

Interviewee: Elizabeth Spellacy O'Hara
Interviewers: Teodor Nicola Antoniu, Arthur Rabinovich
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Abstract: Elizabeth O'Hara is an Assistant Professor at Assumption College, a Catholic college located in Worcester, MA. Professor O'Hara comes from an Irish and Italian background and she is married to John F. O'Hara. During the interview, she explains the connections she made while working at Madison Square Garden that eventually helped to put her in a position to implement a collaboration with Assumption and the Worcester Red Sox program benefitting students from Assumption College and the community of Worcester. She also shares her firsthand experience of the 9/11 tragedy in New York City. She has a passion for helping her students and for the city of Worcester.

TNA: Can you please share with us some details about you and your background?

EMO: Absolutely. I think this project is a fantastic idea and I would love to share with you a bunch of my stories. I am a storyteller. That is my way to talk about myself, through stories. My name is Elizabeth Spellacy O'Hara and I am an Assistant Professor of Management and Marketing at Assumption College. I am half Italian and half Irish. I am married with John O'Hara. My husband is the golf coach at Assumption college. I was born and raised in Springfield, Mass.

TNA: So you like stories? Can you tell us more about it?

EMO: I'm very much a story teller and that's how I teach. That's how I express myself. And if I have to make a point, I make a point by telling a story. Do you know what I mean? Like for example, I get very high energy. I'm all over the place. So, it's interesting how I got into teaching and I was just telling my students the other day that I'm not even sure what my next step is. I've never planned my life. Never. I didn't get married until I was 48 years old. I didn't meet my husband until I was 46 years old. I had dated, been engaged, but nothing ever. I was like, no. So I'm not one of those. I grew up in a loving family. I have an older brother who was in the military, so his whole life, that was it. He was going to be in the military. Everyone knew he was going to be in the military. He has just retired as a colonel in the army. Wow. Very successful in DC. My two younger sisters are not as motivated career wise at all. They both married men who they thought were going to be successful and take care of them and the whole thing. And they

have children and one lives in Baltimore and one lives in Connecticut. So I was the one, when I was in high school I went to Girl's State, which I think they still may do that. And I was elected governor of Girl's State. I don't know how it happened. I just was up on stage. I made a speech and next thing I know I'm getting sworn in as governor of girls. It just kind of happened and there were a couple of life changing moments for me. I was working in Chicago for Mass Mutual. They had moved me to Chicago and my sister called me. She was living in—one was a volunteer out in Alaska for the Jesuit Volunteer Corps and my other younger sister, Ann, was in Texas for a volunteers program in service to America. So she called me, she was working at a shelter for battered women. She said, "I'm going to move back up to Massachusetts. I am probably going live in Boston. Will you help me with my resume?" I said, "Yeah, yeah, I'll do it." And she said, "Well, what do you want to do?" She said, "I don't know. I want a job where I love going to work every day." And I was like, "What? You and the rest of the world, but who doesn't want to go? What, are you stupid?" She is so naive, and then I got off the phone. I thought, so do I, what am I doing? Like life is too short for me to have a pit in my stomach going to work every day. It was crazy. So that next morning I called UMass Amherst. I had gotten into UMass two years earlier, but I decided to move to Chicago. So I called UMass and said, "Hi, I had applied..." and this guy Bob Nackastein said to me, "Yeah, whatever happened to you?" And I said, "Well, I ended up moving to Chicago." This was probably April 1996. And he said, "Well, get here, reapply. We'll take you in the fall." So this was before I could do everything on the computer. And so I did get the application. I wrote an essay about why I didn't go and I sent it with \$75 in the mail. And then I went away to Ireland with my parents, which was also life changing because the whole time my parents kept saying, "Oh, we should have done this. We should've done, we should've taken that, we shouldn't have left." It was driving me insane. So I have a motto that I live by now: Never say would've, could've, should've, never because it's wasted energy. Did you wish you had done something different? Yeah. Maybe. Did you learn from it? Sure. But are you going to be able to go back and change it? No. Move on! I would say to my parents they are driving me crazy. We didn't go left. We went right. Let's live with going. Right. Oh I know, but so I came back from Ireland and I had gotten into UMass, so I quit my job in a very amicable way. Shook hands with everyone. And one guy said to me, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I don't know. I think I'm going to work in sports. I think if I close my eyes, I want to wear a credential. I want to have a walkie talkie on me. I want to be on the sideline of a basketball court. I don't know where. I don't know when, but I know that's what I want." He said, "Yeah, good luck, are you going to meet Michael Jordan?" I said, "Well, maybe I will." So yeah, it's a good story too. So anyways, I packed up my sister and one of my friends flew out. We drove home. I found a great apartment in Northampton, Mass. The first day of orientation in the MBA program, this is when it first became the Isenberg School in 1997. And then the orientation, I call over to the sports school, which was separate, and I say, "Hi, my name is Libby. I'd like to take classes with you." And they said, "No, we hate the MBA kids." And I said, "No, no, but I'm different. Can I please just meet with you?" "No, I don't think so." And I say, "Mmm, please? I'm coming over at lunch." So I walked over at lunchtime. I don't know what made me do this now. So I walked over at lunch and I met this guy, Bill Sutton, who is still a mentor to me today, and he said, "You can take my sport marketing class." So instead of

