

Interviewee, Ann R. Witkes
Interviewer, Hanna Solska
Date, July 11, 2011
Place, Eisenberg Assisted Living, Worcester
Transcriber, Hanna Solska, Muriel Campbell



Abstract: Ann R. Witkes was born in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1914 and attended Ash St. Elementary School and Commerce High School in Worcester. Ann spent all her life in Worcester, except for the last 20 years in Florida. She returned to Worcester as a widow, to the Eisenberg Assisted Living Residence a few years ago, to be close to her family. Ann worked as a hairdresser until she retired. She began at her father's barber shop in Worcester. In this interview, Ann talks about her upbringing and the major influence of a very strong-willed grandmother, who emigrated with her family from Russia to the USA. She also discusses the diversity of her neighborhood and a peaceful co-existence of different nationalities and very inclusive upbringing in her family. Ann emphasizes the importance of being involved in the community and her volunteer involvement in many Jewish-connected organizations in the city. She also underlines her love for poetry and states that to this day she writes in rhymes. She is very proud that she was one of the first women in Worcester to receive a driving license and a charge account independently of her husband.

[My name is Hanna Solska and I'm here with my daughter-in-law's grandmother, Ann Witkes. It is July 11, 2011 and I already explained in our previous conversation that we are completing a citywide oral history project about the lives of Worcester women. Based on the goals of the 1850 National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on the areas of women's health, education, work and community involvement. In this interview I would like to focus on interviewee experience growing up and working in Worcester. I thank Ann for helping us with this project.]

HS: Do you mind if I will be recording our conversation?

AW: No, no, not at all. It's pleasure.

HS: Thank you very much. We'll start this from the beginning.

AW: I did this for the kids for-they were training for nurses-I did this for them too and I did it for some other kids training for something...

HS: I know that your grand granddaughter also wrote a school report on your life.

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AW: Yes, yes, Rachel, ya, Rachel.....My son, my baby, said to me, “Ma-see, I write poetry, and I wrote my grandmother’s life -- write your own obituary, no, not obituary, your, your biography,” and I started and I then I get tired and I say “it’s too boring.”

HS: No, it’s not boring. We’ll love to read it. It’s very interesting your life, for sure.

AW: Well, I started a little bit from the day I was born.

HS: OK, so let’s start from the day you were born.

AW: (The day I was born...) My mother said, “They signed the Armistice, you know, November 14, 1914. No, November 11, 1911, and then, three days later, there was trouble,” -- me. [Laughs]

HS: I see.

AW: She always used to say, “And then three days later there came trouble.” I must have been a little devil, I don’t know.

HS: You don’t remember that, right?

AW: No, I, no I’ve got pretty good memory of my childhood. I was always--I love everything, very interested in everything, always was. If somebody gets on the elevator and I see something strange, I say “Do you mind if I ask you a question?” “No” I say, “What is that?” and they tell me. If they say, “Well, it is none of your business” - I never have anybody say to me, “None of your business” -- I’m just curious. They say, “Why do you want to know?” I say, “Because I love to know things.” I like life; I like to know why. Why I got a plant? Because Hanna decide to give me a plant. [laughs]

HS: I know you like plants, yes, you said so.

AW: My mother had a green thumb and my youngest son, he has the same thing, just like my mother. He can take a dead plant, bring it to life and take buds out and make other ones. Now, he did it. He has never thrown out a plant. You should see his house -- loaded. I asked, “Why so many, why do you buy so many plants?” “I don’t buy them; I make them from the other ones.”

HS: Great, it’s a talent.

AW: It’s a knack. Yes and my mother had it too. I don’t know about my grandmother, but my mother. My grandmother never had time for things like that, those days.

HS: So you were born in Worcester, right?

AW: I was born in ... I don't know what hospital, that I wouldn't know, but I was born in Worcester, Massachusetts and I lived here when I got married. And the only time I moved, was when my son bought a house in Florida and he showed us apartments and he said, "Ma, you should move in winter," blah, blah, blah. And I told this story. My husband--he did very well in the stock market, but that's another story--and my son, and he said, "Dad, you should get an apartment now, that they are very reasonable." And then he turned to me and said, "If we buy--my husband never believed in a charge, you want something, you pay for it, and he turned around and said to me, "If we buy the place, 'cause you know we're going to pay down, then we won't be able to live like we're used to, you know." And as much as he used to say to me and I go to open my mouth and my son said to me, "Ma, dad, (...???), if you like the place, buy it, if you don't, I'll buy it for you." So that's how we bought the place. He [husband] was afraid if we take out some money--he never charged anything in his whole life. He always said, "If you can't afford it, you don't need it; you wait until you can accumulate the money." That's how we lived, not his wife, not his wife [laughs]. I told you. I went to a place and I made them give me [credit] in my own name. In those days, the woman didn't have a charge account in their name. But I got it, I got it. They say, "Well, it's a woman --give me your husband's name," and I said, "No I'm not going to give you my husband's name. The business is mine; the business hairdressing is not my husband's, it's mine. I'm the boss so why I can't have it?" Well, they think about it and I got it. And when I tell my friends, "I got a charge account," they asked, "How did you do it?" And I said "I just tell them-- it's not my husband's, it's mine. I work, I built it, and why can't I have a charge account?" My husband said, "You have a charge account?!!" [exclaims] And I said, "Big deal, I said, I'll pay for it from my own money."

HS: You need it for business, right?

