

Interviewee: Joan Gardella Forbes
Interviewers: Valerie Lusk and Matthew Ringstaff
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Abstract: Joan Gardella Forbes was born and raised in Worcester, MA. Throughout her childhood, Joan was surrounded by a very family-oriented culture. She was the first in her family to attend college. She went to Clark University where she received her bachelor's degree. She then earned her master's degree at Worcester State University. In the interview she shares that while has a degree in human services, she realized that this was not the field for her. She is very proud to say that she is a woman who was never unemployed with her eventual career choice as a technical writer. Music also has always been an important part of Joan's life, and she hopes to share the joy of playing musical instruments with children in Worcester. Joan finds satisfaction in volunteering within her hometown community and loves being active.

MR: Okay, so we are here with Matt, Val, and Joan and we are going to start our interview. The first question we would like to ask you is, what is your full name including both maiden name and married name, if applicable?

JF: Yes, my name is Joan Gardella Forbes.

MR: When were you born?

JF: I was born February 10, 1953.

MR: Have you ever been married?

JF: Yes, I'm married. I was married in 1980. I was 27 and still--- I'm still married to the same man.

MR: And you just told us his name was Bill?

JF: Bill Forbes, yes.

MR: Do you and Bill have any children together?

JF: Yes, we have a son, Daniel, who is 36. Dan lives in San Diego with his husband, William. I also have a stepson, Bill's son from his first marriage, Joe. Joe and his family live in Austin, Texas.

MR: Do you have any grandchildren?

JF: My stepson, Joe, has two children. Adda is 19, she's a sophomore at the University of Texas in Austin, and Will is soon to be 11 and he is in the fourth grade in Austin.

MR: Okay.

JF: And my son, Daniel, has no children.

MR: Okay, okay well now that we are out of the bio stuff, tell us about your parents. How did they raise you?

JF: Hmm, that's interesting. Well, you know, my parents were the children of immigrants, three of my grandparents came from Italy. My father's family is from northern Italy, and my mother's family is from southern Italy. Like a lot of people raised here in Worcester, in that time, in the '50's... I'm a member of the baby boom generation. We lived in the same house with my father's parents. They lived on the second floor, and we were on the first floor. My mother's parents were just across Plantation Street, so certainly in walking distance. We were Catholic [Roman Catholic], although not particularly observant or religious. I mean, we go to mass on Sundays, but I never really thought my folks were that into being Catholic. So, I was raised... My father was an ironworker, he was in the union. I was raised in a working-class Italian neighborhood here in Worcester. I would say working-class values; that you stay pretty close to home, being careful about what you say and what you do. You know, my family did not have a lot of money, nor did they have a lot of power. They had that sort of immigrant mentality still. Neither of my parents went to college, although my mother did go to... She got a certificate from the Worcester Art Museum, she liked to paint a little bit. So actually, I was the first one in my family to go to college. We grew up in the Plantation Street area and most of the kids in school were Italian so again it was a very, very close little community. When I was about 10, my folks bought a house in northern Worcester, which was a very big thing in those days, you know for people to buy a house. And then we moved there and went to Nelson Place School. So, I went to Bloomingdale [School], Nelson Place, and Clark, and sometime later I got a master's degree at Worcester State.

MR: There were a lot of interesting things you said in there that we are going to build upon--- trying to remember in chronological order... Was one of the first things you said that interests me, was you said a lot of your family lived around Worcester and you even lived in the same household. How did that affect the way you grew up?

JF: Well, the interesting thing about that is, as a kid, you feel like you are being watched by not only your parents, but your other two sets of grandparents closely. So, everybody kind of knew what was going on in the household. Let's say in terms of disciplinary problems, and one of my

grandmothers was much more involved in our lives I suppose although they both were, it gave you a certain sense of community, you know with your family you always knew what to expect. And interestingly enough, my family seemed very, and this is not at all uncommon, they seemed very, very stable and happy. But that was not the situation at all.

MR: Did you have any siblings?

JF: Yes, I have an older sister. She's 15 months older than me, her name is Francis. She went to the same schools I went to, although I don't think she ever went to Nelson Place. I think she went to Bloomingdale and then I think she may have skipped Forest Grove [Middle School]. I went to Forest Grove, and then she went to Burncoat [High School], and then she went to a nursing school here. And in those days, most nurses were not required to get a degree, so she just got a--- she was registered nurse it was called.

MR: Okay.

