and they'd have Simplicity, Vogue, McCalls. I can still see it now, and all the fabrics. And you'd get to look through the flip book to make six pieces for your fall wardrobe. And so, that's my fondest memory of seeing her then, in her bedroom with her sewing machine, laying the patterns out and making all our clothes for us and we'd pick out the fabric and then we'd go get a snack at Howard Johnson's— I always wanted a clam roll. My sisters always wanted sodas or something, milkshakes.

**MA:** A special treat afterwards. Yeah.

**JL:** That's a lot of work. [Laughs]

**MA:** Yeah, it's amazing.

**JL:** Alright so, where have you lived during your life? Did you grow up in Worcester?

**EW:** No, I grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio and then I left Cincinnati and I came to the University of Massachusetts and I studied there for three years as a theater major and a focus on women's

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studies and then I was invited to go to California to intern and work with a theater company in Berkeley, Oakland. And I spent a year there, where I was a dramaturg for the Epic West Theater and Cultural Institute. It's a theater for social change organization, and it was founded by a man who founded the San Francisco Mime Troop, so it was a theater that really addressed political issues and the work of Bertolt Brecht. And then I was invited to come back to Northampton, Massachusetts, and put together a Bartokian piece with one of my professors who was my mentor and it was at that time that I met my current spouse. He was working at the Children's Theater in Northampton. And I was working on this production and we started working on various projects together and then we decided we were leaving the United States and we were going to travel through Europe, and sold all our stuff and headed off. Yeah, we lasted about four days. We stopped in Worcester, where my husband's from originally. And it—he went to have a physical beforehand and it turned out he had an injury that required surgery and laid us up at his parents' house for three months and I'd just met his parents. So instead of being in Italy, I was on Pomona Road in Worcester [laughs]. And, then we did then leave for Europe and as we began the journey, we traveled through many countries and spent a lot of time in Italy and the medieval village of Apricale in Italy and Greece, and England, and Scotland, hitch hiking pretty much the whole way. And then we separated, and he went to Israel and I went to Germany to meet my relatives who still live there today. So we spent some time, and then we ended up back here in Massachusetts, after we moved to Philadelphia [Pennsylvania]. We had a friend who was close and in the process of getting married the next week. So [we] flew back and I started working in a theater, The Wilma Project, in Philly and Adam, who's a photographer, got a job with a photography studio and I founded a theater company, a street theater company, which I ran for a number of years and then I found another company and lived in Philly for about eight years. And then we ended up here.

**JL:** And what was your neighborhood like growing up?

**EW:** It was Kennedy Heights. It was considered the first integrated neighborhood in Cincinnati. It was designated during the height of the riots, in the late sixties, the riots were pretty intense, racial riots, the African American community was really not served well, then as now. We saw a lot of strife taking place in lower economic areas in Cincinnati and the neighborhood we lived in, Kennedy Heights, was really about bringing blacks and whites in particular, together, to have desegregated public schools and local schools that really were about immigration.

**JL:** And what year did you arrive in Worcester and what area do you live in?

**EW:** I don't live here.

**JL:** Okay.

**EW:** I live in New Salem. We left Philadelphia, one of the largest most diverse cities and were setting out to live in a smaller community, and we wanted to form another theater company and

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my husband to have a photography business that we would work on together. We had gotten married after we had lived together for seven years, and we spent about a year and a half driving around New England, [getting] familiar with it, and we drove into New Salem which is a population of 800.

**JL:** Oh, my Go...[laughs]

**MA:** Yeah.

**EW:** So really, theater for social change and very diverse. We lived in the most diverse neighborhood in Philadelphia, to a very Caucasian, rural, and arts based hill town, it's on the Quabbin Reservoir. Are you from Massachusetts at all?

**JL:** I'm from Connecticut.

**EW:** Okay, so New Salem was a town that was very active during the 1800s, 1900s. There was a train that went from New York, Connecticut, all the way to Boston. They had lots of mills. There were five towns. And in 1938, under the Federal Water Act, for the state of Massachusetts they decided that Boston didn't have enough water. So they decided they would flood all of those towns. So they flooded five communities, thousands of people, including the graves, and to this day, you can walk down into the Quabbin. It's the largest man-made water in all of New England. In fact, it may be in the whole United States. But it's now a reserve, where there are eagles and bear brought back, fisher cats. So it's one of the most glorious places you could ever be. And the old roads and the foundations of the houses you can still see as you walk down the paths, and it leads into the water. So this is your drinking water that you're drinking right now. It really was a hardship for many of those folks, but it created a lot of natural beauty. So we moved there in 1985 into an old was built as a church house in 1840. But the house was never used as a church because New Salem has so many churches. So they turned it into a tavern and stage coach stop. So the old farmhouse had a barn connected and the barn we worked to turn into a studio, which didn't work out that well. It was pretty old and run down; in fact, a goat lived in the house when we got it.