AW: Yeah, right, for the little things, you know, you subscribe to magazines, like every other business - there always something comes up. I bought a furniture, the first furniture, that's when I went to Mary's in (...???) Park and I bought a whole bedroom set -- and what else did I buy -- a living room set. When I used to sit there and say, "I bought it, I bought it." Like my husband used to say, "What are you looking at?" I used to say, "I bought that and I'm paying for it." I always was very independent and that's why my mother said "and then came trouble."

HS: I see.

AW: I always had, I had a mind of my own. Maybe, sometimes, if I'm wrong, I apologize, but if I feel I want to say something, I'm going to say it. I don't mean to hurt anybody but if that's the truth, that's the truth, you can't hurt anybody if it's the truth. If they don't like it, that's too bad, but its already the truth. What's if it doesn't make any difference? But that's the way I lived all my life. I don't believe in secret stuff. Well, some things you have to keep your mouth shut but

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that's a different story, but most of the time, I always was open with everybody. Like I said it, I tell it like it is; you don't like it, tough (...??). [laughs] My husband said "you swear" and I said that's not a swear; he was little prude but I loved him.

HS: I know you loved him. That's a beautiful picture of you two.

AW: Yeah, that was our fiftieth anniversary picture. From there we went to Israel, and then we went across cross country to visit my relatives in Arizona. That was a travel and I'm not a good traveler. I hate sleeping in somebody else's bed and stuff like that but we had...

HS: Did you go by car?

AW: My husband drove all across this country. He loved to drive. That's when I decided to learn to drive. Too many women those days didn't drive either, but I said I'm going to get a license. My husband said, "Ha-ha" and I said, "Why ha-ha?" He says, "You know you have to learn." I said, "Big deal, so you learn, you go to school you learn, so you learn," and I did it.

HS: What year was that?

AW: Who remembers when I got my first license? I can't remember how many years but suffice it to say that I was young enough to get it and I had it for years and years. And you know in Florida, they'd renew it for six years and the last time after a certain age. The last time, I can remember, that I went to renew the license I was in my eighties now, eighties. And I said to my son, "I'm never going to get it" - 80 years old- they are not going to renew for six years. So I go and I said to my friends, "Well, here's where I'm going to be sorry." I went, and I went, and I go and you know -did you do this, blah blah, you are citizen, you know, all that stuff, okay, come to this and they say go sit down over there. And I sit down and I wait, I wait. She calls me, she says, "Stand over there," ask me crazy questions, stand over there. I stand over that screen. I said, "What's that?" She says "Take your picture." Okay, take my picture. Then she say "Ok, go sit down there, I'll call you." I sit down, I sit down, I wait, I get called and I say to myself, "Here comes the end, they're not going to give it to me." I get up, she signs something, tell me to sign something and she hand me. I say, "What's that?" She say, "That's your license." I say "My license???" I thanked the lady. I say, I didn't walk out, I flew out. I went to my car and I looked, six years! They're crazy! [Laughs] Six years! My license runs to - I still have another year on my license [laughs] to 2012! I still have another year on my license! When I come, my friends say, "Well, did you get your license?"

[Knock on the door; a housekeeper enters room to pick up magazines. Tape recorder stopped.]

Ann talks with housekeeper, then when she leaves, about housekeepers in the Assisted Living Residence]

HS: Can we go back to your childhood a little, to your childhood in Worcester, your early years in Worcester?

AW: (My early years, from..) Give me an approximate time.

HS: Tell me a little about your parents first.

AW: My parents, my parents. My mother was born in Russia and my grandmother came with her, two brothers from Russia, before she was married, wait a minute, she come from Russia. I'm trying to think now. No, she was married and she had children. She came from Russia with a few children, that's a whole another story. She wanted my grandfather to go, her husband, and he said to her, "You're crazy, you want to move to America?" She said, "You don't want to go, I'll go myself." That's where I get that, that's from her. She said, "You don't want to go, I'll go myself." She take the three kids and she was pregnant at the time with another. She come to the ship and they looked and they say, she said "Yes, I'm expecting." They said "We don't have facilities for pregnant women, you go back. When the baby's born, then you come back." She wait till the baby's born, she come back. By this time, but by this time, he [her husband] decided he'd better go, she's going to go without him! So they come together and then the children. She had couple children there, but then my mother was born in America already. She told me stories that I used to sit, this like a little kid, listen to the stories she told me. She lived through pogroms and not the, not the holocaust, she was here, that was in Russia, the pogroms, and all that. She told me stories about [how] they hide in the lofts and they come with pitchforks and if you scream, goodbye Charlie. She told me all these stories and I loved it, I used to eat it up, sit and listen. And that's why I wrote her whole life story. Because I remember everything she told me. Some things I don't remember but that I can't forget. It's like, it's like reading the book myself. Because there she was- and she would tell me anything. If I didn't understand she would explain to me. She was before her time too. I tell you this story she learned when she was a child. The mother died pregnant and there were several children and other children and the husband, "scared-cat," don't know what to do with the kids, take off, and never see him again. An aunt took all the children; she had lot of children of her own. She couldn't take care of everybody so she give to one family take care of one [child]. And my grandmother, she give to a tailor and his wife. They never have children and they love to have a little girl. And he was very religious -I'll tell you this story again because I have to repeat it- every night he would say the prayers. He would sit down here, and there's the table, and she would sit on the other side, and he would start to (_______???), you know what I mean, and she would just sit and listen and listen. She could repeat without the book, without reading, every word he said. How, I never to this day

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could understand how she learned. So when she come to America, and all that stuff, when she's in the synagogue on Saturday she used [to go]. We lived, I told you, she lived downstairs, we lived upstairs. "Sabbath" she says, "you'd better go to synagogue" and she would take me. You know the city at all?

