

Interviewee: Liza French
Interviewer: Jason Shrem
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Transcriber: Melanie Reid
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Abstract: Liza French was born and grew up in the farm surrounded, suburban area of Middleborough Massachusetts with her parents and sibling and is a 2019 Clark University Graduate with two bachelor's degrees in 'Media, Culture and The Arts' as well as Spanish. Consistently challenging herself academically, Liza enrolled in a Massasoit Community College Spanish course at a young age and was part of the first class to receive a degree in the Media Culture and the Arts major from Clark. After returning home for a while after graduating, Liza speaks about her return to the city of Worcester, exemplifying her love of change. Liza is ambitious as she works with Worcester youth at the Division of Youth Opportunities and still finds time for her other passions of art and podcasting in and outside of work. She is socially and politically active within Worcester Massachusetts and loves getting to know the City of Worcester through people. Her aspirations to try a bit of everything has led her to many wonderful and unique opportunities.

LF: You have my permission to record on October 24th, 2024.

JS: And your name?

LF: Liza French is my name.

JS: Okay so we'll get started. Thank you so much for being here. And, so let's start with, just want to talk a little bit about general information 'slash' family and connection to Worcester. So, if, you can just say your full name, including, your maiden name and married name is applicable, and a little bit about where you were born.

LF: Mhmm my name is Liza French, and I was born in Wareham, Massachusetts, and I grew up in Middleborough, Massachusetts, which is in Plymouth County, and I grew up, I lived there all my life. I, it's a fairly small town. It's kind of rural, Suburban, and it's one of the towns, Plymouth County in general is sort of a more conservative part of Massachusetts, and I definitely felt that in my experience growing up there. It's also a really quiet and beautiful place. There are a lot of farms there. It's fairly close to the beach, which is very nice. and it's again, it's pretty small, so I grew up like going to school with the same 100 kids, maybe 100 plus kids in my grade for like kindergarten through 12th grade, and I lived there with my two parents, Michael and Kimberly, and my older siblings, Chaya and many dogs and sheep and chickens.

JS: So, you talk a little bit about your family, do you want to say, do you mind saying something about what cultures or ethnicities you're familiar with?

LF: Sure, so I grew up well, so my family is white, and, I grew up, Jewish because my father is Jewish, and that was really important to him, and the, the family lore is that he made a deal with my mom. So, we were raised, it was really important to her that my older sibling and I have her last name. So, I have my mom's last name in exchange for us being raised Jewish, which was really important for my dad, so my mother was raised fairly religious in an evangelical Christian home, and that was something that she later did not continue in her life. And so, I, but she did go to church. So I went to the Unitarian Universalist church growing up with her, and I also went to Hebrew school, for a number of years, but I didn't actually end up getting bat mitzvahed but it's something I still think about doing sometimes, and that was a big part of my, my childhood. I, we did a lot of stuff at home, more so because there weren't a lot of synagogues nearby, and there weren't a lot of Jewish people living nearby, so a lot of my Jewish upbringing I learned at home - and it's, it's sometimes I don't really practice much now, and it's something I think about sometimes. But it's interesting because I don't really know, I'm not really super comfortable in a synagogue space because I didn't go that often and I also feel like maybe I don't know exactly how to do it at home for myself either, which is how I was raised doing it. So, but it still feels important to me. I, I also grew up very connected to my two parents' families. So, my dad's family, also Jewish, and my mom's family, a lot of different ranging expressions of faith, and so that was a big part of growing up, is being surrounded by a lot of people who have a lot of different religious beliefs. And I actually wrote my Clark college, or my college essay, not just to Clark, but to all schools about that experience and what it was, the impact it had on me to grow up connected to people who had so many different experiences.

JS: And what was that like in your neighborhood, growing up with having those, sort of religious experiences?

LF: I didn't experience it, well, my neighborhood growing up - I did not really know my neighbors [laughter]. So, we were like, the houses were all fairly far apart. There weren't a lot of kids that I at least knew in my neighborhood who I would play with I didn't like, it wasn't the kind of experience where you could, like, go outside and play with the other kids, like, no sidewalks, kind of far, people's houses or in the woods. So, I didn't have a lot of experience with the other kids. In school, I was definitely the like, capital T, capital J: The Jewish kid at school. Like there was nobody else, and it was kind of a thing. Every year I would take the High Holidays off. I'd have to explain to other kids why I was missing school, and they'd be like, I've never heard of that, and I'd be like, it's real, and I, you know, I remember I have one memory, and I remember somebody asking me why I hate Jesus and having to explain to them, like, I don't, I'm just different from you. That was in middle school - and I remember also there was an experience at the end of high school, you know, kids would make stupid jokes, and I was pretty, I think, emotionally mature about it, if I may say so. I wasn't like, it didn't, like, hit me super hard, but kids would make jokes like Holocaust jokes and Jewish jokes and, even kids I was friends with, and I'd have to explain like, 'well, I'm not going to like, laugh. Like, I don't think that's funny' and then they would be like, "why not?" I'd be like, 'like offensive' [laughter]. But I remember at the end of high school, we had they, we did like one of those walks where I think they call it a "privilege walk", where like they say a statement, and you have to like, step forward