JF: So, she's 15 months older than me, she moved to Washington probably about 45 years ago, and my brother, John, is a master plumber, and he lives here in Worcester.

MR: Okay, so when you were a little girl, I'm just trying to get a sense of the household, there were two sets of grandparents, your parents, and you and your two other siblings. Any pets? [All laugh.]

MF: My father had beagles that he left in kennels out in the back because he hunted with them. Please remember we didn't live with both our grandparents, one set lived with us, the other lived across the way.

MR: But they were all really close?

JF: Yes, of course, it was a close family and, of course, we spent time with my mother's sister, and my father's brother. We would only socialize with our family.

MR: So, there was never anything out of the blue? Just normal family stuff?

JF: Yes, at that time, when I was a child up into my early 30's... Yes, I mean certainly there were tensions in the household, but it was fine with me, I was always okay.

VL: Did you notice any huge roles that were different between your grandmother and grandfather, did they have very different roles in the house?

JF: Well, interestingly enough, my paternal grandfather was a Worcester boy, but my grandmother, who was not quite 5 feet tall, and I think she wore size 4 ½ shoe, tiny little thing...

She had a huge personality. She came from Italy. It would seem from the outside, when you first meet them, that he would rule the household. In fact, she did. He was a nice, rough, fun guy. But she was very feisty, she moved to this country when she was 18 years -old. And she told me stories. She didn't know the language, she didn't know the customs. When the phone would ring or there was a knock on the door, she would freak out because she'd have to interact and she didn't know how to. I heard a lot about the difficulties she had, trying to make that transition as an immigrant, it was very interesting.

VL: It is. I can't even imagine that.

JF: Yeah, it was very interesting. And the other two from southern Italy, I really don't know much about my maternal grandmother. I know she came from southern Italy, but I do know my maternal grandfather arrived in New York, I think he was 17 years old, in February with no coat, and made his way--- ended up getting a job at Norton Company here in Worcester, which in those days was a coup, bought a house, bought a car, the sort of that ideal immigrant that makes it, it's kind of interesting.

MR: That's very interesting, the way that you and your sister were raised, was it different from the way your brother was raised?

[Laughter]

JF: That's a good one. You have to remember that it's an Italian family, we're going back 50 years. My sister and I always used to joke because on Saturdays we would have to help clean the house with my mother. And we didn't have a big house, but we'd all have our chores, and my brother would never ever have to do anything, we always called him the Italian prince. He never had to do anything, but interestingly enough, he manages three homes now. So yeah, he grew up and he does it all. But, at first, we were very resentful of him.

MR: Do any of your other family members live in the area? I know you said your brother does.

JF: My brother lives here, so I have a niece and nephew live here in Worcester. I have cousins in Framingham, a lot of my family has died, you know old age.

MR: What was your schooling beyond high school?

JF: I attended Clark here in Worcester, I have a degree in sociology from Clark. Then I went...Several years after I graduated from Clark, I went back to Worcester State and got a master's degree. Then I went back and retrained as a technical writer. I think I was about 33 when I retrained as a technical writer and that took me about a year and a half. And our son was in daycare at the time, then when he went to kindergarten, and then I worked full- time as a tech

writer. Before that I was in human services, because I was in sociology. I'm also an amateur musician. At that time, I was playing classical guitar. I picked up the cello about eight years ago. I was also teaching classical guitar and working in the human services.

MR: So, this was after college?

JF: Yeah, I mean I started playing guitar when I was in junior high, and then taught for a number of years, that was partly what I did in those days.

MR: So, you went to three different colleges?

JF: Yes, I went to Clark, Worcester State University and the Women's Technical Institute in Boston. I have no idea if they are still there, and that's where I got my certificate in technical writing.

MR: How did your experiences differ in each school?

JF: Well, Clark was at the time, I think I was there from '71 till '75, at the time Clark was largely upper middle class Jewish people, most from New York City. I was attracted to Clark because of its reputation, and it's more left-wing attitudes they espoused. But I was some way out of place there because of my background, and the fact that I was living at home. I can't say it was the happiest time of my life, but I do think it really helped me look at a problem differently than everyone else. I didn't hate it, but it wasn't the best time of my life. At Worcester State I was married, I had a baby, needed to get a master's degree to continue in human services. So, I went to school at night, I was focused on the baby. And then at the Women's Technical Institute, we had a tragedy, our family in.....