HS: Yes, I do

AW: We live on Gold Street and we cross Green Street and we go on Harrison Street up the hill. Halfway up was the synagogue. And I go with her and this was Yom Kippur and I was pregnant. I go with her and she standing and (____??). She's holding the Tanakh and the lady say to her, Missus, [reading Tanakh upside-down], she said don't worry, don't worry [because she memorized it this way]. All of a sudden I faint, dead away, and the ladies were all fanning me, fanning me and somebody put water. And my grandma said to me, "You didn't eat?" I said, "Today is Yom Kippur." She said, "A Kippur? That's someone who's pregnant does not have to eat, in fact it's a sin, you feeding not yourself, you are feeding that child, you have to eat!" And from that day if I see anybody, I say to them you don't fast, my grandma said to me, you kill that child, never mind you. And from that day, I learned a lot from her. She was a brilliant woman. I could tell you stories about her that would curl your hair up. When they came to America, her husband, my grandfather, was a barber, and they had a little tenement. Some friends, who come before them, find them a little place with a store underneath with a tenement on the top and that was just for them. He was a barber and she used to watch. And anything she see she could learn, she used to watch him. Anyway I tell you this story that one night, the night my father and my mother's wedding, the night my mother and my father would get married, there was a December. It was miserable freezing weather and the grandfather came down [to check if] the pipe freeze. See, the barber shop was underneath, and he come down with a torch or something, and he want to make the.. so it would melt, you know. It explode, the whole thing - that place- was, you want to say - a pogrom. I could tell you, he was so burned from head to foot, so bad, how he lived as long as he did after that, he just suffered his life away. Anyway, when he died, what do you think she did? She sat down and take the barber shop. And the men used to come, it was a barber shop, come to watch the lady barber, she would shave. I said, "How you did it?" She says "I watch!" Just like she learned, she watched, she watched, she learned from just watching, this is how she was. How can you learn just watching? But, I guess you can, and that's how she lived her life. Anything she would see, if it was interesting enough for her, she would make sure she watched how everything is and would learn. She come to America to get -- what do you get it here? When you get to America, you want to become a citizen, yeah, she'd recite the preamble to the Constitution by heart. They'd give her the book to read and she'd hold the book [upside-down] and she would pray. And they would say, "You don't read it," and she would say, "Eh, I read, the whole thing, all by heart." Whatever she'd see -I don't know in her brain, it just like

somebody writing in her brain, that's how smart she was. I take after her in some things but I don't have that spunk that she had. Well, maybe I get a little of that. I mean, if she decided it was right and it was good, then you do it. That's me. If I think I'm not going to hurt anybody and it's good to me and it's not bad for somebody else, then I do it! [laughs] She was way before her time, way before her time.

HS: How was your mother? Was she the same?

AW: My mother was very obedient little girl, and that's the picture in that, in the corner [points to the corner shelf]. And my mother, the corner one in the left, yes, that's her and her sister. Two people, same house, same sisters, two different people. Anything my mother liked, my aunt didn't like. Anything my mother wanted to do, the other one would say, "I can do better." (Never in my life, through it, my aunt...) I even talked to her daughter and we talked and I say, "How the two people can be so different?" She said, "That's the way they were." Exact opposite. If my mother liked the fancy hat, the other one liked the plain one. I never see, hear of it. I guess, maybe you'll see it today, too, but I never notice it. It almost like, like if you do that, that's not for me. (And they were not enemies but never, never- she never liked to go to the funerals). This cousin of mine, her daughter-in-law mother died and the daughter must said to her, "You don't have to go to the funeral, I know you don't like funerals," and this and that, "You don't have to go, I won't feel bad," and she didn't go. I would go, even if I.....How you do not go to a funeral? That's the difference. And I talk to my mother, "I see one side and she sees the other." And she [Ann's cousin] said, "Why do I have to do it? If it's going to bother me, why should I do it?" I said, "There's a lot of things in life you just cannot, just not do it, because it's going to bother you? That's not the way to live." She said, "I'm here." She is 11 years younger than I am. So I said, "There goes your mother." (laughs) She says the same thing to me.

Ah, I can go back, Hanna, and tell you . I don't know what else you want to know?

HS: So, when you, they came to Worcester, first you lived on Gold Street, right?

AW: Yes, yes. We bought, I think, my grandmother's -- one of the sons bought the house. And he gave over to my grandmother, because he got married, move away, all that. So that was her house. And the.., as I said, in the city, there is the street, Gold Street, [showing map on her hand] and that's Ash Street, and that... And I could see the school house [from the window]. I can hear bell ringing. I never was late for school [laughs], I can tell you that. But, yes, and we lived there and that's where I got married. And I told you the story when I got married; we eloped, I tell you that. And it was the most miserable night I never forget. My father-in-law: God rest his soul, in his dinky hat, his dinky car, the windshield wipers didn't work, and this didn't work. Have we've driving to Boston yet? And later at night, because we made arrangements with the Rabbi, didn't tell my parents.... It was New Year's Eve. We said we are going to a party,