if it applies to you. And I remember they they asked, like, has anyone ever made fun of you based on your, like, ethnicity or religion or race or anything like that? And I stepped forward and I remember people being like, "what?" And I was like, 'yeah, all of you guys' [laughter]. But again, it wasn't, I didn't take it very personally. It was sort of just an annoyance. Like it was like frustrating. But it didn't it - didn't feel like something that was, like, upsetting to me, per se.

JS: Yeah. And so, you talk about, moving on toward the end of high school and how- how did you build, your connection with Worcester and sort of the idea of going to Clark and moving into college?

LF: Yeah, yeah. So, I - like so many kids applied to way too many schools for college. and Clark was one in the mix. It was the school that my mom really wanted me to apply to based on the financial aid opportunities, which is a story that many Clark students have, I think and my older sibling had applied to Clark and gotten a pretty good scholarship. Didn't end up coming, but I was lucky enough to be the second kid. So, like, my older sibling and my mom kind of figured out how to do the college thing, and then I benefited from that. And so, Clark was on my list based on that, I was not super excited. I wasn't unexcited about it, but it wasn't one of my top choices, and it, I also was really grumpy about the college search in general. I was kind of like, terrible to my mom, which I've talked to her about [laughter] and she's like, 'it's okay' [laughter]. But I like, didn't enjoy that process, so I, like, I remember coming to Clark and, like, being like, "I don't even want to get out of the car". But we did tour it, I remember seeing it, it was cool. But I - I applied for the Leap Scholarship, which I don't think exists anymore. But it was a full ride scholarship with room, board, tuition included, and I got that scholarship and so that kind of sealed the deal for me. I was like, I, I really can't choose anywhere else - that would be a wild decision and I'm really glad that I came. Not just, I mean, the financial aid was pretty life changing, but Clark was a great school for me in the end. I really enjoyed coming here. I really had great experiences with professors who I still have to this day, who are mentors to me and who still check on me and offer me opportunities, which is ... Fantastic. and I, you know, I love Worcester, too, and so coming to Clark enabled me to get to know Worcester better, and I, you know, it's the place I've chosen to live and work now. I think I work with youth now in Worcester, and so I like to tell my college story that way, because I think that there's a lot of, like, romanticization about finding the perfect school and how fun it's going to be to discover your independence, and I think for a lot of kids, that is not how it feels to go through that process. but it doesn't mean that you're not going to end up somewhere that's great for you, and so, I like to kind of just add that dose of truth to the story because I think it's important for people to see, like. You know, like, you don't have to have that romantic like, pre- story to have a really great experience and go to a great place and make the most of an institution and its resources, so.

JS: You talk about your work which I want to talk about later. But I want to ask you about your - sort of your parents and how they sort of felt about your prior to committing to Clark. Is there any - Did they push you at all into education? Did they -

LF: No, I was really self-motivated as a kid in terms of school. My experience in my school growing up, although I had a really good experience there, it did not feel very academically

challenging to me. It felt pretty easy to get through school and I think that I did a lot in high school, like, I did too many things. Again, as so many kids do and I think that college felt like just something I knew that I was going to do, and I didn't even really have, didn't have a conversation with my parents about which pathway I would take. I think they also maybe assumed that I would be going to college, but more so based on my personality I think then, I mean maybe somewhat their preconceived notions of what I should do, but I think my relationship with my parents is that if I had felt very strongly about not going to college or about pursuing something else, I think that they might have been a little uncomfortable, but ultimately would have just tried to figure out how to, like, support me in doing that. My - my parents both have, they both have bachelor's degrees, and neither of them have any, I don't know what you would call the extended education - Graduate education, but they both are pretty self-motivated themselves and so, it's been interesting, I've talked to them since graduating, Clark, about grad school, and we've gone back and forth about that. But we're all - we're all pretty practical, pragmatic people, so I think it's, there's - it's not a lot of pressure. It's more a lot of, like, critical thinking [laughter].

