

Interviewee: Leigh Anne Bianchi  
Interviewers: Genesis Hernandez and Mary Catherine Macdonald  
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Transcriber: Genesis Hernandez and Mary Catherine Macdonald



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**Abstract:** Leigh Anne Bianchi was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1974. She spent the first 11 years of her life there. She and her family then moved to Kentucky, Ohio, and finally Holden, Massachusetts. She arrived in the Wachusett area at the age of 14. She currently resides in Paxton. She has worked as a nanny and babysitter as well as in preschools, daycares, farms, and the food service industry. As the founder and sole worker of The Good Citizenship Project and Chris's Collections, she touches upon how she came to develop these organizations and what their core values are. She speaks on how she teaches her clients marketable, transferable skills. Leigh Anne also speaks of her mental health challenges and her methods of coping. She also emphasizes the importance of speaking one's mind and believes in the importance of listening. She discusses gender roles and the unfair treatment of women, as well as the changing atmosphere of Worcester. Leigh Anne also reflects upon the significant role that her spirituality, core values, and upbringing have in guiding her work and life decisions.

**GH:** Okay, so we're here today with Miss Leigh Anne Bianchi on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023, in Worcester, Massachusetts at Assumption University in the TFAC Building [Tsotsis Family Academic Center]. So, Miss Leigh Anne, is it okay if we record this on audio for transcription?

**LB:** Yes.

**GH:** Thank you. So, we're just going to get started with a couple questions, and these are general family questions. So, the first one will be what is your full name, including both maiden name and married name, if applicable?

**LB:** It's just Leigh Anne Bianchi.

**GH:** Thank you. And when were you born?

**LB:** [ ] 1974.

**GH:** Nice, and have you ever been married?

**LB:** No.

**GH:** And do you have children?

**LB:** Yes.

**GH:** And then we talked about this earlier. You're expecting a grandchild any day, correct?

**LB:** Yes, any day now.

**GH:** And is that exciting?

**LB:** Oh yeah.

**MM:** How many children do you have?

**LB:** Just my daughter, Catarina.

**GH:** And what cultures or ethnicities do you identify with?

**LB:** Caucasian, I guess. You know, just American.

**GH:** And where have you lived during your life?

**LB:** I was born in Detroit and when I was about 11, we moved to Kentucky, Central Ohio, and then here.

**GH:** And out of those, would you have a favorite one, you would say?

**LB:** Oh, I missed Detroit terribly, but I've been here since I was 13 or 14, so and this is kind of my home now.

**GH:** So, you didn't grow up in Worcester, well you grew up in Detroit, but most of your life was spent in Worcester?

**LB:** Yeah. Because even Kentucky, we are only there for a year. In Ohio, we were there for six years.

**GH:** And what would you say the neighborhood that you lived in most of your life was like?

**LB:** Once we moved here, we were in Holden, we were always in Holden until I graduated high school and moved out on my own.

**GH:** So, you said you arrived to Worcester at the age of 13, correct?

**LB:** Nineteen eighty-eight, so I guess that's 14.

**GH:** And do you know the reason you came to live in Worcester?

**LB:** My stepfather took a job with what was at the time called Press Met Corporation, over on Harding Street in Worcester, and we had to move with him.

**GH:** Okay, and do you have other family members who live in Worcester as well?

**LB:** No.

**GH:** So, it's just you and your family.

**LB:** My mom has since passed away.

**GH:** Okay.

**MM:** Can you tell us a little more about your parents?

**LB:** So, my dad was actually a radio personality in Detroit for many years, and my mom was a stay-at-home mom until they divorced. And then she just had secretarial jobs. She went back to school for a little while. I remember that, I think for secretarial things. And then, once we moved well, once she married my stepfather—he had—or she had more secretarial jobs until she retired. And then she wound up working for an insurance company until she retired, yeah.

**GH:** That's interesting. So, like going off living in Worcester. Are there any challenges that you think the city still faces today?

**LB:** In terms of women?

**GH:** Yes.

**LB:** Oh well, for sure. I think it's still acceptable to treat us as if we're maybe a little less intelligent than your average man. I think it's still acceptable to expect us to hold down a job and raise our families and still be meek and mild-mannered and kind and loving. And I think it's still surprising to society if a woman has a voice or a strong opinion. I think it's better, I think it's more encouraged now for us to speak our minds and live our truths and all of that but, I still think that anywhere you go in Worcester or the rest of the world, we could all apply for the same job as equally qualified men and we're going to be treated differently, paid differently, viewed differently, in terms of our capabilities to perform the exact same job.

**GH:** What distinct characteristics make Worcester the place that it is?

**LB:** I think that it's still very much entrenched in its history, you know, especially if you go to the outlying towns. More of the—Sterling, for example, or Princeton, Gardner, Oakham, and those further out. You can see evidence of the history and the buildings and everything, and people are still very much in love with what used to be, as evidenced by the preservation of so many of those beautiful buildings. But I think it is interwoven with a new awakening in terms of culture and acceptance and inclusion and hey, just because things were beautiful on the surface in the past doesn't mean that we still have to hang on to a lot of the customs and traditions and that—it's still people finding their way. And it's evident in all the different things that you can do here and the different faces that you'll see in Worcester, as opposed to even what you said. If you go to Wachusett High [Regional] School right now, it's going to be pretty white. It's going to be pretty homogenized, and you have some diversity but percentage wise, it's lacking terribly. Come back into the city and you're going to see way more neurodivergent people. There are representations of different cultures and ethnicities and beliefs and it's more rich than your suburbs.