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because I had relative there. And I was going to stay overnight. Very logical. So my mother said, (____???) Do you know what that means? There we go. Till we get there, I'll tell you, the Rabbi who had to sign the paper, not going to stay there forever. It suppose to be at midnight, it is now two o'clock in the morning. And I said to him [relative], "We came all the way, in the storm, I said, what we are going to do now?" [In a crying voice]. He says, "We'll see what he can do." He got hold of Rabbi, he told him the sad story and he come back, signed the papers, everything, we got married. But, when I come back I said to my grandma... My grandma, I could tell anything; my mother I would be afraid to tell. My grandmother -- I could tell anything, nothing scared her. And I said to her, "Bobby, how do I tell my mother?" And she said, "You just open your mouth and you just tell her." I says, "She's going to kill me." She says, "She's not going to kill you, she is not going to kill you." Till I tell my mother, I think I died six deaths till I tell. "Ma, I have something to tell you. Ahm, ahm, Ma, you know, I'm married." She said, "What ????" (screams). I'm married. "Where? Where, when, what, how???" And she gave me that evil eye, like, like I'm poison, and then, my mother made me a nice little party. And I showed you that little porcelain wedding figure, that's how old it is, 1920, no, 1935 I think it is. And you know how many times I broke that? I never found one piece. And then she made me a beautiful party, even though she was mad at me. She asked "Why did you do ...?" I said "Well, I don't know, we did it. It's done, can't undo it now." (laughs) And he was the love of my life. Let me tell you how I met him. At the bakery, remember I told you? So you know that part.

HS: Tell me one more time.

AW: Well, this is Harrison Street up here (shows a map on a table), then Providence Street like this, and at that corner, was the bakery. And the bakery had the place for rent. We had the beauty shop and the barber shop. I was set up with my father. And in the back, the same corridor back from there and the bakery. That's how I met my husband. If, when I go out, he used to run to the bathroom all the time because he wanted to see me. (laughs)

HS: I see (laughs)

AW: I could hear tinkle (??) every day and I say, "Oh, the bathroom is busy." They didn't have separate bathrooms in those days. One bathroom, if we were lucky. And that's where I meet him, you know.

HS: So, he was a baker?

AW: He was a baker. He was in the service. He was in the Merchant Marines. And you know, he told me this story, "What do you think," he says, "I get a job in the Merchant Marines?" I said, I don't know, in the bakery?" He said, "No, in the kitchen." I say," What do you do in the

kitchen, bake?” “No”, he says, “I peel potatoes.” I say “What?? (screams). He says, “I am a baker and they gave me potatoes.” He never ate potatoes when he got home. If I want to serve potatoes, forget it.

HS: He couldn't look at them anymore.

AW: Can you imagine, go from the baker to give him a job peeling potatoes. And I mean, peeling potatoes. (laughs) He told me sad stories, when he was in the service.

HS: That was after he came back from the service?

AW: He came back. Let me tell you, he came back... He run away, and I was 203 lbs, I was little chubby. I didn't look as fat, but I was built husky-like. In fact, I have a picture of me that you can see my bust, I had a big bust and the.. and the.. whatever. I started to diet, I didn't want to ask my mother for too many things. I never was, I never was.... If we could not afford it, we didn't have it, I manage. Like my mother said, “You manage, you haven't got it, you do what you can without it,” you know. And so I never bother too much my mother wanting to give me money. I said, “Ma, you need money for yourself,” but anyway. So, we, we, we manage. Meanwhile, I didn't want to take from her. So I lost a little bit of weight, little bit. It was good. That's fine. It so happens that was for good. I went down to 137 lbs from 203.

HS: That's excellent.

AW: In a couple of years that he was gone.... He was gone a couple of years. Now, he comes home and he says he is going to meet me at the train. You know, Gold Street at Green Street had the station, if you remember; I go over the bridge to the station to meet him. I look around, I don't see him. I come back to the house. I miss him, I say. Maybe I had the wrong time, maybe that.. Pretty soon I hear knock on the door. “Come in, come in, come in.” Open the door, he says “Right house, wrong wife.” He didn't recognize me. I lost 74 lbs. He says, “What are you doing? Starving yourself?” “No, no, I say, I was on a diet” (laughs) and I stay that way, few pounds up or down, for years until I got dehydrated. And how I got dehydrated, it was my stupidity. But, that's another story, too. So, now we go from where?

HS: So now, we'll go still back, a little back to talk about your schooling. You could see your school from your windows.

AW: Yes, yes, that school that was Ash Street School. And I cannot remember exactly which grade. I think it maybe it was in the third grade or so. I tell you this teacher, she must love poetry. She used to read a story, Longfellow, and I would sit like this [shows wide open eyes]. I would eat it up. To me it was like, di, di, di di di [sings] It seems like, like..

HS: Like music.

AW: That's when I started to write poetry. And my friend said to me, "People going to think you are crazy." I said, "I don't care" (laughs). I said...and then I stopped and my mother said, " You want to write - you write." And she never let me spend 10 cents for postcards. Greeting cards used to be 10 cents, in those days. And I would buy a card and my mother said, "I told you, I don't want you to spend 10 cents- I was getting 50 cents allowance - I don't want you spend your money for that." She said, "Save it for something else." So, I buy a card and I write a poem on the back of it, anyway. And ever since then, it's just, I don't know, I think of something I can say in a rhyme, it's just, it's just like things came to my grandmother. She had a memory, mine is in poetry. I know the story in my head and I can sort of sing the song aloud. It just became a habit, it just became a habit. And I write all the time. I don't think I, I, in these letters I never sent anything that wasn't poetic. It's been a habit, as I said, I have stuff there that I've written and all that, and I love it, I enjoy it. And I have this different friend who I have write, write to, and that's the story of my life. And, what else did we miss?

HS: Tell me a little about your neighborhood you grew up in?

