

Interviewee: Roberta Corn
Interviewers: Meghan Forde and Colleen MacNeil
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Transcribers: Meghan Forde and Colleen MacNeil



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Abstract: Roberta “Bobbi” Corn was born in 1945, in Belfast, Northern Ireland immigrating to the United States as an infant. Bobbi moved from state to state, she eventually settled in the Greater Worcester area over 20 years ago. Being of Jewish descent, she attended Hebrew school on Saturdays, while also attending Springfield High School during the week. After high school, she attended Penn State where she received a bachelor’s degree in English, and also met her husband. She constantly moved around the country due to the demand of her husband’s job, but still started a family and became a mother of three sons, one who had been adopted from Vietnam. Although never pursuing a career in English, she worked as a special education teacher and then as a counselor for survivors of domestic assault. She discusses how the frequent moves throughout her marriage may have prevented her from breaking the stereotypes of women during that time. Bobbi reflects on the importance of how embracing diverse cultures and listening to others’ stories is an important part of life.

CM: All right so we just want to start off by reading this statement from the Worcester Women’s Oral History Project so it says we are completing a citywide oral history of the lives of Worcester women aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences based on the goals of 1850 National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester we are focusing on the areas of women's education health work politics community involvement. We want to focus today on your experiences with being a woman in society and thank you for your help with this important project.

MF: And then if you don't mind just stating your name and the date and that you have permission, or we have permission to record you.

RC: My name is Roberta Corn. I go by the nickname Bobbi. Today is October 7, 2019. And I give permission to record this.

MF: Sounds good. Thank you.

CM: OK. So, I think the first question I’ll ask and since you've already said your name is where and when were you born.

RC: I was born in 1945.

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MF: Where were you born?

RC: I was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Kind of interesting story how that happened, but I don't know if it's something you want to hear or not. Okay, my family history is a little mixed up I guess you would say. It could make a good TV story I think. My mother came from a fairly large family in Belfast, Northern Ireland and she had never left Ireland. 1945 was when she met my father was the middle of World War II. He was stationed there and how he got there is kind of interesting too because my father came from Germany. He was Jewish. His mother was fearful of what was happening in Germany and she was a widow with young children, and she wanted to find a way out for her kids. And she one by one got them out of Germany. My father was sent to United States. He was all by himself. I think he was 13 when he came, maybe a little—oh not quite, 14 I believe when he came by himself. He was put in an orphanage for a short time and then went to live with a foster family. And that was in Philadelphia—first an orphanage in New York and then was sent to Philadelphia. So, he spent his high school years in Philadelphia, went to school, and when he got out of school World War II had just begun. And he volunteered for the Army and he was sent overseas. He became a citizen while he was in the army and he was stationed in Belfast Northern Ireland, which is part of Britain and they had an American airbase there. He was in the Air Force and that's how he met my mother. And they had a kind of whirlwind courtship I guess [laughter] and were married there and I was born there and then my father was shipped back because the war had ended by then. I was born just about the end of the war. He was shipped back home, and my mother was able to come a few months later.

CM: Wow, that's so interesting.

MF: So just going back to the basic questions. Have you ever married? If yes, what's the name of your spouse and do you have any kids?

RC: Yes, I've been married for 53 years I think, his name is Joe and we have three sons. Aaron, Dan, and Josh.

MF: Any grandchildren or no?

RC: And we have three grandchildren. That's the best part, Jake...Jacob, Ian and Taya.

CM: So, I think next we want to just learn more about your childhood. Especially learning about the relationship between your parents and Ireland. How did you grow up and what was family life like?

RC: Okay. It was a little difficult in some ways. I mean my father had ended up losing almost his entire family in the Holocaust, so there was a certain kind of sadness that pervaded in our family. I knew that terrible things had happened to his family as a young child, but I didn't know very much about it. My father never talked a whole lot about it. I mean I knew about his parents, but I didn't know details about what had happened. They were sort of protective of me, both my