**GH:** So, would you say like the diversity makes Worcester an all-inclusive type of city?

**LB:** At least some of the surface, I think that's where it's going, it's trying to be as a city. It's hard for me to speak too much about it because I don't live there. I live in Paxton right now. I'm trying to move on to Rutland. I enjoy the country life, so I think I would be speaking out of turn to talk too much about Worcester because I don't experience it other than to come in here, you know, for a night of karaoke or something. So, I don't think it'd be fair for me to speak too much on it.

**GH:** Well, thank you for that. Now, if it's okay, we're just going to move on to... We will come back to your views on Worcester and women's experiences, but we're just going to move on right now for the education.

**LB:** Sure.

**MM:** I actually had one more question about family, do other family members live in the same area, like around Paxton or in Worcester, or not?

**LB:** No, my stepfather moved us out here, away from the rest of my family. So, my biological father, my brother and my sister, my cousins, everybody still lives in Michigan. So, I don't really have any blood relatives here to speak of.

**MM:** Thank you. So now we'll move on to education. So where did you attend school?

**LB:** I went to Wachusett. I didn't actually go to college immediately. I was a nanny right out of high school. And then I did take some classes at Becker [Becker College] and got my teaching certificate for early childhood. And then worked in preschools and daycares for a while. And I didn't actually go back to college to get my associate's [associate degree] until I was in my 30s,

mid- 30s. I did go to Salter [Salter College], which turned out to be—I mean, the education doesn't go away, but the accreditation and everything wasn't legitimate. So, when I tried to transfer my credits over to any other legitimate college, none of them really transferred. So, I have my associate's, but I don't think it's really worth much on paper, but I still have the experience and the knowledge, so you know.

**MM:** So, what is your associate's degree in?

**LB:** Medical assisting, and I'm all over the map. I'm all over the map.

**MM:** And what years did you go to college, if possible.

**LB:** I want to say 2008 to 2010-ish. It's all a blur. I was going to, you know, going to college, working full- time, trying to raise my daughter. It was a little bit of a mess.

**MM:** What were your challenges in education as you just kind of touched upon, but?

**LB:** Actually, I did very well in college once I made the decision to attend to, and also one of the benefits of Salter was that it's very much like a trade school. So, it was focused on that medical assisting degree, so there weren't a lot of those extraneous courses. As my brain was way more capable of focusing and attending—in high school, I had a terrible time. Sitting through, sitting still in class, paying attention, completing assignments. I was just way over stimulated all the time and couldn't settle. So, my high school grades were terrible. I'm surprised I graduated at all. So, I guess it's in terms of challenges, it would be, I think I went undiagnosed with autism for most of my education. I know my mom used to say that I had dyslexia and ADD [Attention Deficit Disorder]. None of those things were diagnosed. So, I have self-diagnosed, but I mean it meets their criteria. I didn't do well until I was in an environment where class sizes were small. They could amend things and adjust them to my needs. I could sit and focus there. Wasn't that the whole social aspect that goes along with high school? That's so distracting, you know, what clique are you fitting into? And what are you going to do when you get out of school? You know, I just went to school, did my work, came home, my daughter was asleep so I could do all my homework and there were no other distractions. And I hit it out of the park. I graduated with like a 3.9 in college. But high school, it was terrible.

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

**LB:** I had big dreams. I said, “Oh, I have my associate's, I can transfer this over. I take it into nursing. But I also think everything happens for a reason, because as I said, the trade credits didn't transfer. I started over at Mount Wachusett [Mount Wachusett Community College] for a little while. But, of course, was for nursing was just way too, way too vigorous to try and raise my daughter and work. And I made the choice to just let it go. And I wound up working at South Bay Mental Health. They hired me with just an associate. And, based on my teaching experience with preschools, they put me in what we called the life skills track and they had me running

groups for people that were in it. It was a day program, so they trained me up, tell me how to do it. That kind of planted the seed for what I do now.

**MM:** And how long did you do that for?

**LB:** I was there for about four years.

**MM:** What support networks and mentoring have been important to you?

**LB:** I guess it was just always my tight network of friends. I made friends where I worked, but otherwise you know. My mom was wonderful, but she didn't have any background in anything having to do with nursing, mental health, anything like that. My stepfather was a metallurgical engineer, and my dad was a radio personality in Detroit. So there really wasn't a lot of support out there that I knew of. I just always called it together, did it myself, figured it out.