AW: Oh, the neighborhood. We were, ah, what would you call it, we were a mish-mash, really mish-mash. There was Italian, and there was Greek, there was Jewish, there was Polish, League of Nations. Everybody. We had -- nobody knew from religion. And then, we had a little shul [synagogue in Yiddish], I told you, on the corner. You see, we lived here, Ash Street was here, no ??? Street here, Ash Street was there and on that corner, there was a shul. That was first shul, and later there we added another shul, on Providence Street, that was really different, no- Harrison Street I mean. But that's the shul from the beginning and we.. . Getting back to we are talking about? Why am I talking about shul?

HS: We were talking about neighborhood.

AW: Yes, but nobody had any churches. I don't even remember where the churches were. But I know there were churches they would go. The Christians are very, very religious. (_____???) are very religious, they believe in their faith like we do. I don't know, but I believe in faith I was growing up with. This is the way I was brought up, this is what I know. I know there are different languages, different nationalities, every man for himself. You do what's best for you. And I don't begrudge anyone there, and don't belittle anybody. Like some of my friends used to say, "Ho, ho, ho, look over there, look." I don't think it's nice. You know, I said, just because they do that this way, that's the way they do it, what's the difference? You can't laugh at somebody for being that way. That's the way I saw because my grandmother was brought that way. You see, I got, I got – my mother was not like my grandmother. Funny thing is, she adore

my grandmother, no question, but, but there was no anything she wouldn't do for her. But she didn't have that attachment like I had to her. It was almost like I saw my angel there. My grandma could tell me to chop my hand off and I think I'd chop it off. That's how I felt towards her. She gave me, she buy me things. If I wanted to do something, and the kids said...she said, "Never mind that, if you want to do it, you do it." I say, "What if it doesn't work out?" "So, it doesn't work out. You'll try something else. Not the end of the world. You do a little bit, and if it's not good, try something else." And that's the way she lived. And that's the way – that's how I am today. Like they say, "Wow" What do you do if you can't raise your hand over there? I can't lift my hand above my shoulder. I say, "So?" I find other ways. I find it. They say, "How do you cut your hair?" I say, Very easy; like this [demonstrates, laughs]. I mean, you find the way and if can't find the way, you ask somebody, "Would you please do this?" You get a mouth? And that's the way I live and that's what I believe in and that's all from her. Because my mother, God bless her soul, was – and she took a lot after my grandmother, but wasn't like my grandmother. It's hard to describe the difference. She was like her, yet – not like her, if you know what I mean. She didn't see anyone 100 percent, she would find some faults, but that was her mother and that's the way she lived. And that's the way I felt. If my mother thought something wasn't right, so I obeyed her. You don't go against anybody just because they don't believe in what you believe, you know. You live; you keep your mouth shut, do what you want to, but still live the way you suppose to. And that's how I lived, that's how I brought my kids up, the same way. I said, ah, when they find fault with somebody and they come back and say, "Oh, they did this and that", I say, "You'll going to find a lot of people, even the people who hate you, you will going to find people who love you, I said, you just have to go with a flow, you just make up your mind, if you don't like somebody you don't have to do duels with them. Whatever you have to, you have to, and that's it. You don't have to love them, you just pay attention and do what you have to. And that's the way I lived; that's how I still live. They laugh at me when I say that I can do that. I was down in the nurses room, and I said - she was talking about illnesses and I said, don't go through my illnesses, if there's anything- I've had it. I've had it! I say, when I go to a new doctor, they give you a paper to fill out your sicknesses and give you two-sided. I say, "Not enough room" They say, "Write on a back." So, I write on a back. And they say surprised, "You have all that??" Yes, I say (laughs). And I am still here.

HS: Looks like your grandmother was very open-minded.

AW: Oh, she was a woman before her time. She was a woman before her time. And you know, my mother, in a sense, took some of her -- what do you call?. But my mother was a little bit too modern. Like you know, like my mother became healthy. (She believed in – there used to be Bernard MacFadden, I don't know if you ever heard the name, he was a ...???) I'm going way, way, way back. We lived, as I say on Gold Street. Off of Main Street was a little street, Pearl

Street or Pleasant Street, I don't remember – one of the streets. They opened a little store that was called "The Health Store" and, my mother was the first customer and I think the biggest customer. She bought everything on site and then began with me. "I don't like that." "It's good for you." "Ma, I hate that." "It's good for you." "Ma, I don't like it." "It's good for you." And I learned to eat a lot of stuff I didn't like. Believe me, I didn't like.

HS: Well, good for you.

AW: And she said to me, "It's good for you." And sometimes I would go over here and go Ugh! I threw it up. I didn't like it, I didn't know why. I think because it was good for you, almost like my saying no, the heck with it.

HS: Right.

AW: No, but ah – I went through all the child sicknesses and everything. You name it and I had it. My mother had a friend and she'd say.... She'd be talking on the telephone and I hear her say, "Don't tell me, your daughter had that, don't tell me, don't tell me, my daughter will get it." I had all the kids' sicknesses. Whatever, nothing passed me and still, here I am.

HS: Right.

AW: And there are friends of mine who never went through half of the things I did, and are long since gone. So how do you account for that?

HS: Maybe it made you immune.

AW: I don't know about immune but I think.. I keep saying, "Lord you're testing me. Enough is enough." [Laughs] Enough is too much. [Laughs] I lived a pretty good life. I had my ups and downs but everybody does. You wouldn't be human if you didn't have your ups and downs. You just learn a bad day is - doggone, another day will be a better day. That's the way it feels. Now we're up to date, what else?