MR: Sorry

VL: If you need to take a moment.

[Joan tears up, causing Matt and Val to tear up. Matt reaches out to hold her hand in an attempt to comfort her.]

MR: I'm sorry.

VL: If you are not comfortable, you don't have to say it.

JF: Well, I just feel it has to get out there. In '84 my mother killed herself. And eight months later my father killed himself. So, it was a tough time, most things were colored by that experience in my life.

MR: Thank you for sharing that.

VL: Seriously,, you didn't have too.

MR: Now you got me upset.

JF: That's why I don't like to talk about it. But it was a very topsy-turvy point in my life. So, I was focused more on that. School--- I finished my undergraduate, I got through the master's program, and then I did the technical writing and that turned out to be a very good thing.

VL: Did you find that you had a passion for writing?

JF: Well, I always liked to write but was not a technical person. But I always liked to write and see it. Interesting because at that time I was working, counseling for women trying to get back in the workforce after a long time. And I can see that a lot of them were married young, may or may not have a degree, and either their husband left them, or they died, and they were not able to support themselves and their family. And I had a young child, and I was married and it had occurred to me that if anything had happened to Bill, I am not going to be able to support Dan as a social worker. I had a friend who was a technical writer. And she liked it and she was making money and I knew she wasn't the most technical person in the world. So, I decided to give it a try and I went to that school that I mentioned, and I was employed for my whole career. So, it was a good move.

MR: And you are happy with how it played out?

JF: Absolutely.

MR: At what age were you pregnant with Daniel?

JF: Twenty-nine, I had him when I was 30.

MR: Okay. Well, I think we are good on the education aspect and now we can get into the work section, and I know you've been going on about the work. I just want to follow the script.

JF: Sure, yeah.

VL: What was your first job?

JF: Well, I worked at a nursing home, which I hated. Then I started teaching guitar when I was 16. My teacher here in Worcester just had a ton of overflow of beginning students, and I got the job. It was great.

MR: Why did you hate your first job?

JF: The nursing home? Just very depressing... I knew at a very young age that working at a hospital was just not for me, I just didn't like it.

VL: So, it seems you have an interest in working with people, like guitar and nursing home, and helping to counsel women for the workforce. So, what made you realize you wanted to work with people, what about it? Did you like the connections made? What really made you open your eyes?

JF: To working with people? I felt it was my skill, I didn't think of myself as a very technical person, I didn't want to go into a math or science, computers were just sort of starting then. I was also very affected by the politics of the '60's, where you help other people, you give back. I wanted to do that, I wanted to feel like I was making a contribution somehow. The problem with that kind of work is the pay is really low, if you want to be realistic, it doesn't pay.

VL: Did you feel as though from the politics from the '60s it was hard for women to get into those fields or did you feel as though it was pretty open?

JF: It wasn't so much the workforce. I think I told you I came from a very traditional sort of family background. My mother's idea of I really wanted to be an archaeologist when I was a child, but that did not fit into the family...Pardon, at that time it was a nurse or a teacher. My mother wanted me to be a buyer in department store. That was just not my interest. So, I went into sociology thinking I could get into social work, and maybe I could become a lawyer. I just didn't know at that time what I wanted to do. So, I just stopped at the social work part of it. I looked into law a little bit, did not want to work the hours that are required for that. And then I was literally working at my desk and this flyer came across, advertising this program for technical writing. I thought that if I could learn the technical part of it, I can combine it with my interest in writing. And I knew you had to interview engineers, so I could still use my people skills, so that's kind of how I brought it together.

VL: So, you saw an opportunity and took it?

JF: Right, but if your question was, was I led into more female roles? The answer is yes.

VL: What has work meant to you?

JF: Well, I have always been.... My husband has always worked, and worked long hours, I knew I never really wanted to do that, I wanted to spend time with my son. Also, I had these other interests, I had these musical interests that I pursue. So, I was very fortunate to have a job where I worked 35-40 hours a week. It was important to me but wasn't the focus of my life. My job was

never the focus of my life. I enjoyed it. I did it everyday. I was well liked but it wasn't my focus.

VL: What were your primary responsibilities in terms of house care and childcare?

JF: Huh okay. I do the housework. One, I like it. I kind of consider it exercise. Two, my husband is a terrific slob. I knew that from the very beginning, so I did the housework, I did most of the childcare. If I asked Bill to do something, he'll do it but he won't initiate it. So, I have taken on those traditional female responsibilities. He does some cooking, he does most of the shopping. But yeah, I kind of like it, pathetically enough. [In a whisper] He's a slob.