JS: So, you said you were highly motivated, and you did a lot in high school, and I'm wondering what kind of things you did in high school, and did you continue to do any of those things here at Clark? Other than outside of your major, which we'll talk about, but yeah, sort of involvement.

LF: A lot of things that I did in high school, I continued. So, really early on I was a babysitter. That was like my first job. I did it both like at homes for family friends, but I also did it at my mom's church, that was my first official job. And I also did mentorship and mentorship experience in high school, where I put together an event that was kind of a like, I think it was like 2 or 3 days of intro to high school for eighth graders. And so, it was like they would come in. And then we organized all of these like workshops and days. And it was a crazy thing to organize, like looking back and like, 'how did they get me to do that?' But those experiences, I definitely continued to Clark. I did the mentorship program, "All Kinds of Girls", which was really meaningful to me. I think the two leaders who were in charge at that time, Fatima and Nia, were just like such phenomenal people, so open. They also taught me so much about working with youth and thinking about working with youth who have different experiences than you, or different backgrounds. Race, race, like all of those things thinking about, like how to do that in a way that's authentic and valuable, especially coming from a place at Clark where those kids are not necessarily, like financially in the same place as a lot of the students who are, like, mentoring them. So, they I think about them all the time. They were great leaders. So, continuing that at Clark was a really good experience. I also was a pretty serious runner for a very long time. So, in high school, I did eleven seasons of varsity running, and I came to Clark and continued running cross-country here. But I knew that I didn't want to choose a school for its athletic program, I just really loved running and team experience. So that was a big part of being here at Clark, I still run now. I still work with kids now. I also am an artist, and so I did a lot of studio art growing up. I did a program called "Art on the Spot" from when I was in first grade through maybe 10th grade. It was like an after-school art studio art program. Really, really cool. I loved that program. And then I continued pursuing media and arts here at Clark. That was my major.

JS: Okay. So, wow you're involved in a lot of things -

LF: Yeah [Laughter]. Yeah, I did theater in high school, which I did not continue here at Clark. I did a lot of stuff.

JS: What was, so, let's talk about, were there any challenges in Clark that were not necessarily associated with the things you were involved in, but more generally, like what were some of the challenges in your educational experience in college?

LF: In my educational experience?

JS: in college

LF: in college, just as a general? Well, I had a lot of I had sort of, I think college is like very socially awakening for a lot of people, and as I mentioned, I went to school for my whole childhood with the same group of 100, 200 people. So, they were people I was like, okay, I know everybody pretty well. I know the people who I vibe with. I know the people who I do not vibe with as much and like, we can coexist because we have to and, like, we'll just go through this experience together. And then when you come to college, you meet, like, a whole new group of people, which for some people, I think, like people who grow up in cities or even just bigger school systems like that might - maybe it's still kind of a shock, but maybe it's like feels a little bit more normal. You're like, 'oh yeah, I see new people sometimes'. And I was like, 'I've never seen a new person, ever' [laughter] but so that was a big experience was figuring out who I wanted to be friends with. I think that for a long time I had sort of this naive idea that I am just sort of interested in people, and so if someone comes up to me and I and I like them, I'll just, like, be able to be friends with them and I now don't think that that's true. I've definitely met people who I've been like, 'oh, like, I have no issue with you, you seem great, and also we do not connect, and that's okay, we don't need to be best friends'. You know, I also have had all of the friendship challenge experiences of like, people are dating and then they break up, but you're all friends and like, if somebody doesn't like somebody else but you do or you are, and then you find out you don't like them either, and then, you know, all of those things I think we're experiences I mostly had in college and didn't really have the opportunity to have earlier in my growing up years.

JS: So I want to ask you, if you could explain what you studied in college and if there were other areas of study outside your major and why you chose those, and if there was anything that you saw yourself doing at the beginning of college and sort of how they evolved over your years and what you decided you wanted to do after you graduated.

LF: Yeah, my favorite classes in high school were in my English classes. I love reading - I'm still a reader and I really enjoy the kind of modes of thinking that I think for high schoolers English classes, the main way you get access to that, where it's not like I don't love when there's like one right answer, I can do that - I do like puzzles, but like, I really enjoy and feel excited by discussions and conversations and multiple perspectives and tangled webs of thinking. And so English class in high school is the main place you can get that, but I think also I just had pretty