HS: I wanted to ask you – you said a very interesting thing about your neighborhood. That there were people from all kinds [of background]. So, Worcester wasn't divided like Polish neighborhood, the Irish....

AW: No, no.

HS: Everybody lived together.

AW: We lived - I can remember the family across the street from us was Jewish, the one on the left was Portuguese, I think. And then there was -- in fact I had a friend whose name was Ann, and she was colored. We used to be three Anns. I was Jewish, she was colored, and I forgot what the other one was already. And we'd go to high school, the three of us, the three Anns. I always seemed to run into Anns. And we were the best of friends. Religion didn't come into it. Well, because my grandmother wasn't a bigot. So, my mother grew up the same way and I was the same way. We are all people. We're human beings. What's inside you, is there. You aren't going to change you. And you learn to live with what you've got. And, that's the way I feel even today, even though I say -- Lord, stop testing me. [Laughs]

HS: So, in high school you had diversity? Right?

AW: Oh yes, yes. In high school I used to write. I worked on our paper for the..., we had a paper, I forgot the name of it - -the paper, and I used to write poetry for the paper and I did bookkeeping for the paper because that was another -- poetry and money I learned very well. Well, I learned from my husband. But you know, that was imbedded in me and my grandmother, way before my husband. He had the right idea. He said, "If you can't afford it, you save up for it, you get it. If you want it bad enough, you get it. But, you have to be patient too, and get it." I never had that much patience. I used to say "hurry up."

HS: [Laughs]

AW: When I wanted something, if it was possible in the least way, I'd manage and I did and I did get mostly the way I wanted. A couple of things didn't work out, I'm still alive. I managed. It's not the end of the world. When I see how many people have less than I have, I was lucky. I lost -- I had five miscarriages that I lost. That must have had to be the girls, I always said that. Must be the girls -- doctor used to say "you're a good receiver, you're a lousy carrier." [Laughs]

HS: [Laughs]

AW: I had five. I always said those had to be the girls.

HS: And you had three boys.

AW: Yes, I love them all. There's no question about it.

HS: Yes, I know.

AW: But, that's why -- I love all kinds. Boys, girls, I love when I go [to visit them]. Last year when they had my birthday party in New Jersey, this year they are going to make it here.

HS: Okay

AW: And when they have it in November, you've got to be a guest.

HS: Yes, thank you.

AW: Definitely. And, this is, I look forward to it, you know. I like life. Live and let live. That's what my mother always said. Live and let live, do what you can, and what you can't you try, if it's possible, if it's anyway at all, if you can't, you can't, you failed. Try again. Now, where are we now?

HS: If you are tired, we can stop anytime.

AW: No, my mouth is the first thing that never gets tired. [Laughs]

HS: [Laughs] Okay, thank you.

HS: So, you went to high school. Do you remember the name of high school?

AW: Commerce High. I went to Commerce.

HS: Commerce.

AW: Yeah, it was Commerce. One was... Commerce was business and the other was... what do you call it? But I chose business because my family said business is more important than - you know- the luxury you would get later.

HS: Ahem.

AW: Yeah, I went to Commerce High.

HS: And, then you went to the hair, beauty school?

AW: Marsallus (_____sp??) (There was a teacher there-Marsallus- I went to beauty school).

HS: In Worcester too?

AW: Yes, oh yes. It was on Main Street. She had a little place on Main Street. One of the apartments, a little place up there. I remember. It's like I'm standing there now, on Main Street and, McGinnis I can't remember the name, different stores and there was a place there that she had an office, and I learned there. And then, in order to get your license, you had to have a residency [internship] somewhere to get your ... yes. And so there was a place that they sent me that I worked there for nothing, nothing. It didn't seem not too long, I don't know exactly how

long, what the residency went and that's when my father [made a separate space in his barber shop]. I started up when I was near the bakery; that's when I had the first [hairdresser station]. And then,

HS: It was your first job, right?

AW: That was the first. Then we moved to a corner. My father had a bigger place so I could have the beauty shop. So there I had two booths. My father had one side the Barber Shop divided and I had the beauty shop and I had two booths. I had a girl who lived in my neighborhood, who was a hairdresser, Marianne Savonne (sp??). I still remember her name. And, that's from there..., then marriage, moved here, moved there, we moved around quite a bit.

HS: But always in Worcester, right?

AW: Always, yes, yes. We never lived anywhere else but Worcester, until Florida, yeah. Well in -- no before that -- my middle son got married and he had a house and we had like a mother-in-law apartment. And they would go away [to Florida], and that's when they talked us into going to Florida. And I loved there, my husband loved it. He love to play pool, stuff like that, he loved it there. He had a moped. Remember what a moped was like?

HS: Yes

AW: He used to drive that from work when he started the bakery, after he retired. He worked in another place, I forgot the name of the place, was that he worked there. And he used to -- we lived in Harley Drive up in Greendale for a while- and that's when we moved in with my son for..) We were going to talk about moving to Florida. And they were going to raise the rent, I don't know what it was, so then I lived with them for a little while in... it's with a "w", not Webster, near Worcester, a little town. We lived with them for a little while and that's when he was talking about he had a place in Florida and then we had that, and we loved it when we were in Florida until my husband died. We would come back, you see, hot summers, we'd come back because it's too hot there. So, it was nice. We had that place and we had this place, until I lost my husband. And I still lived in Florida. I had made many friends and life goes on. And that's when my kids said [to come back permanently] [Cough] And I did a lot of volunteer work. I.....Jewish War Veterans and stuff that I told you. I had books of it. And, I just did a lot of things and that's when you talk about volunteer work, I worked, you name it, if they needed help I volunteered.