parents were. And my mother also had a difficult childhood because first of all it was the Depression and bad as it was in United States it was even worse in Europe and Northern Ireland really suffered. So, our family was quite poor. Everybody in her family worked. She dropped out of school at an early age to care for her younger brother and so when she met my father he was very different from anything she had known. He had a—he was very good looking, he had an accent she told me it reminded her of Charles Boyer [laughter], he was an old actor from the forties and fifties, and I could see that when she told me that. Yeah, he really did. And my mother was very good looking. She was an attractive woman; very different than my father. She was sort of outgoing when my father was a bit quiet and studious and my father's favorite thing in the whole world was reading. He read everything inside. He was very well educated even though he didn't have a lot of formal education. He's one of the smartest people I knew. My mother was very different, but they got along really well they had a very close relationship. I never got to go to Northern Ireland. In fact, as an adult I'd been to Dublin and the rest of Ireland but never gone to the north partly because of the Troubles and finally a few years ago I went with my husband and my sister and it was wonderful. We went to Belfast and somewhere our grandparents had lived, and all my grandparents came to the United States when I was about eleven or twelve. My uncle came first and then my grandparents and then all of my mother's family. Everybody from Ireland came and as they came they would stay in our house. We had a nice home my parents and my father did really well and eventually became fairly well-off. But when I was young we didn't have a lot. We lived in a small three-bedroom house in the suburbs of Philadelphia and we had all of these relatives. It was like an ongoing thing. My mother's family comes and we get relegated to the sofa or the sleeping bags or something. My grandparents took over a bedroom or whatever so that went on for several years until they all got settled. Eventually they all did and found jobs and or started businesses or whatever around the Philadelphia area. So, we did have eventually a large family. When I was younger before they came we had no family other than my parents which was difficult. We lived in town where everybody sort of had a similar background and both of my parents were from other countries, both of them had accents. It was difficult. We were also Jewish. We were brought up Jewish even though my mother wasn't Jewish, religion wasn't important to her, but my father I think he just because of what happened to his family he wanted to carry on their traditions that we did that. And one does Hebrew school and Sunday school and all that, but we were the only Jewish people in the community and that was difficult. I remember going to a Hebrew school and not telling anybody where I was going which is terrible. It was bad. That was awful. But, you know, when you're a kid you don't want to be different from anybody else.

MF: So, we heard you have a sister. Do you have any more siblings?

RC: I have a brother and a sister.

MF: A brother and a sister... are you the oldest, youngest?

RC: I'm the oldest.

CM: What town in Pennsylvania?

RC: I lived in a town called Springfield, which was outside of Philadelphia. It was a suburb of Philadelphia.

MF: This may be jumping ahead, but like when did you come to Massachusetts.

RC: I came. We came here in nineteen ninety....[pause] We had lived in Massachusetts earlier when we were first married. We moved to South Weymouth and my oldest son was born there. We lived there for about four years and then my husband's job took him someplace else. We ended up living several different places and then in 1998, all our children were grown. We had moved to Indiana because of my husband's work. We both did not like living in the Midwest we are not Midwesterners. We had always liked Massachusetts. Our oldest son moved here; he lives in Townsend, Massachusetts. It's north of here. And my husband said, "Would you like to move to Massachusetts?" and I said, "No, I don't know at this point whether we should move again." But he said [laughs]—he didn't have a job here. My husband's the kind of person I think just Sakes up his mind. So, he said, "Well let me just see what's doing." So he sent out some resumes and within two weeks he had an interview and within another week he had a job offer and I still wasn't sure. Now I really wanted to come, here but I was a little uneasy about it, but we came out and I found a job right away too, so it worked out okay. We've been here for 22 years now.

CM: Just to go back to talking about when you lived right outside Philadelphia, what was it like or how long was it or what age were you when the rest of your family started to come?

RC: From Ireland?

CM: Yes.

RC: Well, I should say my father's family also came he only had two family members left after the war. His sister and one brother. One brother was killed by the Nazis, but his parents, his mother his father, died earlier, but he had a sister and a brother who had been sent to Scotland and they were there during the war. So, after the war they eventually were able to come so they lived near us. And then my mother's family started coming in the 60s—late 50s I think like 1958 something like that they started coming. Yeah that's about right. and by the time I was in high school, her family was in the United States. So.

CM: Yeah

MF: So just kind of like going off that you mentioned you went to the Hebrew school in high school so what was your education? Where did you go? Did you go to college?