VL: So, did you feel the childcare was balanced?

JF: Well, I think I just wanted to spend more time with Dan than Bill did, not that he disliked him, and he had his other son to think about. Joe lived with us when we got married. But Bill was just really into his work, and he just knew I was really into Dan. So, he just let me do it. You also have to understand at this time, he, was 16 months old from when my mother died. It was a great way for me to focus on something else other than that situation. So, I didn't feel burdened by it. Bill suggested to me to hire a cleaning lady while I worked.

VL: What do you think the pros and cons have been from the path you have taken?

JF: Well, I can say this, I wish I had studied more math and science in my undergraduate--- in my high school years. I definitely shielded myself from that because I didn't like it and didn't want to challenge myself. When I got into my job as a tech writer, I realized how really uneducated I was in math, so I wish I had done that more. Sometimes I wish I was more ambitious at work, but that's about it.

VL: Do you consider yourself to be active politically?

JF: Yes.

VL: Could you go into detail?

JF: Yes, [laughter] brace yourself. We are very liberal despite the fact that we were in Austin for 25 years. I know Texas has a very, very bad reputation for the conservative, and it certainly is very conservative. But Austin has this liberal enclave, in this huge sea it's this little liberal island. So we were quite involved in the Unitarian Church which we also belong to here. And that's a left-leaning politics, we support the Democrats, we hope Trump [President Donald J. Trump] is impeached, liberals.

VL: Do you do any volunteer work here in Worcester?

JF: Yes, I am getting ready to volunteer at the Worcester Chamber Music Society. It has a program called Neighborhood Strings where they provide inexpensive lessons and free instruments--- cellos, violins, and bows---to kids in underserved neighborhoods in Worcester. I will be helping out the teachers, help the kids get their stands up, and play along with them to keep them in tune. I'm going to start that Friday. I used to do quite a bit of volunteer work in Austin teaching mostly Mexican women computer basics.

VL: How did you feel about that experience?

JF: Oh, that I loved. I finished up my work, I was at a large corporation and very nice people and basically I loved it, but I was not basically an employee. It's kind of interesting thing, I was a long-term contractor, I started with a six-month contract, and that six-month contract lasted 20 years. So, so the advantage was I could come and go as I please. I didn't have to do any corporate stuff and I got pretty well paid so ... Sorry I'm afraid I lost the question.

VL: How did you feel about that experience in your life working with the Hispanic women?

JF: Oh so, I was looking for an opportunity to help women who were probably in the same boat I was in, you know the technical world, I don't know anything about this. So, I wanted to help them. It was fun. I liked that very much.

VL: That is awesome. Did you see any big differences in how these women were raised in compared to how you were raised?

JF: Oh yes. These are mostly women raised in small villages in Mexico. They had no opportunities. I have no idea what percentage of them were illegals. They come to this country in Texas, and work in restaurants. I think it's the same thing here. And hospitals --- many of them could not read, even in Spanish. Many of them were uneducated, completely uneducated. But even if you're working in, let's say a hotel or restaurant as you may know, if you continue to advance, you are going to have to learn how to use a computer at some point. They also had to learn it for their kids. The teachers were communicating, email and texting. They had to know how to write an email, what an email program was, how to add an attachment. You know all the things you take for granted --- to help their kids stay in school.

VL: How did it feel working with these women and did you make any connection with them?

JF: Oh yeah, it was great. I really think that I helped them because it was easy for me to empathize with them. And, yes, we had parties at the end. I liked that very much.

VL: Going back to the organization that you said you were going to join on Friday, how was that brought to your attention? How did you find that one?

JF: Well, when we moved back to Worcester, I started looking into the various musical organizations to get involved to meet people. So, I heard about Music Worcester and the Chamber Music Society. We went to several of the concerts, and I read about this neighborhood strings program. I play in a community orchestra in Worcester. It's called Seven Hills Symphony, and the cello section had a tutorial by the woman who is the musical director for this program. She was very nice, so I asked her if she needed help and she said she did.

VL: That's awesome. What are some of the main programs you are going to...Is it just going to be musical based?