HS: Ahem.

AW: Used to be called the Jewish home. Now it's a healthcare center. I did volunteer work there, I did volunteer work with the veterans, I did volunteer work wherever. Especially when the Jewish community places shut. I did everybody, when anybody asked for help, I did. And so, when my husband died, I was still living in Florida, and my son said to me "Ma, what are you going to do now"? I used to drive the car, I used to take my neighbors shopping, I still – that to me, that's still volunteer work, you know.

HS: Right, of course helping others.

AW: Yeah. We helped. But after my husband died, I had a couple of friends on my floor. This one lost his wife, this one lost this, and I said to them you know now the widow, the widower, I said "You know, just in case of something, we should have, I called it a buddy system." I said, "We should have each other's keys and just in case of something, in an emergency, in case you needed help." This one was without a husband, this one was without a wife; and it was the best thing in the world I did. I always had these great ideas about stuff that you can do to help.

HS: To help others.

AW: And it was. If it wasn't for the better, I don't think I'd be here, to be honest with you. Because I told you the one time in the middle of the night that I fell in the middle of the night. You see, before my husband died, he was having trouble with getting up and down and stuff, whatever, so we had a little unit that you put on the toilet you know, to raise it and when he died, I asked did anybody want it, nobody wanted it and I put it away. Who knows, I didn't even remember it. Well, I had fallen and broken my – trying to remember – it was getting, I had fallen and it hurt my arm and that so I thought it would be easier for me. I dug it up and I put it on. [I was a] big shot, don't need any help you know. It was a little thing that you screwed on to the... what to you call it, and then proud [of myself]. And in the middle of the night I had to go to the bathroom and get up and went and I went to get up from the bathroom, this is the first one that I broke. The seat, evidently I didn't tighten enough, the seat came up and hit me on the head and now here's it there. Make believe this is my shower and my tub, okay? [Shows the space] And here I am sitting on the... what do you call it? Now this thing, no space, I have to touch the shower door that came up, hit me on the head, fell down, how I don't know, with my head through the toilet seat, grabbing the sides, and I can't move. I can't get down, I can't get – the good Lord was with me, 'cause I don't know how I got down there. I don't know to this day how I got down. This is the middle of the night, now my cell phone was on my night table near my bed, now my bed is there, and my bathroom we'll say here, how am I going to get there? I wriggled, I got out of that, how I don't know and I'm still on the floor on my belly. Now what do I do? I can't get up. I've got nothing to hold onto, the shower door is closed, I can't reach nothing. I crawled on my hands to my bed and I said to myself "I know

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..... little, it's just that littleso and I say, I can't get up. How am I going to...? My neighbor had my keys. "How am I going to get up?" I said to myself. I pulled the bottom drawer and I say "I'm going to shake it, if all falls down- good. So if the lamp falls on me, so be it. I have no choice." I shake the thing, the Good Lord was with me, and there pops my cell phone almost in my hand, you could say. I call my neighbor and I don't think it took them three minutes, he was there. And there I am laying on the floor and all that and he said, "I ain't touching you." They called the ambulance, they called this and they got me up and got me in the bed, that's when I broke... That was this shoulder. Oh, no wonder this one hurts, this was the worse one. Anyway, oh I tore, ribs, but the ribs. This healed good. The ribs took a lot of time. Now, that's when I was so thankful. Now, months later, years, whatever, I told you I take my friends shopping. This is another time. It was a hot, hot day. I never looked at the weather, this one couldn't go, this one couldn't, so I had a little cart with me and I say "I'm the driver, I know where I'm going", I need the stuff so I'm gonna go. You know, what the big deal is. I can always ask somebody to put this or do this. So, I went, I did my shopping, I come back. Now, I'm trying to take my stuff out of my car and somebody walked by, it was a place, community, complex, uh.

HS: Senior complex?

AW: Yeah, yeah and they put the cart down for me and I said, "Oh my God, I'm so happy I got here before the rain, not a drip a sight." Get up. I'm on the third floor, I take the elevator, I go up, put my bundles away, do something, for something, no, no, no I had to put bundles away, put this away and I said "I'd better have something to eat", grab something and said "Now I've got to relax." I go in the other room; I have two bathrooms that one over there with the high rise on it and the other one with nothing on it. I'm sitting at the computer, relaxing, this I remembered just [like] it was today. This was about 9 or quarter passed 9 at night. By the time I sat there and I says I've got to go to the bathroom. I got to walk over to the other bath, ah, I'll go to this one, never thinking, to the bathroom. Do my thing. Now I'm sitting, now I'm sitting the other way, this way now, and the shower is here, the bath is here [shows]. I go to get up, I can't get up. I got nothing to hold on, I can't, quarter passed nine, eleven thirty the next morning, I hear my neighbor say "Ann, where are you"? I always take my paper into bed, I like to do the crossword puzzles with the morning, my cup of tea. "Ann, where?", I said, "I'm in the bathroom." "Oh, okay, I won't bother you." I said, bother me, bother me. He comes in and he took one look at and says "oh my God." Wringing wet, and I'm shaking like a jelly fish, 'cause I have to tell you- I broke the other shoulder.

HS: Oh.

AW: So that's the story of my shoulders.

HS: Oh, I'm so sorry. Oh.