good English teachers, like they were the most fun to me. And so, I came to Clark, and I took one English class, and I was like mmmm no, I won't be doing that [laughter]. I think also, I didn't love that professor, and so a little bit of influence there. But so, I thought I was going to be an English major and maybe a writer, but I decided pretty early on I didn't want to do that. I did come into Clark Undeclared, and I was really adamant about, with all my schools about being able to be undeclared because, I just felt like asking a - I was 17, asking a 17 year old to, like, decide what they're doing for the rest of their life or even for the next four years, I was like, that's unreasonable request, and I won't do it. So, I was like, I'm going to be undeclared everywhere. And I came in undeclared, and I took screen studies with Professor Manon, who's still here, and loved that class. And he actually - he and I met before I came to Clark. He was like a professor I had, like, a meeting with to get to know the school, and so he kind of knew who I was already a little bit, and he actually had a conversation with me, not officially my advisor at that point about a new major they were starting called "Media culture and the Arts", and he thought that I would be a really good candidate for it. And so, 'Media Culture in the Arts' is an interdisciplinary major. You have to take classes in all five of the arts majors, which is, I can do this, I used to work at Admissions. So they are: studio art, theater, screen studies, art history and music and you have to take a class in each, but it's also interdisciplinary in the fact that it is both theory based, and practice based. So, you have to take theory classes where there's a lot of reading and writing, and you also have to take practical courses where you're making things, and I loved that major. That was great for me. I get bored really quickly with like one thing. So that was really fun to kind of like get to try all sorts of things. And like I mentioned, I got to do a lot of that, like reading and discussion and stuff that I really like. I also was I was a double major, so I did that, and then I took Spanish, and I majored in Spanish, and I just loved in, in high school, I loved Spanish. I actually, this is such a weird, like, little side story about me, but I when I was 13, 12 or 13, my mom bought a couch from a woman off of Craigslist, and we went to her house and she was a Spanish professor somewhere, I don't know where. She was in Massachusetts, and she got in a conversation with my mom about how important it is for language to be taught really early to kids and how they can, acquire those skills much better when they're, like, cognitively still developing their language skills early on. And I was like. 'Excuse me?' Like, my schools didn't offer any language until high school, so I was like, 'I have been robbed of my opportunity like, this is injustice'. So I asked my mom if I could enroll in a college course for Spanish at the local community college, and I started taking Spanish at Massasoit Community College and everybody thought I was a college student, and I was 13 years old [laughter], and they found out, like, in, like one of our last two classes, they were like, they were like, 'do you drive here?' And I was like, 'no, my mom drops me off because I'm a child' [laughter].

JS: That was when you first started.

LF: That was when I first started Spanish, and I just loved learning languages, so I did - I took Spanish starting then, and then I continued in high school, and then I just continued in college, not even thinking that I would major, just I knew I didn't want to stop and then they were like, oh, you only need two more classes because I also wanted to study abroad. I studied abroad in Seville. And so at that point, my I, she wasn't officially my advisor, but the professor who I was

talking with a lot, she was like, yeah, you obviously I should, major in this is going to be pretty easy for you to do, so I did, and it was really fun and I enjoyed it a lot.

JS: And just to clarify, when did you formally declare both of those majors? Because you double majored.

LF: Yeah, I did. I declared in MCA - these could be totally wrong. I think the end of my sophomore year, I was one of the first - I was like in the group of people who were the first ever to declare that major, and I declared in Spanish later, I think. But I, I had had that conversation with that professor early on, and I think maybe I just waited to declare for no particular reason. But she knew that that was my goal, and I was taking classes as though I was going to major. That might have been junior year.

JS: And did you study abroad Junior year?

LF: ... Yes. The second semester of my junior year.

JS: Second semester? And how was that?

LF: It was great. I really needed to, like, take some time off of Clark's campus, that was like, emotionally kind of a challenging time for me. I was just sort of struggling with, like, changes in life, and it was great. I also had just gotten mono and was very sick right before leaving, and so that was just sort of a dramatic experience. Like I was just the most sick I've ever been in my life, and so I recovered and then was able to go have this new experience and I learned a lot! I learned - A lot of life skills, important life skills, and I learned also how to feel stupid in a place and still be able to, like, figure out what I needed to do. So that was very empowering.

JS: So, you did a lot in your four years at Clark

LF: I did [laughter]

JS: So, I'm wondering now kind of moving into the the work section. Did you, did you go to graduate school right away, or did you get a job immediately after college or during college?