**MM:** Now that we talked about that, we'll move on to talk about your work.

**GH:** So, with that, do you remember what your first job was?

**LB:** My first formal job was working at the McDonald's in Holden after school.

**GH:** Oh, and what other jobs have you had and what do you do now?

**LB:** Oh, well, I mean. I always babysat, I was always babysitting. Obviously, I said I was a nanny right out of high school. While I was a nanny, I was also cleaning stalls at a big barn in Sterling and working at the Honey Farms in Sterling. I was 18 years old with three jobs. Never seem to have anybody though. And, what else? Well, I've always been in some sort of food service, so I did McDonalds. I worked at a bunch of different country clubs over the years. I'm actually working as a bartender at a country club now, two nights a week. Like I said, that starting at South Bay Mental Health kind of planted the seed for what is now my business, The Good Citizenship Project, because we needed a reason for people to continue to attend the day program, because it's mandatory for whatever they've been told they need to do what their goals are, or maybe some of them were there, court mandated, but we didn't lock the doors. We couldn't force them to stay. And there really wasn't a lot of incentive for people to stay, so I created this idea that, you know, do good things, help each other out here during the day. You know, show up on time, participate in group, stay out of trouble in the hallways. And you know, if you could do that, then we'll go out into the community, we'll do things. We sang Christmas carols for the veterans. We brought the veteran shelters leftover Thanksgiving dinner. We went and volunteered at the Worcester Animal Rescue League and stuff like that. So, they benefited from the serotonin you get when you do good things for other people, got them out of the building. It was an incentive for them to participate in groups, and actually take their treatment seriously. You know, they got us all out of the building, got me out of the building. So that was the basis for The Good Citizenship Project, which is now morphed into something entirely

different, except for that it's based on the idea that, everybody, everybody, doesn't matter who you are, what your diagnosis is, what culture, ethnicity, anything, we all need meaning and purpose. Every single one of us needs a reason to get up in the morning, and for The Good Citizenship that means going and helping other people by helping out in farms and barns. So, parents with people that have autism will contact me. I will go pick them up at their house and we'll bring them to local farms and barns, and I teach them how to do all the chores. Through that, they get to interact with all the animals that are there. Sometimes it's horses, sometimes it's llamas and peacocks, sometimes it's cows and we do all the chores and I mean all the chores, cleaning up the manure, moving the hay, fixing fences, learning how to trim the goats' hooves. And everything that goes in between that. So, they get these marketable skills that they need to be able to go out into the world and be positive contributing members of the community. And the barn owners get much needed help because just about any barn--- and you go to the barn owner stressed out, there's tons of stuff to be done and not enough time in the day. So, everybody wins and I am there to make sure that if there's someone confused, they don't know what to do or maybe there's a better way to do that chore, I teach them. I teach them how to do it and I base that on my own autism and obvious signs of autism throughout the family and all the years working in the field. And I just kind of took some (???) that I learned and a little bit of {???) and being a mom and being a preschool teacher and combined it all into one. And here we are, we have The Good Citizenship Project.

**GH:** And what has this work meant to you?

**LB:** Well, it gives me meaning and purpose, right? Like I said earlier, I never did well in school in a normal environment. So, I recognize and can relate to the folks that come to me, and I mean the youngest one I have is 12. The oldest is almost 30. And, and I get it. I understand when there's something you want to be good at, you want to learn how to do it. But maybe the environment just isn't right, and you don't know how to express all the stuff that's going on in your head at any given moment. And so, I figured out how to help people adapt, so I have meaning and purpose. I can do something good for someone else. And the people that I've supported throughout this time have gone on to get jobs at the farms or they, you know, actually started being more communicative, verbally, and I mean just I get to see them blossom. And I know I've done a good thing.

**GH:** So, would you say it's fulfilling for you?

**LB:** Absolutely fulfilling. It doesn't pay well, but it's definitely fulfilling.

**GH:** Yeah. And how long have you been doing this?

**LB:** I finally gave The Good Citizenship a name two years ago in June. But I started it with one young man named Christopher. His mom and I used to volunteer at Forge Works Farm in Rutland, which was a therapeutic riding facility. Based out of the program called Ride with Pride, and it was that Forge Works Farm. Lovely couple, Chris and Ted Mahan, opened up their

farm and they had these therapeutic riding horses. And Christopher's mom and I volunteered there. And he was little, he was little little, like still running underneath the bellies of the horses. And years later, she reached out to me. She said, "Heard you're looking for a job. (???) said that I could create a program for Christopher. I don't want him to go into day program every single day. I don't think that'd be appropriate for him. But he can't stay home with me every single day either. Would you want to work with them?" I said absolutely. So, we just sort of pulled this thing together. And initially I was going to be taking him and she'd be able to leave the house. I'd teach him how to do the dishes and run the vacuum and stuff like that. And that was not going anywhere. He was not having it. A friend of mine, who has a horse farm, which is where my horse was at the time... I don't remember what happened, but she was going to take a bunch of clothes up to Andy's Attic at South High School. You've heard of it?