RC: I finished high school in Springfield High School, went to Hebrew school and Sunday school and actually I did like it a lot. And it's funny because people say, "Oh they didn't get much religious training," and you know I always answer the Bible questions on Jeopardy—my husband looks at me, but I paid attention. When I graduated I went to college. I went to Penn State and I majored in English with a few detours because I kept—I'm still this way, I see something in the catalog that looks fascinating I take it, and I think I want to change my major, but what would I do with that. But I did get a liberal arts degree. I met my husband there my freshman year on a bus and we've been together ever since.

CM: You said that when you first started Hebrew school you felt different because everyone in your town was similar.

RC: Yeah.

CM: How did that change your experience or how did you feel.

RC: I think I wanted so badly to fit in when I was really young. As I got older, I realized that was important. And I think it's made me appreciate people's differences and diversity and I've always liked knowing people of different backgrounds and different cultures. I think that's a really important part of who we are as people, that we are much more connected and much more similar than we are different. One of our kids is adopted, in fact he's Asian and that was a really good experience for our family too and made us much more aware of how much alike we all are.

CM: And what made you want to adopt?

RC: I think part of it might have been my father's experience. In the back of my mind I always felt that the people who raised him—it was just an important thing. So that is part of it. Part of it was during the Vietnam War we were seeing on TV every night about these things that were happening to the kids over there and I had two very healthy kids here and I had to say I felt a little guilty about it. I would say being Irish and Jewish makes you doubly guilty about everything, it's those two cultures with this burden of guilt. So, I guess I felt like I had these really healthy wonderful kids and there were always children that weren't doing well at all. And we knew someone that had adopted from Vietnam and it was a good experience. We got involved with that and that's how we got our son Dan.

MF: Just kind of relating all this back, you said you've kind of started looking back and you wish you appreciated going to Hebrew school and just taking in your culture more. Did you start to do that as you got older?

RC: Yeah, I met more people like me naturally in college. There were a lot of Jewish kids. So, I got involved with them and that helped a lot. My husband's Jewish although he was never very religious. In fact, when we met, I was probably more religious than he was. But his families were Jewish and everything, but I always think it was really good having these two backgrounds

and two cultures. And now I'm really happy that I have that. it's really important to me, and I know I never try to favor one over the other. I mean I'm just interested in both Irish Literature and Irish culture and Jewish culture is really rich and the food is [laughter] really good.

CM: Did you ever feel growing up that your parents fit like specific stereotypes for the woman of the household or the man of the household.

RC: I don't think that it was something that she thought about a lot. And that's sad to say I guess I guess you know that their times were so different. It was just the way your family was, and it was the way you were. Although my grandmother was a very strong independent woman with my mother which is funny because my mother is the one that left home to move 3000 miles away with a man that she'd only known for a couple of years. But my mother was never that independent. She was very dependent on my father. My father was very protective of her which I think has a lot to do with his background. I think he was trying to take care of his family as much as he could. You know he didn't want anything to happen to us which I can understand. But I remember one time my, mother never worked and I remember one time around when I was in college or maybe when I was still in high school, I remember my mother said there was a new shopping center that opened near the house it had Strawbridge's which was a department store in Philadelphia. And it was my store. My mother said maybe I'll go over to Strawbridge's and get a job. She said it would might be fun to work there. And my father said, "Oh you'll just put me in a higher—I'll have to pay more taxes." I mean he didn't tell her she couldn't do it, he just didn't encourage her at all. And so she never did it and she wouldn't do that. And my father worked until he was about 70 I guess. And my mother. She wouldn't do anything without him. I used to say to her, "Why don't you join this or that," and she just wouldn't. You know if my father was there, she would do it. But if he wasn't, she didn't. Yeah, just different.

CM: Do you think it was just the times that it was?

RC: Most my friends' parents were the same. Not that many women worked. If they did as teachers or maybe a nurse.

CM: Did you ever feel like you had to do the same thing.

RC: No except that when my children were very young, I really felt like I should be at home with them. And looking back I don't think that was that necessary. I look at younger people now and children who are still really young go off and work. My daughter-in-law does. And I think that's fine. And I think I might have been a better parent if I had done that, but I didn't. And to be honest none of my friends did. We were all home when our kids were little. No, I went to work when the youngest was in second grade, I think.

MF: So, just kind of go back to your parents and how they had those norms. Did you ever feel as if because you had a sister and a brother, did you ever feel like they were kind of like I don't know how to phrase it, your brother had different like expectations or roles?