LF: Neither. So, I did not, I have not been to graduate school. I still just have my two bachelors' degrees. I graduated from Clark and moved back home for, I'm not even sure. Maybe it was like 6 or 7 months? and just tried to apply for jobs. I applied to so many jobs; I could not get a job. And that was really hard for me. I was like, I, I feel like I am somebody who has had a lot of support and recognition from teachers and professors in their life. So, I was like, I think I'm a good candidate. Why isn't this working? and you know that validation doesn't really apply to the processes outside of those schools, and that was, I really struggled with that. I also - I think it's just hard to in general. I mean, this is kind of an obvious statement, but it's really hard to start your job search with no full-time experience or even like prolonged part time experience, because there are so many people who have that who are also looking for jobs. But I mean, that

doesn't make you not a good candidate, it just means like, you really have to squeeze in somewhere and that can be really hard. So, I tried to apply for jobs for those like 6 or 7 months and like could not and was living at home and was very unhappy. Just because I felt like I was failing, not because- it was- my parents were really nice to me about it. I just didn't want to be there. And that is when I decided I'm just going to do it and move back to Worcester, because living here is not good for me, and I then started, like so many part time jobs over the course of the next few months. So, I worked, I knew some friends who were living in the area looking for roommates, and I was like, I'm just going to live with them. Done. So, I moved in with them. That was over on Granite Street. That was a great little apartment. I worked at the Worcester Art Museum as an art teacher. I worked at, that is when I started working for the Division of Youth Opportunities, where I work now a part time as a youth worker in Nelson Place Elementary School. That was really fun. I worked at Wegmans. That was really not fun. I worked, I also was, I had a couple freelance opportunities, so I was an associate producer for a podcast called "Writ Large" for the media company Himalaya. I wanted to be I - the jobs that I wanted to do were in podcasting. That is, my final thesis at Clark was a book podcast. And so, I was doing I wanted to work in audio. I worked at a nonprofit based in Rhode Island called "Red Tomato" as a sales associate for a little while, connected through my dad to that. I worked, I think I did other things- oh I worked at a coalition for Healthy Greater Worcester as an admin assistant and that was a really cool job. I really enjoyed that one. And I still work with those people now I actually have a big project with them, through my current job. But so that that is what I did, all of those jobs.

JS: And also, you said at the admissions office at Clark?

LF: did that before this time. So, I worked there as a student. Yeah. So those are all of my jobs outside of Clark. Honestly, I liked it. Except it was way too many different things, and I got really fatigued trying to keep track of all those things - and so, a job opened up, well mmm, Covid happened. Always forget about that! yeah. The pandemic started in February 2020. Like I remember March. everything - So some of my jobs were virtual already. Nelson Place Elementary School, we got the notice that they were closing for like a week or two and that was my job with the Division of Youth Opportunities. And then they were like, yeah, we're closed for the school year and then I still worked at Wegmans, that was my other in-person job at that time, and that was so bad. And I quit or I, I - they were allowing employees to like take to be like 'remain employees' but not work, and I was like, oh yeah, sure, I'll do that because I didn't want to commit to quitting. And then I was like, I'm just going to quit. I'm not coming back here.

JS: That was the only job that you had at that time?

LF: No, I still had all those jobs [laughter] but that was just the one that I quit at that time because it, it was the Wegmans in Northborough and I didn't like working there anyway, and then during Covid, it was just, like, pretty brutal. And it was very confusing at that time because I didn't, we didn't know, like, no one knew what was actually safe to do. But just like their protocols that they were putting in place where like, clearly just like perfunctory, they were clearly like, we have to seem like we're doing something and what we're going to do is like, yeah, just like space out the lines at the checkout, and I'm like okay. I still interact with - 70

people a day like this close to my face. So that doesn't seem right. And, and like, the customers were just, you know, people were panicking. Wegmans has a lot. They have, they sell alcohol. People are buying like a conveyor belt of vodka. I was just like this like I was like, that doesn't really affect me, but, like, I'm having a weird experience, so I quit.

JS: So, you mentioned the job that you have now, the Division of Youth Opportunities. When did you take that job?

LF: I started in May of 2022 as the community engagement specialist for the City of Worcester's Division of Youth Opportunities. I had been working for them part time through the pandemic on their virtual programming. I helped develop a podcast club for fifth graders, which was really fun, called 'Woo Stories' and that is kind of what I think got me on their radar as someone who would be useful to continue working there. And I, and I helped develop a few other programs, and I think that was a time that really tested a lot of people's skills and I just tried to make it work. It was really hard to work with kids online. Really, really hard. For both of - us and for them. And the person who had this job before me was leaving the job and recommended I apply. And so, I did. And that's how I got this job that I have now.

JS: So, I want to ask you, do you think you could talk about some of the pros and cons of the path that's led to where you are now? Are there any?