**GH:** Yeah.

**LB:** So, she was going to take a bunch of clothes up there. But there was something that happened in her family. Somebody got hurt or whatever, and she says, "I got all these clothes piled up, they were going to take them to Andy's Attic. Is that something you and Christopher could do?" "Sure, why not?" So, we pull up, then he goes and then loads all these bags of clothes into my car. And she comes out and she says, "Oh, my friend Melanie, she's got a bunch of stuff, too. Do you guys want to go over there today?" I said, "Sure okay." So, we went over to Melanie's house. We grabbed a bunch of bags. We took them all to Andy's Attic, and the kids came out, and helped Christopher carry everything in. And then the next week, Melanie called me again. She says, "Oh, you know, my friends got more clothes. Do you and Christopher want to do that again?" Sure. So, it was born, Christopher's Collections or Chris's Collections. It was a way to get him out of the house and we started going door to door throughout the Wachusett region once a week, gathering donations for different agencies, Andy's Attic, Worcester Animal Rescue League, the Veterans Shelter. Forgetting some places, Abby's House, Visitation House, the food pantries. And it just sort of exploded into its own entity. And then from there I started taking him to farms and barns on the other days and helping to clean up and whatever. So, we're really lucky to just find people that had barns that were willing to trust me with another person on their property around their animals. And it just—the two things just kind of took on a life of their own. So, Chris's Collections has its own website, it's its own thing. And then The Good Citizenship sort of took off. People in town heard about what I was doing, started calling me up. Now I have like six different clients. It doesn't sound like much, but it is just me. I'm the only one doing it. I have no employees or anything like that and like I said, I pick them up. They go to barns, we do the chores, we're done.

**GH:** I'm curious. How do people find you? Do you have like a website?

**LB:** Yep, the Good Citizen Project at Facebook. I haven't put on my big girl pants yet and figured out how to create a website. So, people just, you know, look it up. I advertise occasionally when I have an opening, and I'll go on the Wachusett special needs parent page, Mountaineer Mamas, different groups in the area and I'll just say I have openings. This is what



we do. If you're interested, give me a call. And then a parent will call, or guardian, we do a phone interview and then we do a meet and greet at one of the farms, make sure the person's interested and invested because it's hard work. And then we go from there. Sometimes people think that little Johnny is just going to come and get to feed a couple horses. No ma'am. Like, no way. He's pushing wheelbarrows and he's shoveling the manure and he's walking through chicken coops covered in poo. So, it's serious business. It's not just, let's go to Davis's Farmland, you know, yeah, it's way different.

**GH:** And you said you live in Paxton, correct? So, do you go out to different communities to pick up or is it just in that Paxton region?

**LB:** The parts that we go to, there's one in Rutland, there's one in Barre, Oakham, New Braintree, and Holden.

**GH:** And then you pick up your clients from around those areas? Wherever they live?

**LB:** Princeton, Sterling, Holden, Paxton. Might be forgetting, but yeah, basically I do have one member of The Good Citizenship Project that lives way out in like Northborough area. So, mom drops her off at my house.

**GH:** You said you do this alone. You don't share with anyone you don't have, like a team?

**LB:** Correct.

**GH:** How would you say you've changed over this experience from the beginning to now, if you do see a change?

**LB:** It forced me to think outside the box. It's forced me—I guess I was always an outside the box thinker. I never, I was never linear, but it's forced me to really be creative in problem solving, to be way more patient, way more empathetic and really start using all that DBT [Dialectical Behavior Therapy] that I used to shove down everybody's throat and look at all the different perspectives. You know, families will cancel and if they do, I still have to go to that farm or barn and do all the chores. So, at the beginning, I think all these people just don't get it. They're irresponsible. That's forced me to just look on the other side of that thing. Well, what would make that parent decide that little Suzie can't come today and why would they, if it was in terms of like multiple cancellations and things like that? What could be the motivation behind that? Why would a person do that if—and stop making it about me, and more about what's best for other people. What drives the person's decision? And just be way more understanding of other people's situations, because the world does not function in black and white. It just doesn't work that way.

**GH:** How do you balance your responsibilities and priorities, like in your life?

**LB:** I don't. I guess it depends on who you talk to, whether or not I'm good at it or not. But I'm really, really selfish with my personal time. So, when I've decided that I'm done for the day, that literally means I am done for the day. Don't call me, don't text me. I will ignore you. Or I decide I need to go blow off some steam. Doesn't matter what my responsibilities are in the next day. I'm going to go do that if that's what I feel like I need at that moment. So, I might go out and just sing karaoke all night long and come home without a voice or I might go home, crawl underneath the covers with my dogs and just put on like *Will and Grace*. I mean literally ignore everyone. Even my roommate will knock on the door, I'm like, "Go away." And it's just I get—I put up those boundaries that I decided this is what has to happen for me in this moment today. And that's the only thing that I can really say I do, because my schedule is erratic. If someone cancels, I will very strongly encourage them to reschedule rather than cancel. And that means I don't get days off. Saturdays are the days I don't schedule anything, but it never happens. I have a horse out in Brimfield that I try to go see. I have the country club two nights a week. I don't get a lot of days off, so when I block off time, I block off time. And I'm really selfish with it. That's about the only thing I can say I do.

**GH:** So, you would say there are pros and cons to the path that you've chosen?

**LB:** For sure. You know, I call myself a business, but it's me. I don't enjoy any of the benefits of having a company that, if I call in sick, I still get paid. I don't get sick time. I don't get any of that. I haven't had a vacation since I started this because who's going to run the business? Who's going to go to the barn, get all those chores done? So, there's that. But if I am sick, I just call that person and say, "I'm sick today, can we reschedule?" And they say yes or no. Or if I want to, I don't know if I decide that I want to go on a trail ride with my friends on our horses on Monday afternoon, and that's when Christopher is scheduled. I just called mom and say, "I'm going on trail ride today. Can I take Christopher tomorrow?" Yeah, so. You know, you can't usually call your boss and be like, "Oh, I want to go on a trail ride today. I'm not coming into work." They'd be like, "You're fired." So, there's pros and cons.