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RC: Absolutely. My sister and I have talked about this. Yeah, very different. Part of it was when my brother was fairly young he had been ill, and it turned out not to be anything serious but at the time they didn't know, and he was in the hospital. I think for two weeks or something. My parents were frantic, and you know they really thought it was something bad and finally they figured out what it was. And he was okay, but I think that that experience maybe made my parents overprotective with him. So as a result, they didn't ask him to do anything. My sister and I did all the chores around the house. And to be honest maybe we didn't mind it as much. We were more likely to help my mother or my father and my brother. He didn't do anything. But then when we got out of school, my brother—it was during the Vietnam War and people were getting drafted. They were afraid he was going to get drafted. My father I don't know. I can't remember what it was—how my brother—my brother finally flunked the physical or something really minor. So, he didn't get drafted I think that was it. But then he didn't have a job when he got out of school—college—and my father gave him a job. And by this time my father owned his own business. He worked for a business right out of the army and out of the military and he finally purchased this business when I was a young adult. And he was doing very well. But he brought my brother into the business and gave him a really good job and his own car, got a Corvette as a company car. Nobody gets a Corvette as a company car. My sister and I used to work for my father in my father's office every summer and weekends and stuff and we would answer the phone and do filing or go out and help in the factory if they needed us to. We did everything you know. And my brother did not do very much. And all of a sudden, he's like, you know, the guy. I think he had business cards that said vice president or something. So, my sister and I we said, “What gives?” If we needed a job, if we wanted a job after school, we would have been working in the office, we would've been a secretary or something. So that was the difference.

CM: Is he the youngest or?

RC: He's the middle one. Yeah.

CM: Interesting.

RC: And then he married a woman who is an attorney with a high-powered law firm and did really well [laughter] and not his own doing but he lucked out. No, I lucked out. I really did.

CM: What kind of company was it that you're father...

RC: My father had a clothing company In Philadelphia and they manufactured men's clothing, and he had worked for the uh right out of school he'd worked there and then when he came out of the military went back there and he worked there for years and years and then the owner passed away. Probably the 1970s, and they were going to sell the company. And my father was panicked because he'd always worked there, and he had a good job and everything. But the people that were going to buy had a bad reputation in Philadelphia for running companies into the ground and taking all the money out. So a bunch of businessmen—says a lot about my

father—a bunch of businessmen in Philadelphia approached my father and said, “Would you be interested in doing this? Of buying the company.” And he said, “Well I can’t afford to.” And they said, “We’re willing to help you.” So my father ended up—my mother and father mortgaged their house which I thought was gutsy. They were in their 50s at this time about 50. Yes, and they mortgage their house. And then these people, a couple of different people, put money up for it. So he was able to purchase the company and do really well for a number of years and then you know men stopped wearing business suits and they really just couldn’t survive with the imports and everything. He managed to get a good living out of it for about 20 years.

MF: So you said you worked in the offices or even in the factory. Was that like your first job or only job growing up?

RC: Oh no I had other jobs. That was probably my first job. I was about 13 or 14. I used to help them—they used to put these catalogs out every summer for the fall and they would send them to stores all over the country and they would send out thousands of them and I would help them. I would stuff the envelopes and put the catalogs in the envelopes and address them. And he would pay me. I forget what used to pay me. It was like a nickel or something like that I don’t know. But anyway, I did that effort for a long time and then I eventually worked there more often and more regular kinds of things. But I worked other things I worked in a post office sorting mail, at Christmas I used to work at E.J. Corvettes which was a discount department store and I did that for a couple of years at the holidays. Try to think what else. And a bunch of kind of nothing jobs. The kind of odd jobs you have in high school. Babysat a lot.

CM: So did you get a job right out of college?

RC: No. I’m trying to remember. Yeah I did actually. What happened was, you know, in some ways I fell into the same thing my mother did in doing what my husband was good for him. After college he went to graduate school, and we stayed in Pennsylvania and there really weren’t any jobs. Everybody had a college education and there weren’t that many jobs so we ended up working in a law office for a couple of years, and then we left and we moved to New York, but at that time I was pregnant with my oldest son, and so I didn’t work then until my youngest son was about seven.

CM: What did you want to do with your English degree?

RC: I don’t know. I think I wanted to write.

CM: Yeah?

RC: I think so, but I never did that much.

MF: What did you end up doing instead?