LF: Of course! I am just now starting to commit to spending time to invest in creating art and creating creative work that I think through the course of that journey I described, I really stopped doing that and let go of creating artwork that is like, valuable to me. I, you know, I was doing art classes at the Worcester Art Museum for a little while with Kindergartners. So cute and fun! But I was like, that wasn't feeding my art practice. And I also, and I've just - yeah, I've just started kind of getting back into that. That's something that I think, I think the like, drama and stress of trying to be an employed, functioning person kind of made me set that aside. And I don't really regret it, but it was like a casualty of that process. So, I'm excited to feel like I can get back into that now. I learned similarly to the kind of friend lesson I learned that, like, there's just some places that are probably good places to work that I just don't want to work. Maybe they're not good places to work [laughter]. I mean, some of them probably are and they're just maybe not a good fit for me and I think that has been important to learn. The pros, if I think, looking back, you know, there were a lot of times I felt like I was failing. And then looking back, I'm kind of like, no, that was fine. Like, I would I wasn't doing the thing I thought I was supposed to be doing, but I was like, pushing forward and I was, continuing to try, and I was doing the best that I could. And it worked, ultimately. Maybe didn't look exactly as, like, clean and sharp as I thought it was supposed to, but and at the time, like, I really did think I was failing, but now I'm like, no, I wasn't that that actually was fine. I think that - yeah and I'm proud of being resourceful during really challenging times, both like graduating school and not getting jobs and interviews and like being resourceful about how to get what I get to where I want to from that place., and also during the pandemic and being resourceful about, like, rethinking how I could be useful to people based on the skills that I had during that time.

JS: So, it sounds to me like you're really passionate about a lot of things sort of outside your professional realm, like art, which I think is really cool. Do you ever see yourself maybe going into that in a sort of professional setting, If so when or where?

LF: What a great question. I am currently trying to get my art to be more visible and to share it with more people. And I am occasionally selling work to people. But when I think about if I want that to be my full-time job, I think probably not. I really like, I really like working with other people and I really don't love making art with other people [laughter]. So, I think that I really want to keep those two things in my life. I also think that when I was thinking about schools, I, actually people kept asking me if I was going to go to art school because I had done studio art for so long. And I was also really adamant, I don't even, I don't even think I thought about this that much, but I was really adamant about not applying to art school outside of high school and I think that I don't know if this was right, but I think I thought that if I made art my like whole thing that I did and might lose some of its like joy in my life and I still feel that way a little bit. I want to keep it enjoyable to do, but I do hope to be more of a creator in my professional career path. I do hope to continue like making art, whether it's like traditional art, the way you imagine or like more audio stories or podcasts or just community experiences. I do hope to have more output and make more things in my career path.

JS: And so how do you feel about like where you are now and with the choice you make? Because I feel like you've sampled in so many more things in the average person, you've sort of experienced a lot.

LF: I might just be good at cataloging them all. I think a lot of people have a lot of experiences. It's not to say not to be like, 'no', but I think, like, maybe I'm a good talker [laughter]. No, I think, sorry. Could you repeat your question?

JS: I'm just like, wondering about the choices that you made and where you are now, how you feel about - Do you have any regrets about anything?

LF: I don't have any regrets. But that's more of a philosophical standpoint for me. I definitely think there's some choices that I've made that I'm not happy with, but I don't regret making them. Just because I think, like. It's weird. I don't even know how, I don't even know how thinking like that would feel like I just can't undo any of them, so I'm kind of like 'welp' [Laughter] Like that is what happened and now I will react to it. So, I don't have any regrets. I am still, what I would consider a very young person getting into just young and not very, but still, I think a very young person. And so, a lot of my choices I look back on as just things that I learned how to do and I'm still like, I'm still in this moment doing that now. Like I every day I'm thinking about, like, how do I communicate better with the people I work with and, and the people in my life? And how do I, the things, the choices that I didn't - that I'm not happy with. Like how do I not? How do I improve upon that? Maybe I don't do the right thing next time, but how do I do something that's like at least 15% better than that next time? So, that's kind of how I look on it. I feel, I feel very happy with where I'm at right now. I don't think that I want to be here indefinitely. I am someone, I love Change. I don't like transitions, but I love change

JS: Do you see yourself living somewhere else in particular?

LF: I'd like to try. I'd like to try living somewhere else. My friends have, many of my friends have lived in other cities in the U.S. A couple of people I know have lived in other countries and I live an hour and 15 minutes away from where I grew up. And I love it here, like, I don't there's, Worcester is not, like pushing me out, but there's other things that kind of call to me sometimes, and even the experience of living somewhere else for a few years and returning feels like something I'd like to try to do.