JF: Yeah, the idea is, and I kind of like this, it's called Musicians as Citizens and musicians go out and, you know, do civic things, help the society. You know for some of these kids... I can tell you honestly when I was in grammar school if someone showed me a violin, I would be like I have never seen one of those up close! So, I expect the same from these kids. It will just give them the opportunity to expand their horizons a little bit. Also, so if you play an instrument, you know if you take it seriously and practice, it takes terrific discipline. You always have something to do. So, it is a great hobby. So, I would hope for some of these kids it will just broaden the horizon a little, that's what I'm hoping for.

VL: Yes, it will. Do you feel as though the music is a huge part of who you are and why you are involved in these things?

JF: Yes, I don't really know, I suppose, it was the Beatles.

[All laugh.]

JF: I suppose it was. I was 13 so this was '65. A lot of people were playing the guitar. You know the whole hippie folk thing was happening. It was a ball! I loved it! I loved the people I met. I loved my lessons. I did that for many, many years. In Austin, I played there quite a bit, and then about eight years ago I'm tired of the guitar, I want to play something else. What I wanted to play was the violin, this just seemed so hard to me. Holding yours up like this. So, I thought let me try the cello and I really enjoyed it. So, it is a really big part of my life.

VL: Do you feel there were any limitations trying to enter the music, with being a female?

JF: Oh yes, absolutely. First of all, I was not encouraged by my family, but I think that was mostly cultural thing. You know, girls do not become musicians, but then at that time it was mostly men in the guitar world. And I again was not competitive, I never saw myself as someone who wanted to become a professional guitar player, but I definitely felt like it was a boys' club, yes.

VL: That's awesome you are still able to make your mark.

[All laugh]

VL: We are going to now talk about healthcare, and how have you felt that health issues have impacted your life or those in your family.

JF: Well, personally I have been pretty lucky. I have had very few health issues with the exception of this arthritis stuff. I just have a lot of body aches so that worries me because I am quite active. I like to exercise a bit and I do worry that moving forward it will prevent me from doing the things I like to do: walking, biking, swimming and, of course, playing an instrument. So, I do worry about that a little bit. I am very careful about my health. I don't take any medications because of my family history, I do worry because of my family history about depression, so I have all these activities that I do to keep me balanced. My husband takes good care of himself, excuse me, but he has a few health issues, but so far, we have been lucky. Neither one of the boys have been sick, so we have just been lucky.

MR: Um, as of today, whose health are you responsible for besides your own?

JF: Well, my husband's.

MR: Your husband's?

JF: Yeah, my husband's, and our son, I suppose. You know, every once in a while. I have to give him a call still.

[All laugh.]

JF: But it's my husband's and my own, yeah.

MR: So, we pretty much banged through all of those questions. Now we get to get into more fun ones. The ones that I really want to get into is how old were you when you were allowed to date?

JF: Well, my folks kept a pretty close eye on us. My father never really said much of anything. He was not the disciplinarian, it was mostly my mother. But they let us know they wanted us to be pretty careful with the boys. So high school, you know. I was a junior, I never dated a lot, but I had a couple boyfriends when I was a junior and senior.

MR: Where did you go on dates?

JF: We would go to the movies. We would go into Boston to hear music, we would go clubbing. We would go drinking at 18. You know, I was a bit of a partier. So that's what we did.

MR: That was in Worcester, right?

JF: Yes, that was in Worcester.

MR: So, how has Worcester changed?

JF: Oh, Worcester has changed tremendously.

MR: Really?

JF: Tremendously, it is a completely different place. First of all, when I was growing up in Worcester, I went to Burncoat Senior High as I told you. I believe we had one black kid in our class. Virtually no black kids in the school. So, of course, the makeup of the demographics has changed. There are so many more minorities, I think the city itself looks a whole lot better. There's a lot of new construction. I think it looks great. I love the new can - do attitude here. I think Worcester is poised to change and be a much better place to live.

MR: So, you were in Texas. What inspired the thought to come back to Worcester? What made you want, you know ---- we were in Worcester we came to Texas we experienced it, let's go back to Worcester? What made you do this idea?