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RC: Well, I had a bunch of different jobs then too! When my son went off to school, I got a job at his elementary school. I was an aide in a class with children with learning disabilities, which I really liked. I enjoyed that a lot. It was very rewarding. I never wanted to teach, but I ended up liking that a lot, but once again we moved! [laughter] But it was my husband's job, and you know I say it was his job, but it was an opportunity for the family too, and I have to say, I kind of enjoyed it. It was always an adventure for me. So we moved, and then we moved back to Penn State actually. My husband was working there, and I started volunteering at a women's center, and I was a domestic violence and a sexual assault counselor and worked on a volunteer basis. And then a position opened up there, and they hired me as a regular staff person, and I did that for a number of years, and then our local district attorney was opening up a position for someone to work with victims of violent crime and they were mostly sexual assault victims, and I ended up getting that job and I worked for him for a few years. Then we moved again! [laughter]... So anyway...

CM: What was your experience like working at that women's shelter?

RC: It was just an incredible experience. I learned so much, and I had been a little interested in it, domestic violence, right before that. Kind of something had triggered me to fall into volunteer there, and what had happened was when my kids were little, I was at the playground one day. They were playing and I was sitting next to this lovely elderly woman, probably about my age now, probably a little younger actually, and we were chatting and she was with her grandchildren and she said since her daughter was killed she tries to spend as much time as she can with her... well she starts talking to me, and she starts to cry. She told me that her daughter had been murdered by her husband, and anyway... so that was that story. And a few days later I was with a friend, we used to go to this lake together with the kids and I'm at the lake with her one day and the kids are in the water playing and we're watching our kids and I told her about this conversation I had with this woman, because it really kind of shook me up. And she said that's horrible, but she said that, "I never told you what had happened to me," and she told me how—I knew that she had been married before. This was her second marriage, and that her son was from her first marriage. She said that she had been married before, and when she was pregnant with her first, with her son, that her husband had started to—he had always been abusive, but it started to get worse, and he started beating her when she was pregnant, and she said she had to call her parents one night and her father came and got her out of the house and the police came too. It was a big thing. But anyway, they got her out of the house, and she never went back and she divorced her husband. In fact, she was going through an annulment thing then. She had already divorced her husband and had remarried, and the man she married was a wonderful guy. He worked with my husband in fact, and our kids played together. And she was getting an annulment from her first husband, even though she had already remarried, but anyway, but that was her story. So it was like, oh my God, in two days I've talked to people who had these horrible experiences. I wasn't even aware that that—I mean I knew it happened, but I didn't think it was ordinary people you know?

MF: Yeah

RC: And so, when I was in Pennsylvania, I saw this article about this women's center that worked with victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, and I thought that that's something I want to find out more about, and that's how I got involved, and I learned so much and I met so many wonderful women over the years. [pause] Young women, older women, women from all walks of life, you know, people who think domestic violence only happens in certain groups of people are totally wrong because we had women who came in who were married to professors, or women who had wonderful careers and their boyfriends beat them up, and we had women from Appalachia because we were on the border of that also. Women who were desperately poor, and who were also victims of that kind of abuse. So, it was really very educational for me and very consciousness raising.

MF: Did you continue kind of like helping people? Because like from learning disabilities to domestic violence you seem like a person that likes to reach out and help

RC: [Laughter] I never saw that connection to be honest!

MF: But just like, did you think that maybe you were drawn to situations that you wanted to maybe, like help?

RC: Maybe, maybe...

MF: And did you continue to do it?

RC: My father always said, "The only purpose in life was to make a change, and that hopefully the world would be better a little better in some way with you being there." He always said that. I remember, I bet if I had asked him later on if he ever said that he would say, "I don't remember saying that!" [laughter] but he did. He said it when I was young and he said it more than once, and it always stuck in my head, you know? It was something that I felt was important. So yeah, I think it was, and the jobs I had after that were connected to that in some way, except for a little while when I worked for a bookstore [laughter] which was wonderful as well!

CM: Connected to reading and your love for English, do you think you got that from your father too because you said he liked to read?

RC: No... well maybe because he did like to read, and I would always read the books he liked, but I also think part of that's my Irish background.

CM: Yeah

RC: You know, there's so many good Irish books my grandfather loved to read too, on my Irish side, and I still have the volume of Shakespeare that he gave me [laughter], and again, he was somebody that didn't have any education. I don't know how high he went in school. I don't imagine very high, but he knew all the Irish poets, and he read Shakespeare, and I think that's amazing.