JS: So, let's move on to talk about politics and community involvement. Do you consider yourself active at all politically at this time?

LF: I do consider myself active politically. I think there's so much pressure to, as to what being active politically means. Like, I think that there's a lot of times where, oh my God, I'm not doing enough, but I do think I'm active politically. I do care a lot about my community and what happens in it. I also, you know, working for the city of Worcester. It's, that's such an interesting question like is am I a politically active by working for the city of Worcester? I think yes, I think like but not in the way we think of politics as like a like two-pronged set of values here in our country. But I think that, like when you do work that is specifically designed to improve your community, like that's political. So yeah, I think so.

JS: What was one of the organizations, community based organizations that you work with?

LF: So, the coalition for a Healthy Greater Worcester is an organization that, they do a lot of community work. One thing that they do that's kind of notable is the community health improvement plan for the city, which I didn't not, I didn't know existed until I worked for them. But it's a - it's a citywide plan that identifies issues specific to Worcester and issues that affect Worcester. Specifically, Worcester County, I believe and like plans about how we can improve on those things here based on the resources that we have and like what our community looks like. And a lot of actually, it's an interesting thing to know about a lot of cities. I don't know what a lot is, but there's other community health improvement plans that you can look at for other places, too, and kind of see, like the different things that they've identified.

JS: So, I just wanna see how we're doing on time -12:03 Are you okay?

LF: Im good.

MR: Do you mind if I ask a question really quick?

JS: Yeah, Of course.

MR: You talked about. You know, I think it was really interesting your Spanish speaking experience. Has that made an impact on how you cooperate and communicate with the community here? Your Spanish speaking experience?

LF: Definitely

MR: Yeah

LF: I think that, I mean, in a kind of meta way, my experience learning Spanish has taught me a lot about communicating with people in any language because I am not a fluent Spanish speaker, but I'm a very functional Spanish speaker. Like, I can get on the phone with somebody and like, they can ask me like a question, and I can try to help them figure out that question. It's a conversation that's like kind of awkward and kind of like, has a lot of, like, could you say that slower? Can you like, there's a lot of that. But it's, it's taught me a lot about, like, how to communicate with people when it's hard. And so that I think transcends languages and that definitely working with the community again in any language because I don't always understand what people want or why they want it, or why they think I'm the right person to give it to them, and sometimes I'm not. But there's a lot of like, how do I ask - How do I get to the like, how do I get to the place that you're thinking? Especially living in Spain for those like study abroad months, like there was a lot of like really confused back and forth. You've been really persistent and like just honest about your intentions with people to get through those conversations. So, in that way, yes. Also, like more literally speaking Spanish. I definitely use it in my job. We have definitely people who use our services who only speak Spanish or primarily speak Spanish and, when I first was hired, I was the only non-Spanish speaking person on my team, I think fluent, fluent. Just, I was the only non-fluent Spanish speakers on my team [laughter]. Everybody else like, grew up speaking Spanish, and so that's kind of interesting, too. I mean, I'm in a lot of spaces with friends and people I work with where Spanish skills are needed, and it's something I'm always trying to figure out. I think it depends a lot on the people you're with, whether it's appropriate for me to be the person who steps in or not, because a lot of fluent Spanish speakers who are also fluent English speakers get like translation fatigue and like, they're like as everyone's always like, 'hey, could you help?' And they're like, 'yeah'. Which is I mean, so in some cases it's like, if you can help Liza, like, please, like don't I don't want to have to do this all the time. But also, like inherently my Spanish skills are not as like high quality. So sometimes it's hard to know like does, does this need like the highest quality Spanish speaker experience. Like, is that what this situation deserves, or is it okay if it's like us muddling through it together? And so that's kind of been an interesting experience too.

JS: And are you still studying it or are you just speaking it?

LF: I just speak it, in kind of daily or weekly occurrences, but I, it's still in use. Like, I still practice it. I wish I was doing a little bit more Spanish. I do read sometimes books in Spanish, which is good practice.

JS: Okay, so let's move on to the last section, which is health. And I'm wondering if you could talk about, have there been any health issues that impacted your life personally, or someone in your family or friend or anyone close to you?