**JL:** Oh my God.

**EW:** So, it's still a work in progress. To this day we still live there. And I founded a theater and the only reason I knew it [was] there was because I went to the library and met some folks there. And New England, as you know, has meeting houses in order to have a parcel of land turned into a town at the origin of the state. You had to have a meetinghouse in the community.

**JL:** Yeah.

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**EW:** And you had to have a church. Often times they were combined into one. So, there is a meetinghouse in New Salem, it was run by a bunch of seniors and I offered to turn it into a theater. And we received money to turn it into a convention center. So we are the smallest convention center in the United States. It seats about 175 people and we promised to have Shriners and little cards. So that was my vehicle to do theater for social change and to bring artists from around the world to work in this small community and center to introduce people to different cultures.

**JL:** And do you have any family members in the area?

**EW:** Yes. Here in Worcester I have my in-laws, Hannah and Myron Laipson, and they live in Tatnuck Square.

**JL:** Cool...And what is your connection to Worcester?

**EW:** My connection is through my family, the Laipson family, but my connection is also through my work. I am the cultural director—cultural development officer officially for Worcester and also the executive director of the Worcester Cultural Coalition.

**JL:** And what challenges do you think the city still faces and what would you change about the city?

**EW:** Well I work in city hall [laughs] and I have been there since 2004. I had done other work prior to that the meeting house I have mentioned. And I worked with the state to work with various communities to use arts to bring communities together. So that was the incentive when I came to Worcester, in 2004, which was a very different city from what you are experiencing now, in that there was an attitude that was pervasive where many Worcester residents did not have a really good perception of the city itself, that it's a gateway city, so an old industrial city that has lost its industries and it's wealth. In that respect and behind the scenes it has a very rich arts community that really had not been convened to work together in a very specific kind of way. So the arts organizations, there's a handful of them, they had been knocking on the city's door to all have their own agendas. They went and organized amongst themselves and said to the city, "This is what we are interested in. We will pay to put a cultural development officer in city hall as long as it is not a separate arts office, but it's in development," so that when you are making decisions about education or how the streets look or how we market the city or how we engage college students, this person in the coalition—cultural coalition would be at the table. So we started working together, in that respect, that was in 1999, it was formed. I was brought in in 2004 and what has resulted from that was building collaborations between the colleges and the arts organizations. The arts organizations like the art museums, symphonies, but also small artist collectives, that and new immigrant groups. Like the South East Asian coalitions, Central West Americas, the Syrian community and Albanian community and bring them all together. So what

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are the biggest challenges here in Worcester... is to let people know of the rich amount of activity that is taking place and how arts can build community.

**JL:** Right.

**CK:** What changes have you seen in Worcester overtime?

**EW:** Well in my time since 2004 we are seeing so much more collaboration; I do not know if you have been downtown recently. They tore down this old mall that separated the two sides of the city, the Eastern and West side of the city, the train station which never had two or three trains running to Boston at very odd times, there are 21 trains a day and they are direct trains. They opened up the streets so you can walk from downtown Worcester straight over to the train station. I am seeing more college students getting engaged. We created something called the Woo Card, you might have known from when you first were freshman. Well, we have 12,000 students who use that on a regular basis to go to concerts and events and get prizes and stuff. So we are seeing a lot more students who are graduating, "hint, hint," [laughs] who are choosing to stay and live and work in Worcester, and there a lot of startups by people who have graduated. Some with master's, some just coming out of undergrad, and the city is really welcoming to young people and trying to create new jobs for them, and I see that as a real plus. Plus, I am really proud of Worcester. It is one of the most engaging and open cities for new immigrants, has one of the largest Syrian populations that are coming in compared to other cities in the country, so I feel very proud of that. It was also the first state to have same sex marriage and that was one of my fondest memories. It was my—I think it was my second year in Worcester and being right next to the City Clerk's office and the first day that same sex marriages could take place, there was a line maybe three blocks long and all the way down Main Street. And the City Clerk had put up stanchions, like when you walk down a red carpet, and he rolled out a red carpet and he wore a tuxedo and they had flowers all over. There were people, some in full marriage regalia and some just laid back and with their families, and that's one of the poignant memories I have of the city and it really made me think about the inclusiveness of Worcester.