CM: Yeah, that is amazing.

MF: So you said that they didn't go high in education, but did they value education?

RC: Yeah

MF: Did they want you and your siblings to go to college and everything?

RC: Oh yeah. I always knew I'd go to college, by the time I was little. My mother said that when I was born, she was in the hospital and she said she was holding me and the nurse was in the room, and she said to the nurse, "I wonder where she'll be twenty years from now." And the nurse said to her, "Oh, well you're going to America. She'll be in college." [laughter] Because in Ireland women didn't in that period. Women didn't go to college that often because of the depression and the war you know that was just... it tore peoples' lives apart, but I thought that was funny. My mother always told me that you know, she knew from when I was an infant.

CM: That's interesting. [pause]

RC: I'm talking to much aren't I? [laughter]

MF: No! This is the point of it.

CM: No, it's perfect! Do you know how many times you ended up moving?

RC: [pause] hmm... I think we've had about six houses.

CM: Wow. Did you ever wish you stayed in one place for longer or... because it was always for your husband's job, correct?

RC: Yeah, well I think once we moved because we had outgrown our house, and we moved within Pennsylvania. We lived in Pennsylvania for a long stretch, and our kids—we were there for sixteen, eighteen years, something like that, and at one point we did move to a little bigger house, but yeah most of the time I didn't mind it. Actually, I kind of liked it, and it was always a new opportunity to explore new places. When we moved back to Pennsylvania to State College, where Penn State is, I was really happy about that move because I thought it would be a more intellectual environment for the kids to grow up in, and that they would... the schools would be

better. We had been living in New Jersey and the schools were not... they were okay, but you know, it wasn't that stability and I thought it would be better in Pennsylvania. And I liked the area a lot being near the mountains and it was really beautiful. So that was a good move, and we were there for quite a while. It's funny because I never... when I was much older, after we moved here, I thought maybe I shouldn't have moved around so much, but then I couldn't think of any place I would have wanted to give up. I mean, every place was a good experience. We met people, you know, that were interesting and I think it was a good experience for our kids, but although our kids have said, my oldest one especially, the younger ones felt like they lived in Pennsylvania their whole time they were growing up because they were not that old when we moved there, but the oldest one was a little older and he complained sometimes that we moved him around so much. But then I heard Tom Hanks talking about that [laughter] and he said he moved around all the time when he was a kid and he said not only that he said, "My mother had three husbands so he said every move was a new father!" but he said, "They were all great people, and I loved it!" I told my son that, I told him that it's all how you look at things.

MF: [laughter] Yeah, so just kind of off the moving thing, like connecting it now back to Worcester, kind of jumping ahead, so...

RC: How did we get here? [laughter]

MF: How did we get here? [laughter]

RC: Well, my oldest son did move to Massachusetts, and the other kids were kind of living all different places. We were out in Indiana. The idea was, we were going to stay there until retirement, and then move back east because we didn't want to live in the Midwest particularly. My oldest son met somebody here, got married, and bought a house, and it was like, "Oh, he's gonna be here for a while!" We had come here for the wedding, and it was at the wedding, because we just loved being back in Massachusetts, and my husband said, "Wouldn't you like to live here?" and I said, "Yeah I would, I really would" So he made it happen, it wasn't me. He just... he's that kind of person. If he makes up his mind on something, he does it [laughter]. He's very... I don't know, proactive with that stuff. I probably would have waited. I would have said, well, we will move in five or ten years when you retire, but we came and it ended up being a really good experience. I'm so glad we are here. I love Worcester. When we first moved here, I thought, "Oh, Worcester is not that nice of a city," and it has grown on me, and its changing also, but it has also grown on me, and I value it now. I love it. I think, I walk around, I see the architecture. It's so beautiful, and it's very different from Pennsylvania, but I really do like it here. I like being fairly close to the ocean. We can drive. We couldn't do that in central Pennsylvania. You couldn't drive to the beach for the day.

CM: Do your other children live close too?

RC: No. One still lives in Indiana, which is funny because he was off doing his own thing when we moved to Indiana, and he came to visit us right before we moved, and I said, “We’re moving back east,” and he said, “Yeah, I am too. I’m only coming for a short... I’m only visiting,” and we left and he ended up staying. Long story, but anyways he’s there [laughter]. And our youngest son moved out west. He’s in Seattle. He kind of moves all around. He’s a drifter.