LF: Yeah. When I, I am the only member of my immediate family who has not had, like, a fairly major surgery or health complications. I have had my wisdom teeth removed now, so I'm in the crew [laughter]. But, yeah, so my mom had, I, you know, it's interesting because I was a kid for a lot of this stuff, so I don't always know if I got the details right, but my mom had, some, like, preventative breast cancer surgery and then medical stuff done, and that was a big deal as a kid. My father has had various health issues. Some have been resolved, some are ongoing and my sibling also, my sibling is disabled. And so, they what, during my childhood had a lot of medical experiences, a lot of hospital time and surgeries and things like that. Which is really interesting because for me, my health sort of generally has been stable and fairly easy to take care of. So that always feels like significant to me because I've been like in the hospital or dealing with other people's medical things a lot. But I guess thankfully not for myself. I had a minorly traumatic - seems dramatic, but I had a challenging experience with my IUD that I had a few years ago. I had kind of a bad medical experience with the doctors who removed it, and that was really difficult for me for a little while, but, and then I've had sort of like the unfortunately commonplace experiences of having, like, concerns dismissed and bringing issues up to doctors who kind of were like, don't worry about it. I recently my most recent experience, a doctor literally was like, sometimes my job is just to tell you to like, let "Doctor Time" take care of it. And I was like, okay [laughter] that's not the most helpful. But nothing that seriously impacted or like, Like, put my life on pause or anything like that.

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

LF: I am fortunate to have been insured through my parents while I was not, while I was unemployed and while I was doing part time jobs that didn't offer benefits. And then about a year before that ended, I transitioned into my full-time job, which has insurance and medical coverage. So that is really fortunate. I think that I definitely have experienced the like, frustration and challenges just of being someone trying - like who, trying to navigate the medical system and how non-intuitive it is and how it's designed basically to confuse you and everything's changing. It's getting increasingly difficult just to get appointments, like, I think across the board I'm hearing from people that, like, you have to schedule your, you're like medical appointments, like even if there's an issue at hand, like months or a year out, which just like, wild. So, I've had those experiences. I think that there's been a few times where medical bills have been kind of shocking to me, but again, I've been pretty fortunate in having some coverage and at least, the ability through my jobs to pay, even if it's a little uncomfy, it's been okay.

JS: Okay. So thank you for all the information, I think that brings us to the end, but I do have a couple of concluding questions, [to MR] and if you want to add a question just go ahead, But, so one of the concluding questions that they have is: how do you define the success in your life or success generally in your life? And has the definition changed over time?

LF: Oh my God. I don't know [laughter]. That's a great question [pause] I mean, I think the first thing that comes to mind is I kind of view success as an ongoing process. So similar maybe to my feelings about not feeling regret. I think that I could pinpoint things that felt like successes, like it was great to get a job like that, that felt like a success. It was great to get into college. It was great to make new friends in a new place where I was living. Like, those all feel like successes, but I don't really think about them so concretely very much. I really think about success kind of as like an ongoing thing that I'm working toward and may never even have, like. I'm not really waiting for the moment when I'm where I'm like, yes, I have achieved it. This is success. But more so it's kind of like this is so corny, but it's kind of like a state of mind of just like I'm trying to continually slightly improve a little bit if I can, and I think I feel I'm someone who my - I'm very lucky. I think this is not the case for everybody, through no fault of their own. But I am someone who my general state of being is, like, pretty happy. So, like, usually I'm kind of at like a seven out of ten, like, that's kind of my general state. And so, I can kind of gauge like, how well I'm doing based on just knowing that, like if things are sort of neutrally good, I'll probably be at a seven and then I just kind of go from there.

JS: sevens not bad [laughter]

LF: No. I'm just very happy to be in that, in that headspace.

JS: Okay. So, because this is the Worcester Women's Oral History Project, based on your own experiences, what advice would you give to women of today and future generations?

LF: [Pause] I think one piece of advice that I would give women today is. Oh, I don't even know how to say this. I think that we have all of these kinds of images of what being a woman is defined in so many places and in so many ways, and they look so different, and some of them can be stronger, in our view, than others. Certainly, things about body image are very prevalent in how we define women and also personality, I think is something that can be very prevalent in how we define women. But there's also all kinds of other definitions out there that are that you can look for. And I think the thing that I would encourage women to remember is that none of those singular definitions are inherently wrong or inherently right, they're all just one little atom of a composite, huge, undefinable "what is woman?" question that like I am so I love a - I love an unanswered question. And I think that like, that's the most valuable thing to look for is like, you can choose from any of those little atoms, you can even add your own little atom if you want and so it's really hard to like, hold that in your brain. But I think if you can kind of like try to come back to that. And I struggle with that too. But that can be really helpful in terms of how you think of yourself in the grand scheme of what it means.

JS: I think that's all the questions I have. [To MR] Do you have anything?

MR: No, I don't think so

JS: Thank you so much.

LF: Yeah, it was great to talk to you guys.