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

**EW:** Well as my mother in-law would say—she was one of the first women and Jewish women to teach at Assumption College—so the doors for women have come a long way in being opened. There is something called the Worcester Club here in the city and my family who, on my husband's side of the family are Jewish were not allowed to be members there and women were not allowed to enter the building. And when they finally were, they had to go in the back entrance. So little signs like that have changed the landscape. When I was growing up there were still advertisements that said "Female wanted, Male wanted" in help wanted ads. So that has really changed and I think that the doors have really opened for women to pursue the careers that they deem fit.

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**CK:** So you said that you went to University of Massachusetts?

**EW:** I went to UMASS [University of Massachusetts] and then I left to join that theater company, much to my parents chagrin and I did not go back to school until I moved back to Massachusetts. I had been in Philly running a theater for eight years, and when I moved back to Massachusetts I enrolled at Smith College in the Ada Comstock Scholar program. A program for selected women who had been on career paths, and I went back and did a whole undergraduate program again in Theater for Social Change and Women's Studies which was a combined self-designed major and then I graduated. I had my son, running the meeting house, and I graduated Phi Beta Kappa Magna Cum Laude. I was pretty proud of myself.

**JL:** Wow.

**MA:** Yeah, you should be.

**CK:** That is amazing. What were the challenges in education?

**EW:** What part of education? Child? High school? College?

**CK:** I would say college.

**EW:** Well, the challenges were for me wanting to have an impact in the world and loving studies. I have always been an avid student and believe in lifelong learning so I still consider myself a student today in my learning. The challenges were really being clear on choices, on career pursuits, but also determining what was useful for me to develop as whole person in my education, in terms of my career, in terms of spirituality [small bang on table], in terms of creative development and trying to find ways to make those three components intertwine.

**CK:** Upon finishing your formal education what did you see as your options?

**EW:** Well I was already immersed in my career-

**CK:** [Laughs] Right.

**EW:** I was running a theater and was helping my husband with his photography business and considered myself an arts activist. So my path—I have always pretty clear on my path, perhaps being young, but being very focused on the choice I have made.

**CK:** At what age would you say that like you knew what your path was?

**EW:** When I was 17.

**CK:** 17.

**EW:** I started a street theater company in high school.

**JL:** Oh my gosh, so young. [Laughs]

**CK:** What supports networks and mentoring have been important to you?

**EW:** Well the arts community has been a vital part of my life and in the same way that sports can bring people together and community building. I find that in the arts. That is one of the reasons I am really drawn to it, for creative expression, and arts often times helps people open up and expose themselves to different ways of looking at the world. And often times artists can have very big egos but can also be very big hearted. It has been a very inclusive community. There have been a number of women's groups I have been a part of over my life. Some that are focused on very specific experiences or activity and other times more general. Family has been very important to me and here in Worcester, my work with the Cultural Coalition is a unique group, what started as 12 organizations is now 78 organizations, so that is a rich community for me.

**CK:** What was your first job?

**EW:** Paid job?

**EW:** My first paid job was at—well babysitting. For sure. And then there was this program called Rent-A-Kid, which would be illegal now. [Laughs]

**MA:** Oh man!

**EW:** But it was like for odd jobs , but it was called Rent-a Kid and I worked at a grocery store, but that did not last too long. And you know...

**CK:** Ok. So what do you do now?

**EW:** I consider myself an artist embedded in City Hall. And it is about infusing arts into everyday life in any way I can. So as the cultural director I support festivals, created the WOO card program, and I raise money to do arts education in the schools. I convene folks when a small organization like the Worcester Women's History Project has a technical need or is looking for advice or wants me to connect them, that is what I do. I raise money, I advocate for the creative community, not only here in Worcester but throughout the state. And I do a lot of talking and traveling. Talking about the role of arts and community building.

**CK:** Right. What has this work meant to you?

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**EW:** It is part of my heart and soul. It's not work it is living. And that is where it's not a negative it's a positive experience where the challenges of how to bring people together through art is something that I look at every day. And with my coalition and with the city we try to build partnerships around that to see what is best for the city.

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

**EW:** Growing up?

**CK:** Let's say when raising your son.

**EW:** We lived and worked together, so my husband is just as much a primary caregiver as I have been, and sharing household duties as well. I mean he does know certain things better than me like how to upload certain software [laughs] on the computer, or you know he's a very visual person and I am much more cerebral and participatory so I do not read maps well and so he needs to read the maps [laughs] and I will do the other things. But it was a shared responsibility in the household.

**MA:** Sure. That's good. That's good

**MA:** Alright so, you sound like a pretty busy person. you are involved in a lot of things. How have you been able to balance your priorities, responsibilities, and roles, as well as your interests in your life?