CM: Do you get to see them often or?

RC: I see our son in Indiana fairly often, and we have our oldest grandson, we do see him a couple times a year. We honestly see our son in Massachusetts the most because it’s only an hour away, and when their kids were little I used to watch them a lot.

CM: How’s it being a grandmother?

RC: Oh, I love it! [laughter] it’s fun. Having good grandkids helps. But I guess every grandparent thinks theirs are the best so [laughter]

MF: Okay, I’m trying to think so just kind of, because it is for Worcester, you said you love the city, and it has grown on you and stuff. Do you have any like involvement in it that helped grow like did you partake in any activities here that helped?

RC: Well, I worked here for a little while, and then I retired, and right after I retired I got involved with WISE [Worcester Institute for Senior Education], and it’s such a wonderful program. I’ve been in it since I retired. Well, I retired and I was about 60, 61, so I’ve been it for maybe 12, 13 years, something like that. And I love taking courses. I always missed college. I always thought I’d go back and get a master’s degree or something. I’d always planned to do that, and it never happened, so this is wonderful. It’s better than getting a master’s because I don’t have the stress [laughter], and I just take courses for fun, and I can take whatever I want, and take interesting classes. I’ve met interesting people. We have such a diversity of people from all different backgrounds, which has been wonderful. So, that’s been really good. I’m involved in a couple of different book clubs, and I gotten involved in some political things and stuff in Worcester, and that’s been really good. Anything else?

CM: Do you ever think about... I know this is going back, but do you ever think about going back again to Ireland?

RC: Yeah, we’ve thought about it. Right now I think what I would really like to do is go back to Germany actually. I’ve never been to Germany, and I grew up in a family where Germany was, it was a bad word. You didn’t talk about it. You didn’t buy a German car. Both my parents had very bad experiences in World War II, and so I never did, but a number of years ago I... after my father passed away, he left a shoebox full of letters from my grandmother in Germany, and I had those translated. It was a really interesting experience. I found out where the family lived

different relatives that I didn't even know that had existed. So, I started doing a little research, and I found out kind of what had happened to a lot of them, and so that's what I'd like to do. I'd like to go to Germany, just to see where they lived and where—I know the ones that died before the war, if there are any graves left, I don't know if there are, if they were all destroyed, but...

CM: You said earlier that your father was more like quiet, reserved...

RC: Yeah

CM: Do you think that was like part of the reason why, because it was what he experienced, and like his family

RC: I don't know. I'm not sure... maybe, I don't know.

MF: Do you ever wish you poked more as a kid and asked more questions as a kid?

RC: Yeah... yeah I do. Partly because, one of the reasons why I didn't was because I always felt that maybe it was painful, and when he did talk about his family, usually it was good things. He talked about foods that his mother used to cook that he remembered, and he would talk about going to visit his grandmother in, and his grandmother lived in Bavaria, and they would go there in the summers and they had chickens and they would go in the woods and pick mushrooms and berries and he would tell me stories about that. It just sounded wonderful, you know, but he didn't often talk about when things got bad there. I knew he had an uncle who had been murdered before the Holocaust. He had been murdered in 30s and had been picked up by the Gestapo, and taken to Dachau, and had been murdered, but I never found out about the details about anything. My father did leave a little bit of a—he wrote a little bit of a memoir which gave me some clues I was able to follow up on some of it, and the internet is wonderful for doing stuff like that, but there are still big gaps that I'd like to find out more about that.

MF: So, we have about fifteen minutes before the hour is up, so just like having your mom and dad be kind of different people and stuff, do you think they played a really big impact in how you turned out? Do you think the reasons maybe you... even though you don't really notice that you gravitate towards helping people is because of how you were raised?

RC: Yeah, I think so. It's hard to imagine that your parents wouldn't be the biggest influences, at least for the first part of your life you know?