JF: Well, my son, Dan, moved to San Diego. I started to get tired of Austin. The heat is very depressing, and it lasts a very, very long time. After a while, it turns into the winters here. You don't go out in the summer. I was getting tired of that and also Austin became a very sought out place, so 70 people were moving to Austin every single day. That's a lot of cars that is a lot of people if you think of that over a course of a year. It just got huge. We lived in a very nice neighborhood in Austin, and it--- about a mile and a half from us they were going to be building a very large commercial facility, like acres and acres. And I could just see this little neighborhood we liked so much was going to be changing a lot. A lot of our friends were moving on, the heat, Dan moved to San Diego. So, we went out there a couple of times to see if we liked it, but we didn't like it. Also, it is very expensive. And you know always kept tabs on Worcester, so we just decided we wanted to get out of Austin. So, when we sold our house, because Austin is this very desirable place, we were able to come back here. So far so good. I wanted a city, but not a big city. So, you know, you would love it there. It is a place for young people, not old people.

Worcester is a better fit for us. It is a small city, very manageable. I also don't like to drive. I could not see myself driving in San Diego at all. But here I know the roads. So, it was the

familiarity, I wanted to be closer to my family. As we got older, I could see us being alone in Austin because Joe, my stepson, at the time was talking about moving to western Mass. So, it looked like, “Oh they are both going to be gone and we are going to be alone down here.” A lot of our friends were moving on, so we decided to come back here. And, so far so good. It was not a big adjustment. You know it was a big adjustment moving from Worcester to Austin, completely different cultures, a completely different culture. I acclimated to that and back here it was a bit of a shock, too. We have been in this house for about five years, the first year was kind of tough readjusting.

MR: Just to go off, just for second, from you, why did Daniel move to San Diego?

JF: Well, his husband, William, had been in service there and really liked it. They were very tired of the heat in Austin, and Dan liked his job but was not real crazy about it. So, they all just wanted to be in San Diego. So, Dan got a job there. They just went and wanted to give it a try, I think.

MR: Have they been there ever since?

JF: Yeah, they have been there five years or so. Dan has lived all over. He lived in Chicago, New York. Austin is where he grew up and he likes it very much, but he wanted a break from it.

MR: Why do you think Dan is so on the move?

JF: His jobs, his jobs. He worked in the wine business when he was in Chicago. Moved to New York for school. So, you know, he is just a curious guy.

VL: You mentioned earlier that you were the first one in your family to go to college. How was that for you?

JF: You know that is kind of an interesting place to be in because, and you have probably have read about this or you are probably in the same boat I don't know, you know when your folks go to college, they know the ropes. They know what to look for, what to do. They tell you how to navigate through it. My folks had no clue and I had to figure it out myself. So, it was certainly way out of my comfort zone. But I mean, what can you do? You just have to push through and do these things. You know how it is, the more you do the more you feel capable of doing. But I was guessing a lot.

VL: Do you feel because you went to college that it was important for your kids to go to college?

JF: Yes, absolutely and have a good job. And he knows that!

[Clapping]

[All laugh.]

MR: So, we keep jumping around from topic to topic.

JF: It's alright.

MR: It's only because this is the end of our interview. So, we are trying to find the things we find interesting the most. So, this one says, "Do you have any hobbies or leisure activities?" I'm assuming your music.

JF: I would say music, exercising, and we do a lot of socializing, cooking and having people over, you know, that sort of thing, go to the WISE program at Assumption.

VL: How is that?

JF: It's good! It's really good. We like it a lot, I like the classes. I spend a lot of time walking up there at Assumption, it is a nice campus.

VL: It's changing a lot!

[Laughter]

MR: That class is in Kennedy, right?

JF: Yes, the Kennedy Building, 119.

MR: I am there all the time because of football. Next time I see you, I'm going to have to stop in and say hi!

JF: Oh! Okay!

MR: I'm going to yell!

[All laugh.]

JF: I also go to Plourde [Recreation Center]. I exercise there at Plourde in the bad weather. Maybe I'll see you there, too.

MR: Our gym is right in there so... Now that I know you, you are going to be seeing myself around Worcester. How was your parents' education?

JF: Well, they were high school graduates. Like I said, my mother did go to the Worcester Art Museum and got some kind of certificate. And my father when he got out of service, he was in World War II. He was in the navy, he did not see any action, was stationed on the Galapagos Islands, and I guess had a ball, but did not see any action. He went to Wentworth Technical Institute in Boston. I do not know if that still exists. I do not think he got a degree or I do not think he even got a certificate. He took some classes.

MR: So, what was your parents work like?

JF: My father was an iron worker. My father was a union iron worker, and he worked every day. He would get a call every day, every evening after supper as to where he would be the next day. He would get a crew and it was mostly in central MA. For instance, he worked on UMass Medical School. He worked on a lot of buildings and bridges. His father did that type of work. It was very heavy manly work that they did. He loved it, he looked forward to going to work every day. And my mother stayed home until I think I was 13. Then she worked as a secretary in an insurance company.