**EW:** Well I see it as a continuum, and the older I have gotten, the better balance I have been able to create in my life. And when I was younger, there could be times when I would be really stretched, and then I learned by being really stretched, I was not being as effective as I could be. So I call upon friends and mentors to be sounding boards for me, and me for them, to help us kind of gauge what our priorities are— what is my spiritual life, what is my work life, what is my family and creative life. And there will be different times in my life that various areas are more important than the others.

**MA:** That is kind of like situational thing. Do you see pros and cons in the path that you have chosen thus far?

**EW:** You mean “woulda, coulda, shoulda?”

**MA:** Right. [Laughs]

**EW:** I try not to do “woulda coulda shouldas” too much. Would I have been better off just going straight through and finishing a degree? Well then I would not have been exposed to various

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things that were important to me in my life. I think I have become more reflective as I have gotten older.

**MA:** How do you feel about the choices that you have made in your life? Do you have any regrets?

**EW:** I feel good about the choices I have made. They may not have been the best choices in the moment, but when I look at the continuum of my life I feel that's it has been very rich. And there are things perhaps I would like to do. Maybe I would have liked to have make more money, you know? To have a little bit easier of a life living, as my father said, "A photographer and a theater person, they have some challenges," in his southern voice [laughs], "You are both not going to make a lot of money." So could we have done better financially? I mean, I am in a secure position, I feel very grateful for that. I have had a very rich and creative life. But would I have liked to have perhaps more money to offer more things to my son and to other people? But Would I do it any differently? No. I feel that my wealth is more my creativity.

**MA:** Do you consider yourself politically active?

**EW:** Yes. I consider myself an arts activist.

**MA:** And have you been involved in volunteer community work outside of your formal job of art activism?

**EW:** Yes. Over my lifetime very much so. I volunteered on school boards, I have been on arts commissions, the local cultural counsels, done a lot of work in the political realm earlier in my life, and now I see it more about infusing my philosophy about politics and volunteerism in my everyday work.

**MA:** What would you consider your major accomplishments in the groups that you have volunteered with?

**EW:** In the groups that I have volunteered with?

**MA:** Or I mean it could be more like a community involvement type of piece as well.

**EW:** I think of myself as a creative catalyst. I have been fortunate to be able to work with many different types of groups. And I like to think that I can find a common language for people to be able to be comfortable to express their opinions with each other.

**MA:** And what are some of the specific \_\_\_\_?? programs that you worked with?

**EW:** As a volunteer? Or as ...???

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**MA:** Yes, a volunteer.

**EW:** The New Salem Arts Council. That is the state mandated program that every community in town has a fund to allocate out dollars for arts and culture, and creative engagement. I worked on the school council to help shape the programming for our public school systems. And I have worked with youth who were interested in arts in particular.

**MA:** What role has religion played in your life?

**EW:** I was raised as a Catholic, and lost my affinity for the church when I became an adolescent, when the role of women in the church really pointed out some inequities, and that was something that I could not really reconcile myself with. And I consider myself a very spiritual person, and have a spiritual practice, and still have affinity with many aspects of Christian and Catholic philosophy, like being of service to others, and loving others. But the formal religion is not a part of my life.

**MA:** Can you extrapolate on the practice of your spirituality?

**EW:** It is connecting with an inner sense of being and connection, not only with other humans, but the planet and the universe beyond— that there is an energy in all of us that embodies good and love, and to me that's the most powerful part of religion. I think most religions actually come back to that. But then there might be a construct around that. And my spiritual practice is about being centered, number one, and at one with myself, so that I can have a deeper connection with other people, and with those I gage with, and with the planet.

**MA:** Have health issues impacted your life of those in your family? [Laughs]

**EW:** Nothing dramatic. There have been acute situations, I broke my other ankle eight years ago, so now I am kind of centered. [Laughs]

**MA:** Made it even. [Laughs]

**EW:** No major health issues. My mother did suffer from Parkinson's [disease] in terms of my family, and that was very painful but a growing experience as well. And I am really fortunate to have six siblings who could also be there and be united around caring for parents until both my parents passed away.

**MA:** What are your experiences in accessing quality, affordable health care?

**EW:** Before there was MassHealth, and before I worked for the city, my husband and I were both self-employed. Health insurance was extremely expensive. So we had a very high

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deductible and health care was a real challenge for us. The one piece we made sure of was that my son always had good health care.