MF: Yeah [laughter]

RC: Either you want to follow and emulate what they've done or you want to rebel and do exactly the opposite you know? In some ways, I've done a little of both because in some ways I did want to follow [pause] I think that they were both a little bit adventurous when they were

young, and I think that idea of being able to pick up and move was something that both my parents did... under different circumstances, but they did. I remember, we lived overseas too, I didn't tell you about that [laughter]. We lived on this little island on the Pacific for a couple of years, my husband and I and our kids, and when we went I remember my mother and father being really upset that we were going because it was so far away and we had little babies and my mother said to me, she said, "I can't tell you not to go," she said, "Look how I left." So she said it's important to...

CM: Was the for work too? That move?

RC: Yeah

CM: Where was it?

RC: Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands. It's a little island. It's about five or six flying hours flying time from Hawaii, and it was only three miles long and a half a mile wide out in the middle of the Pacific. [laughter]

CM: Wow

RC: And we went out there with 2 little kids. We adopted our third child while we were out there, but yeah it was a bit of an adventure I guess, so a lot of people say, "How could you do that?". I don't know, my mother's blood, my father's blood [laughter].

CM: Did you enjoy it though? Was it beautiful?

RC: No. [laughter] No, it was very isolating. There were a lot of people there I should say because all these companies were out there. My husband worked for Raytheon at the time, they were there, G.E., MIT had a lab there, all these different companies and Atomic Energy Commission. Everybody was doing studies and things out there, and so there were a lot of people there, but it was very isolated. It was crowded on this little island, and they had, I can't remember, a thousand people in it maybe, something like that, and the only way you could get off, I mean you had to fly to go anywhere and it was a long flight. So you didn't go all that often, but anyways, what was I saying? How did that come up? [laughter] So I said that I think that maybe my parents had a little influence about that... I'm trying to think what else... I think my father's interest in learning and reading, that was always important to me. I do think I got that from him. Politics... our family was always interested in politics. We would sit around the dinner table at night, talk politics, we would argue politics, when the newspaper came in the evening—we had an evening paper in Philadelphia back then, and we read the paper. From a very young age I started reading the comics, and then was eventually reading the editorial page. I read a newspaper every day of my life I think as long as I've lived, and if it's not a paper paper,

it's online and we've always been interested in things like that, and my husband is too so we have great conversations [laughter], we always did.

CM: Do you ever wish or do you ever think about writing now?

RC: I do a little bit.

CM: Yeah?

RC: Yeah, every once in a while. I don't publish anything, but I do write things sometimes for me.

MF: From just like where you were as a kid, to a college student, to now, were there any times in your life where you were like... How would you define success in your life, and do you think you've been successful in it or has it changed over time that you don't really have a set definition?

RC: I've never thought of myself as a successful person at all, and it is a sad feeling in a way, but I honestly, I mean successful people are people that have had wonderful careers or they've earned money or they're at a job where they get paid very much. Luckily, my husband did [laughter]. I guess I've been successful in that I have some close friends, I have a wonderful marriage. I mean I couldn't ask for a better marriage really. I saw lots and lots of bad ones though. And I thought that when my kids were growing up I was the good parent, but looking back I'm not sure. But you do what you can, you do the best you can.

CM: Just to wrap it up and to get back to our class about women's studies, what do you think, or if you could give advice to women in today's society, because it has definitely changed over time.

RC: Oh has it!

CM: And it's still changing

RC: It really has.

CM: What would you tell them?

RC: I think to follow your dreams, to take risks. I was never a risk taker as far as career. I was always afraid of failing, and I would take little baby steps. A couple times I would be offered a job that sounded wonderful but scary, and I didn't take the risk, and I'm sorry about that now. I think that's really important. I think that it was important to try new things and to grow and I think that's one of the good things about WISE. It helps you grow.

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CM: Do you think today's society is more of an opportunity for women to take those risks?

RC: It is. There are more opportunities. There are still obstacles. There are still things that make it more difficult for women, and it's not a level playing field at all, I know that, but you do have more opportunities. Even just the fact that you know of people who have been successful. I mean we didn't have a lot of role models when I was growing up. You didn't know very many women that had done anything important or were very successful in careers when I was young.

CM: I think that wraps up, or...

MF: Unless you have anything else to add.

RC: No, I don't think so. This was really interesting. Hopefully I didn't talk too much! [laughter]

CM: No, it was perfect.

RC: But I think that this is a wonderful project. I think it's really good that you're doing this.

CM: Well, we want to thank you so much for participating in it.

RC: Well, it was my pleasure

CM: And it was so interesting to hear about your life story so thank you.