AW: I think these things were meant to happen. What could possess me to go, I did all that, why was I lazy to go from here to that bathroom, yesterday. I believe, it was meant to be – that's it. Now I get the other one, then I get two shoulders.

HS: So that's when you decided to come back to Worcester?

AW: Well, no, no, no. That's when I still, when I got back from the hospital and all, that's -- my daughter-in-law, my middle son – God bless her. I call her my angel. I stay there to recuperate.

HS: I see.

AW: And they say, you know, you're not going to go back to the apartment now. This and that. I say, I don't believe in the mother-in-law living with them. I said, "I'm going back. I'm going to go back to bed." That's when, little by little, the story goes on that we came here to Marlboro for a, my grandson, had a Bar mitzvah and I came to that. And then, we then came here [to Jewish Community Center in Worcester] to visit, I came to visit my parents – we bought lots, I told you that we had 20 lots and we went to them. And I take a look, and every single one is full of "I'm not ready," [Laughs: looks up, like speaking with God] I said, so what are you doing? I said "I am not ready." [Laughs] I said. "Who are you talking to?" I said I know who I'm talking to. So, then we come here, I think I told you. There was a little pavilion that I had paid for bricks for my mother and father, this all that. And then, while I was there, I said, you know that's the building up there that I hear so much about. I said I have friends there. I said, how about we go about visiting one, I'm right there. You know. So, we come, we go up and there's nice, well you see it here, looks just like a hotel.

HS: Yes, Eisenberg Assisted Living.

AW: Yeah, yeah. And then I said "This looks like a fancy hotel." And big mouth, I said "I wouldn't mind living here." Just like that. And I didn't know it was the big shot that the guy who was going to give me some tour. He said "Are you kidding?" Now he says, "Nice here." [Laughs] He says "Okay, I'll get you an application." I said wow, wow, wow – he got the application. But it took a year before I got the place. Then I was on the third floor, didn't like, but anyway. But I went through plenty of things that I didn't like because there was no choice. Only because, if there was a choice, I opted for something better, naturally. But when I had no choice, you just bite your tongue.

HS: Sure.

AW: And you sweat it out. And that's just what I did. Actually, I got this place [room on the 6th floor] and I told you I promised them. And they said "Oh, we're going to miss you." I said "I'm going to make a party for you"[for all the staff on the other floor]. And, I did. And I had the loveliest party here. They were coming in and out like I didn't know there were that many [Laughs]

HS: They must have liked you a lot.

AW: Yeah. Well, listen, I was always friendly and I -- what's not to like? I had never did anybody any harm and that's it to this day. There isn't anybody here that does not know me by name. [Laughs]. I call myself big mouth. [Laughs] They said push Big mouth, you know me. That's the story of my life to date.

HS: Thank you, thank you.

AW: And, this year – my son says "Ma, we are going to have your birthday party here."

HS: I'm coming.

AW: Oh, you'd better believe it.

HS: It's in November?

AW: It's in November. This year event. This is, uh..

HS: It's July already.

AW: July, August, September, October, November. So, it'll be four months away.

HS: Four months away.

AW: Ah, ah. Oh, I didn't realize it was that close. Oh yes, yes, yes. I don't know what they are going to do about invitations. But you have my word of mouth for my invitation.

HS: Thank you so much. I will be there. Thank you so much for the interview. I appreciate your thoughts. Thanks a lot.

AW: I'm looking forward to that.

HS: That's the 86, 87?

AW: 97

HS: 97?

AW: Yes, I'm going to be 97.

HS: Wow.

AW: I'm already 96.

HS: I can't believe it.

AW: You see that plaque, that's last year's.

HS: So, in three years we will celebrate, we will have big one for you – big, big celebration for you.

AW: Well, we had 100 birthdays here. Several people already have had 100-year old birthdays here. We've got another one coming up this year that I know of. She's going to be 100.

HS: A lot of women live much longer these days.

AW: You're not kidding. But these happen to be men. Both of these are men.

HS: Both men – uh, uh.

AW: Yeah, yeah, there was one woman a friend of mine here she's going to be this year her birthday, this year she's going to be 100, she's 99 and brilliant..... oh yeah. She's -- lots of smart people here. Age has nothing to do with, age has nothing to do with what's up here [points to her head]. It's not over here.

HS: Absolutely. Yeah.

AW: She's a very brilliant woman. And then they have a lot of meetings and stuff. Did I show you they have like a schedule every week?

HS: Uhm, I did see downstairs.

AW: Yeah, just all that. There is always something going on if you're interested in.

HS: And, it's good for your brain.

AW: That's right, that's right. And, they have health club you know, exercise, they have all kinds of meetings. They have like a monthly meeting; they call it "Newsweek." You can voice

your opinion. That's where I gave them the idea for the computer. They never had computers lessons here.

HS: Oh.

AW: I said "How come there's no computer lesson in here." And somebody said we don't know if anybody would be interested. There you go - the hands up there, I said. There you are. And they started a computer club. See, I mean nobody mentioned it. I'm sure there are people here who knew far more than I did, but never even thought about it you know. So, they have a computer club. And they have all sorts, literature -- there are, you name it anything of interest and the facilities are great.

HS: Yes

AW: Outside of the food, [that] kills me, but that's not their fault. No, that's my system. That has nothing to do with -- it's just my, I have an intolerance to a lot of foods and stuff. And that is the story of my life up to know. What's going to be from now I don't know? But I'm going to make that 97.

HS: 97 you're big, big celebration.

AW: I'm going to make that, going to make it.

HS: Thank you so very much, I appreciate it. I will turn this off now.