VL: Was it important for, do you feel for the men in your family to be a manly man they had to be?

JF: Oh, yes, they were the men and they hunted. And um he was a character of masculinity. He was--- he wasn't the Tony Soprano [Character on television program, the Sopranos] type either. I do not want to imply that at all, but it was an Italian family and men were manly.

[All laugh.]

JF: However, you describe that right! They did the men stuff.

MR: Did that affect you growing up?

JF: Well, you have to understand when no one is talking about it, you think that well that is the way it is. That's just the way it is. My father did the shoveling and the mowing and my mother did the housework, and she took care of the kids. And everyone's folks did it that way, so that's what you saw on TV. So, I was born in '53. I never started questioning it until really the Women's Movement [Women's Liberation Movement].

MR: How was that?

JF: Well yeah, it was like, "Why shouldn't we do this?" It was a very eye-opening experience. I was never at that time --- in that time feminism could be, what's the word, strident. And that did not appeal to me. I did like the political aspect and the cultural changes. So, it was kind of a slow

understanding for me. But growing up I can remember it did not really affect me. Men's lives seemed more fun than women's lives, that I can definitely remember!

MR: And that thought came from?

JF: Just seeing it. The men had so much more freedom. The women were so constrained.

MR: Did you feel that way?

JF: I did definitely feel that way, absolutely. My sister was much more of a stay-at-home kind of good girl. I was a little bit more rebellious. I left the family a little bit more than what they would have liked.

VL: Was that because you were trying to get your own sense of freedom?

JF: Yes. I just had more of a desire to move beyond the family. I did not hate my family. I was not embarrassed of them. But it looked to me like it was a pretty big fun world out there so why not try more things? That sort of thinking was not encouraged in my demographic at that time.

VL: What could you relate to during the Women's Movement? What points during the Women's Movement, that they were making that you could relate to the most?

JF: That you could do things that were not prescribed, that you be a doctor or have your freedom to do things on your own. At that time, women never did anything on their own, never went anywhere on their own. Just the freedom to be who you are or who you want to be without the constraints of the stereotypical behavior...

VL: Growing up in Worcester do you feel you have seen cultural changes for the better? Do you feel big movement in the third wave of feminism that is making it look better? There are still issues that are not being addressed.

JF: You know, Worcester used to be, I think there would be a lot of people who still describe it as a blue collar town, meaning the education and the income level, but also sort of the matter of thinking right. But I am seeing Worcester become more and more educated, a little more cosmopolitan, people are moving here from all over the country, people who have seen and done interesting things. So, I am seeing Worcester become less parochial and little bit more cosmopolitan. With that comes women who do what they want to do and say what they want to say. So, yes, there are a lot of women owning little businesses and running for school committee. So, I think, yes, it is a better place than it used to be.

VL: So, for our last question, this is going to be a big one. How do you feel about the choices

you made in your life, and do you have any regrets?

JF: Well as I say, I do regret not studying math and science a little bit more. Sometimes I wished I had been a little more ambitious and focused a little more on my career, just put in a little bit more effort to do more. There was a situation but you know...But I do have that regret. I have some friends who are doctors and lawyers who talk about their careers. I think, you know, I could have done that, too, and have more of a career story to tell than what I think I do. But whatever...

MR: What are you most happy about?

JF: Well, I'm happy that I switched out of the human services. I am very happy I did that. That again... I was very out of my comfort zone and did not think it was going to work at all. You see the program was expensive, it was 1985 I think, and I had some money that was left to me when my folks died. And I thought do I want to spend all my money on this program when I was really unsure of it. Like I said, I was never unemployed, I was employed my entire career as a technical writer. I was very proud of that. Also, very proud of making that move to Austin and making it work. I had a very large circle of friends, and I was very hushed when we left by the response from these people. I really felt as though I lived and learned another culture very deeply and that it has made me a better person.

JF: I would recommend up and moving elsewhere for a while.

VL: Do you have any final advice for us?

JF: Yes, I do if you are interested. Take very, very measured careful risks, put yourself out of your comfort zone, and do not worry about it because everyone does it. Do not worry about looking at you, do what you feel you have to do. And just give it a shot and do not be afraid of failure.

VL: I appreciate you sharing your life story with us. That was amazing.