**GH:** Do you have any regrets? In your life or how do you feel about the choices you've made?

**LB:** For The Good Citizenship Project?

**GH:** Yeah.

**LB:** I don't regret doing that at all. Yeah, every once in a while, I'm like, "Oh, you know, I could have a steady paycheck and health insurance and all that," because right now I'm on state health insurance. And then I look at the people who are like, "Oh God, I got to go to work." And I never say that. I never say that. Going to work for me means picking somebody up, going out into the country, spending all this time with them. And you know, on some level, all the animals.

And you know, doing good things and then coming home and going, “I just did good things today.” Yeah, there's, there's no regrets there. Not at all.

**MM:** And it makes you feel good.

**LB:** Yeah, absolutely it does. That I don't regret it all.

**GH:** Great.

**MM:** Can I ask what drew you to farm life and why you chose it? Like, I know you said you know people who work at farms always need help, but what specifically kind of made you interested in the country and farm life?

**LB:** Well, I mean ever since I was a kid, I was barefoot and muddy. All day, you know, I've always—I mean the very first dog we ever had slept in the crib with me. It's just, I've always been around animals. I've always loved them. At one point I had a chicken and a goat living in the spare bedroom in my apartment. Yeah, in Paxton. Yeah, that's true. So, I've always done like that, but I have a horse. And in order to be able to see my horse, I need to make time for him. Because here I am paying money to board this beautiful animal who's lovely and kind and just deserves all the best. How was I going to do that? Well, a lot of places would offer me a discount on board, which is like rent for horses. And they say, “Well, you know we'll knock off some money off what you have to pay every month if you want to come clean stalls.” And I was like, “Oh ding, ding, ding. How about that?” So, I started doing that. And then it started conflicting with my schedule with Christopher. And I don't know it just, it just kind of took off. Because obviously my horse, Johnny, lives in Brimfield. So, we go out there, we do chores there. But the other barns, they're just people that I met through having Johnny. And one person heard, “Oh, you've been taking The Good Citizenship Project over to so and so's barn. Would you want to come help out a couple days a week here?” I'm like, “Sure, why not?” You know, do they pay me? No, and my horse isn't there, so they're not knocking off board. But they're friends of mine, and they need these things done, and what a perfect learning environment. That's the whole basis. We go there, we help out someone who needs it, and ask for nothing in return. That's what I'm trying to teach. Just go where you're needed. Do good things. Good things will come back to you. And it hasn't, hasn't steered me wrong yet you know.

**MM:** So, you grew up like around farms, the farm lifestyle with of all those animals?

**LB:** I always wanted a horse. I didn't get Johnny until he was—three years ago now, right? So, yeah, 45th birthday I got him. And that was because like this guy was just getting rid of him and I was already there taking lessons on a different horse. And the guy was like 1500 bucks and you can have him. And I'm like, what? Are you kidding? And \$1500 for a Tennessee walking horse is unheard of. There's a whole back story to it. But basically, I have been working with my horse, well Johnny, to get him to just to the point where you could ride him for six or eight months and this guy was like, “Oh, 1500 bucks, first person who comes up with it, can have him.” I was like,

“Are you kidding? I've been working with him for all this time. Please don't sell him out from underneath me.” So, a very dear friend of mine lent me money. And I went to the guy I'm like, “Here you go; he's my horse.” And that's how I ended up with Johnny. But before that, I mean I went to 4H camp. My parents leased a horse for me when I was about 14. And I always loved them, but I really didn't have that much experience except, well, I mean, I guess yeah, volunteering at Forge Works, that was for a few years, so definitely spent time around it. Learned how much I loved it. But Forge Works was also helping people with special needs, so the two worlds just came together, and everything happens for a reason. It all comes together. Like if you see all the different things that happened in my life, how I ended up here, it just—if you were taking a bird's eye view, you could see they all came down to this moment where I got my horse. My horse is the reason I have my business really, because I needed to be able to see him. Well, I mean Christopher's the crux of it, but yeah.

**MM:** Well, next we'll talk about community involvement in politics, so we were wondering if you could answer do you consider yourself politically active?

**LB:** Do I go to rallies and things like that? No. Do I speak my mind about my political views? Yes. So, what's that like right in the middle?

**MM:** So, what does that mean to you about speaking your mind, do you have conversations with people and like try to, you know, raise awareness?

**LB:** Oh well, post-[President Donald] Trump, I say that we've all sort of changed. But the dichotomy between Democrats and Republicans is just still so strong, and I think no matter what side of the fence you're on, most people will tiptoe around that topic. I'm not just going to walk into karaoke on a Friday night and be like “I'm a liberal Democrat yeah, rock on!” If the topic comes up and I feel like I could speak intelligently on it, I will. I'm not here to insult anybody. I'm not here to degrade or tell anybody that they're wrong or bad. But if I have information I will, I will share it.