**MA:** And now, are you responsible for just your own health care? Or both you and your husband, and your son?

**EW:** My son is 28 [years old] now, so he is off on his own. [Laughs] He has his own healthcare policy and so Adam and I are on our own policy together. And we cannot get rid of Obamacare. [Laughs] Especially when you are just going out in the world, you need that option so you do not need to take a job just to get health care.

**MA:** Right. [Laughs]

**EW:** MassHealth, we were the first in the country. And even if Obamacare goes away, you will want to stay in Worcester or Massachusetts. [Laughs]

**MA:** How would you say you got through tough times, like what kind of thoughts keep you going?

**EW:** Friends keep me going quite a bit. Having a sense of community, and family, and going back into that spiritual base and that inner core. Does that mean it is always smooth sailing? No, no. I think part of living and learning and lifelong learning is being able to go in and expose raw feelings and grow from those feelings. And even those hardships you might go through so that you can be a stronger person, and perhaps have more foresight to the world around you, yeah.

**MA:** How do you define success in your life? And has that definition changed over time?

**EW:** Success does not preclude failure. Taking action on something that I firmly believe in, even if it does not go as successfully and its outcome is not what I anticipated. I would rather take the leap. So success is taking a leap when I feel strongly, have done my background search on what is important and what's not, and follow through. Success is following through and then having the insight to evaluate what worked and what did not, that's success to me.

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

**EW:** Take a leap. [Laughs] Take the leap, follow your heart, and educate yourself so that when you do leap you can feel confident and strong in it.

**MA:** Now that we are working to tell a fuller story of the history of women than what has been recorded in the past, what should we be sure to include?

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**EW:** For me? Or do you mean in the work in your interviews that you are doing in general?

**MA:** I think kind of in regard to the project overall, so what should we be mindful of contributing to the—

**EW:** Listening to different voices and generations. That perhaps interviews are often done, and this may be an assumption on my part that is not correct, that women of a certain age who have gone down a trajectory are interviewed and I think it is just as important to be starting to interview women your age. So that you look at the continuum of the way we perceive the world, because I perceived the world very differently when I was 21 [years old] than when I am almost 60 [years old] next year, wow.

**EW:** So listen to multiple voices.

**MA:** Absolutely. And is there anyone else that you suggest we talk with?

**EW:** Yes, two people. Gloria Hall. Gloria is very involved in arts— inclusive. She is also very engaged in the African American community and has a great sense of history and of Worcester.

**MA:** You mentioned two [people]?

**EW:** Actually I have three [people]. [Laughs]

**EW:** Ellen Dunlap. She is the president of the American Antiquarian Society, not aquarium, antiquarian. And it is just down the road from you. I do not know if you are interested in history. It is the largest repository for every single piece of print from the inception of the country, to the end of the Civil War. So it is everything from broadsides of music, to the original Declaration of Independence, and they have tours there. It is incredible, you have to go visit there sometime. She [Ellen Dunlap] has such a wealth of knowledge and a love of Worcester. Anh Vu Sawyer, is the director of the Southeast Asian Coalition. Her name is A-N-H V-U, Sawyer. She is Vietnamese—

**JL:** I actually met with her last year.

**EW:** Oh, did you?

**JL:** Yeah, for a project too.

**EW:** Isn't she remarkable?

**JL:** Yeah she is great. She actually reminds me of my mom.

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**EW:** Really? [Laughs]

**EW:** So Anh Vu [Sawyer] is the director of the Southeast Asian Coalition. I can give you her contacts too if you do go down the road. And she is a poet, and she was one of the last Vietnamese babies airlifted out of Vietnam—

**JL:** Oh my gosh.

**EW:** —at the end of the war.

**MA:** That is incredible.

**EW:** And she does incredible work, not only with the Southeast Asian Community, but with new immigrant populations here in Worcester [Massachusetts]. And she is married to a dynamite clothing designer. [Laughs] He makes outrageous outfits. [Laughs] And if you ever want really cool clothes, she now and her husband have trained the South Vietnamese women who have a pension for fine hand work. So they make gorgeous clothes and they sell them all at way too low prices. But you can check them out if you ever go there.

**MA:** And right before we conclude, are there any additional comments that you would like to share with us?

**EW:** I think Worcester's community of women is very strong and I think there are so many strong, engaged women who are really the leaders in the city. And many times we only get the broad picture, but it is the workers behind the scenes that are weaving the fabric really of city making that come from women in the community, and I think that's a really rich story to tell. That is why I really value that you are doing this.

**MA:** Well thank you for coming.

**JL:** Thank you so much.

**CK:** Thank you.

**EW:** My pleasure.

**MA:** It was awesome to hear your story.