**MM:** That's great. Have you been involved in volunteer or community work?

**LB:** I mean, that's what The Good Citizenship is.

**MM:** Yeah. I mean, yeah, yeah, it's right there. You already kind of touched on that. So, we don't really need to talk more about that.

**LB:** That's the basis for what we do is volunteering and giving back to the community.

**MM:** So, do you not get paid by your clients?

**LB:** Oh no, the members of The Good Citizenship Project themselves don't pay me. Obviously, it's their parents or guardians. Some are private pay and some are funded through DDS, the

Department of Developmental Services, so I do have an hourly rate with a minimum. I try and make it fair. I've been told that my hourly rate is absolutely ridiculous, that I should be charging way more, but I can't, in good conscience, do that. I'm not here to make money off of this. I'm just trying to pay my bills. So, it probably doesn't make me really effective business person.

**MM:** That's okay, I mean it's, it's about what you're doing, and it seems to mean a lot to you.

**LB:** So, I'll never be rich doing this financially, but I will always be rich in spirit.

**MM:** Exactly.

**LB:** Always. Because I know that what I'm doing helps other people and I'm teaching others to be helpful and kind and involved in community. At the very basis of it just giving back and doing good where you can, and that's enough for me.

**GH-** I have a question. Do you ever go out to events and stuff and advertise your business?

**LB:** Actually, the first one that I'll be doing is coming up, it's Ladies Night Out Worcester. It's in April and it's all women-owned businesses coming together at a venue in Shrewsbury, and we'll all have our little kiosks and booths. It's everything, groomers and jewelry makers and accountants and real estate brokers, all of us. And that would be the first one where I've ever really advertised. I mean, like I said, otherwise it's mostly just Facebook because let's face it, if too many people contact me, it's going to be me mostly turning them away because it's only me. I don't have the means to pay an employee. So, I don't know that I'm ready to try to train somebody because I don't know how to explain what I do.

**GH:** That's exciting though, that event coming. I hope a lot of people show up for that.

**MM:** So, what would you consider the group's major accomplishments? Would you say your ability to help people individually, or like being able to help in the farm? What would you say are the major accomplishments?

**LB:** All of that, all of everything you just said. Helping each individual that I support and watching them grow and gain skills and for some--- you don't think about the executive functioning necessary to shovel, right? You just do it. No one took you out there and said this is the proper way to hold the shovel. Push it this way. Don't do it that way. Your brain watches somebody else do it, maybe when you're six and then you go and you do it. A lot of people I support can't make that translation from watching it happen, to coordinating their bodies in a way that they could do it and you don't think about it. But I have to sometimes break that down. Bend your knees here, bend over at the waist, put one hand here, put the other hand. And learning that coordination, right? So, when someone that I've been working with for two or three years, I just step back and I give him the pitchfork and they go do it on their own and I don't have to say, "Wait, wait back up a little bit that your knees." And I don't say any of that, it's amazing. And

then being able to say that to their family. And hearing the delight and their families like their moms, saying, “Really he did that on his own today? That's awesome! Yay.” You know, just hearing that and like, I'm getting goosebumps talking about it and then seeing their pride. I just did this on my own today, you know what I mean? All of those things, those are all accomplishments. But then knowing that when we leave, the barn owner, when they come home from work that night, they can just go and start making dinner for the family. They don't have to worry about getting the stalls cleaned or trimming the goats' hooves. They know that everything's taken care of when they get there that day, and then I can be a relief to them that way as well and then having it all come together and knowing that people I support, are going to take those life lessons and use them elsewhere, wherever they go, whatever they do. It's going to help someone else, too. So, it's like this butterfly effect but in a good way, not like the scary movie way. It's just an all-around good thing. I can't think of anything that's not an accomplishment when we go, you know?

**MM:** You mentioned that you nannied right out of high school. So, would you say that working with kids has kind of shaped your desire to do more work with kids?

**LB:** I think it made me realize that I'm just a natural caretaker. Most of the people I support are in their 20s. So, they're not kids. They might still have some childlike tendencies or developmentally, you know, maybe they still like SpongeBob or something, but they're still adults. They still have adult desires and needs. And often they have very adult thoughts, they just don't know how to express it the way that we would. Being a nanny, I think is the foundation for being a caregiver. But I think I actually do better with folks that are more mature than I do with the littles. I love the littles. I love babysitting for my friends, and they can come over whenever they want, but then I get to give them back. Yeah, you know. No sticky fingers, no dirty diapers, all that kind of stuff.

**MM:** Our next question is what role has religion played in your life?

**LB:** Oh, that's a good one. So, my grandmother was a Sunday school teacher and both she and my grandfather were very, very involved in their church, Holy Cross, in Detroit. All of us cousins, we—I don't know why we all spent so much time at my grandmother's house, but we did. You know, we had parents that worked and parents that were going through divorces and all that kind of stuff. So, we were at Grandma Trudy's house all the time. And so, we spent a lot of time at church with her, and over the years we've all kind of developed our own theologies. And many times it's come up in arguments and I always say, “God just wants us to be the best person that we can be. And it's going to look different for each of us, and it's going to look different every day.” But He just wants you to do the best that you can do. That's it. That's the only requirement. And it doesn't matter. The rest of it doesn't matter, who you fall in love with or any of that. None of that matters. Are you trying to be a good person? If you can honestly answer that question with a yes, that's it. Your job is done. The rest of it, not up to us. My favorite book is *The Shack*. My mom struggled with her religion for a long time. She was raised Catholic, but her mom just struggled with motherhood and all of it so, by the time my mom was old enough to get

married, she definitely walked away from that religion with a terrible taste in her mouth. And so, she converted to Lutheranism and married my dad, and she hated *The Shack*. Hated it. And I think it just short circuited her brain to think that, you know, God could be anything other than the picture that we would see on the wall? You know, a handsome white guy with long brown hair. You know and see that representation of the book of Papa being a black woman, and you know, Jesus actually being a carpenter, an actual carpenter. Then the Holy Spirit being this undefinable beautiful amalgamation of colors and everything. I think it just kind of blew her away, but for me, it just brought it all together and explained why bad things happen. Recently, there's been a series of things that have just, big barriers of my life that I have tripped over himself hard on my face. The old me would have been angry at God, or whatever you conceive him to be, and blame God. How could you let this happen to me? But after reading *The Shack*, I've read it five times now. It's more like, okay, so it kind of lies with that whole poem about the footprints in the sand, right? Like you thought you were alone, but I was carrying you throughout all these terrible things that have been happening to me. The outpouring of love and support from friends and strangers and barely even acquaintances that have made sure that I got to the other side has solidified my belief that there is someone bigger out there. Do I pray? Sure. Do I go to church? No. I was never able to sit still any longer anyway. But I think that's again the basis of The Good Citizenship Project. Are you doing the best you can do today? If the answer is yes, there you go, help people where you can. Be good to other people, be kind, and if you screw up, and you can't be kind or you weren't kind, own up to it. That's it. And I think like that because of the foundation my grandma gave me making me go to church. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son for who believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." [Book of John 3:16] It's like all right so if this person was willing to sacrifice the most important thing in their life, I can sacrifice some things too and it puts things into perspective. And I think that foundation and all those beautiful stained-glass windows that were in church that I would just sit there and stare at, there was one for each of the commandments and I would just make up my own story. Again, couldn't stay focused to save my life, but I could focus on those. And she gave me a piece of gum to keep my mouth busy and I came out of that with a really good relationship with God. One that later upset her because I didn't believe that I needed to go to church to have a relationship with God. I see God in the beautiful sunset and the breeze and that one little flower that grows through the cracks. That's where I see God. And I can talk to him or her, whatever they are, wherever I am at any time. They don't need someone to do it for me. And I think that upsets a lot of people that are deep in strictly in their religion. But that's why I say I'm spiritual, not religious. But I think that's still religious. I don't know.

**MM:** All right, but it sounds to me like that's important to you and is something that kind of guides your work, like your belief in doing good and helping others.

**LB:** If you hadn't asked that question, I probably never would have realized, but it's the driving force like, yeah... It's all based on what I learned as a little kid in Sunday school. Be a good person.

**GH:** It was like it planted in you already.

**LB:** Yeah, you know, sometimes to my own detriment because especially back to the whole women thing, we're always taught to be apologetic and kind, and especially the apologetic part, "You speak too loudly, "Oh I'm sorry." You bumped into someone, "Oh, pardon me. I'm sorry." And how many men would accidentally step on a person's foot and be, "Oh my God, I'm so sorry, I love those shoes." They'd say, "Oh, excuse me," if they even acknowledged you. This is not a man slamming thing. But it's just how we've been raised. "Be quiet. Clean your plate. Pick up everybody else's plate at the table." Is that why so many women are waitresses? Probably. Because that's what we're taught. You're the one that gets up from the table and you clean up everybody else's plates. You wash the dishes, and you do the laundry and go to work and raise the kids and all of that, so I think part of it's because I'm, I'm a girl. That's the way I was raised, but also there was that deep, deep, deep foundation of be a good person. Help where you can. That's what Jesus would do. Jesus didn't care who you were, how much money you had, where you came from. Jesus was like, "Bring them all in. Mary Magdalene, she's cool. She's all right. I still love her messed up. Whatever." Right? Forgiveness. So yeah. Had you not asked that question, I would have never put that together. So, thank you.

**MM:** Of course.

**LB:** Thank you, Gram. Thank you, Grandpa.

**MM:** It makes sense. It's very interesting how sometimes we don't even realize why we do things, but yeah.

**LB:** Yeah, like that. I'm going to be driving home thinking about that one for a while so thanks.

**GH:** And there's a question here that says like how do you define success but I feel like the way you just mentioned all of that is like your definition of success, like just being a good person. Would you say that's your definition?

**LB:** Absolutely. Recently had a relationship end because—and that person was just always very money driven and did business with people that I would not do business with. Well, "He's going to pay me 500 bucks for that." I'm like, "Yeah, but is that a person that you want to be associated with?" And I know we talked about forgiveness and then you can forgive someone and still not want them in your circle. And we would have that conversation often, "But I'm going to be successful, I'm going to be this." But you're taking money, it's dirty money. And I don't care if I can't pay my bills, but if I have to take money that way to be successful. I'd rather just go to sleep at night knowing that I've harmed no one today, at least not intentionally, and that I've helped people and, that to me, is more a measure of your success than the dollar bills in your bank account, which therefore means I'm super successful. Like pretty close to zero today.

**GH:** Yeah, one of the questions I like would like to ask you is, based on your life experience, what advice would you give women of today and future generations?



**LB:** Listen to your intuition. Follow your instincts. Learn to tell the difference between your intuition and your fear from past trauma. Listen. Be silent every once in a while, and just listen. Your heart and your soul know where you're supposed to go, and when it gets difficult, it's because you don't like the answer. Not, because you don't know the answer, because you don't like it, and there's a difference, listen to yourself. You know better than you give yourself credit for. We don't give ourselves enough credit. We question ourselves all the time. Question, but then listen for the answer.

**MM:** What has your experience been like with accessing quality and affordable healthcare? Has that been an issue for you?

**LB:** Not for me, I know, I hear. I see others struggle. I have a friend right now who is deeply entrenched in alcoholism right now and she's in a shelter and she just can't find resources anywhere. I keep sending them to her and she keeps getting them shut down and she has some pretty significant health concerns. And she can't seem to find a doctor or anything. And I'm doing the best I can to help her, but for me, I've never had a problem accessing affordable healthcare because as soon as I applied for Mass Health [Massachusetts Health Insurance], I got it. And I don't know why I'm different because I'm a single white female with, you know, on the books, a pretty decent income. I'm not sure why I qualified, and others don't. But it's personally not an issue. The issue is getting up to the motivation of actually going to the doctor, but that's more of an anxiety thing versus accessibility, yeah.

**MM:** Whose health are you responsible for besides your own? Would you say, you know, now that your daughter is older, the people that you're more responsible for are people that you work with, like their health?

**LB:** Absolutely, for sure. We go to farms and barns and we don't go to places with therapy animals. They're just cows and goats and donkeys. There's a tractor over there and a log splitter over there. I have to know what I'm doing in terms of health. If somebody trips and falls, you know I have to keep--- make sure I'm aware of their medical histories and any allergies they might have and whether or not it's okay to give them a Benadryl or something. But on top of that, you know, put your hat on, wash your hands after using the toilet, all that kind of stuff. Because again, a lot of people that I support, that's not their strong suits, hand washing and covering your mouth when you cough and zipping up your coat or letting me know when your jeans are all wet cause you sloshed a bucket of water on them. So, those are the things that I have to work around and work with and address. Am I worried about if someone's going to get sick from someone else? Not usually, because it's usually just the two of us and all the farm animals. So, one could say that I'm helping them be healthier by people outside all the time, yeah, the fresh air.

**MM:** Yeah, and especially since they're older, you don't really need to, you probably don't need to go over the same things that you would have with like a kid about, you know, health and like safety.

**LB:** Depends on who the person is. It's very individualized. Some, I'm just like don't touch that and they're like okay. Others, they just know not to touch. Still others we have to do the social script, when we go to the farm. We know that we don't put our hands on the fence. And if the dog runs up to you, what do you do? It's very individualized. It's all over the map with that.

**MM:** And I was just wondering, how do you get through tough times and what kind of thoughts keep you going when you're having a hard time?

**LB:** So, my horse has been instrumental, and I am diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder. And the horse is definitely—Johnny, has been instrumental because I knew I had to get out of bed for him. I had to, because if I didn't, who was going to take care of him? And my dogs, so they've been just invaluable, better than any therapy session I could go to. Yeah, there's still days, but knowing that when I get to work, I'm doing the things that I'm doing, also is very helpful. And you know there's again that change of mindset that we talked about before. It used to be, you know, why is this happening to me? Why is God letting this happen to me? You know, what did I do to deserve this? And now it's okay. So, this happened, but at least these people came in to help and at least I know that I have a roof over my head and a lovely horse to go sink my face into when I need to. It's been a change of perspective and rather than focusing on negatives, it's been focusing on positives and hope. This can't stay like this forever. The Tao [Tao Te Ching] gives you a quote and there's a little saying it says, "Fire cools, water reaches its own level." Nothing lasts forever. No matter how bad the fire is, it will burn out. No matter how deep the flood is, water's going to find its own level. Nothing, no circumstance is permanent, so you got to get through it.

**MM:** Wow.

**GH:** So, based off your answer on that, I just want to ask you this last question because we have taken up enough of your time today. So, we're working on telling a fuller story of the history of women that has been recorded in the past. What should we be sure to include?

**LB:** History of women, oh I don't think I have anything new to add. I think it's important to note that throughout, women have not been recognized for many of their accomplishments. I think it's important to note that, in every story about a man, look and you'll probably find a woman that was there supporting him, or made it possible for him to be successful in one way or another, good, bad, or neutral. And it's cliché, but for every successful man, if you look back in history, I'm sure there was a woman somewhere in his story that made it possible for him to get where he got. And I think, if we could all do that, then the rest would be so much easier.

**GH and MM:** Thank you. Oh, we appreciate you taking the time to be here in this interview and work and like helping us with this project.

**LB:** I'm glad, it was nice meeting you.