marketing, I took sport marketing and all my electives I took over in the school of sport, but I still had my MBA because that to me was most important. I didn't want a master's in sport because, who knows, maybe I'd want to go into trading.

AR: You wanted to keep your options open, right?

EMO: Precisely! Maybe I'd want to go into some other fields. Leave it. So that's what I did, I got my MBA but I got all my electives in sports and now it's a dual degree at UMass. We helped create it, I was like one of the first students that unofficially did it. So we wrote a white paper and now it's a dual degree. It's pretty cool. So during one of my classes I would sit in the front, it was economics of sport. And I wrote about these two sports teams move when the Cleveland Browns left Cleveland and I went to Baltimore, probably before you two were born [referring to the interviewers]. But anyway, so I'm going to learn something. I wrote this paper and I called the mayor of Cleveland. And I did this whole paper with my professor who was a brand new professor, new doctorate, the whole thing. And I worked so hard in his class. And he said to me one day, "What do you want to do?" And I said, "I don't know, I think I may go work for American Express or Visa and do other sports sponsorship stuff." And he said this exactly, "Did you ever think about working at MSG?" "MSG? Is that what they put on Chinese food?" He said, "No, don't be silly. Madison Square Garden." I said: "Madison Square, isn't that where the Knicks play?" And he said, "Yeah, it's also the world's most famous arena." And his father-in-law was a scout for the New York Rangers and had left and now at the time was a scout with the Anaheim Mighty Ducks [professional ice hockey team]. So he told me about his father. So I'm waiting tables and my professor comes in with his wife and this older gentleman and I figured it was his father-in-law. So I waited on them and at the end of dinner the father-in-law said, "Do you have your resume with you?" I looked at him and I said, "Mr. Ferreira, look at me, I'm covered in pasta sauce. I've been working, do I look at my resume and all this other stuff?" He says, "Listen wise guy, here's my card, get me your resume. So after work, I went over to a store like a FedEx store and it's open 24 hours. Again, no laptops or anything. I wrote, "Dear Mr. Ferreira, it was a pleasure meeting you. I hope you enjoyed, blah blah blah. Here's my resume" which we used to have on these floppy disks. You have to print it. The next morning I'm in line at the post office and I sent it to him. So a couple of weeks go by and I get a call from Madison Square Garden to set up an informational interview. So I also interviewed at the WWE at the time of WWF, whatever it was, and the MDA, which the WWF which was in Stamford, Connecticut, and then in New York. So I go in to meet with the gentleman at the Garden and he says to me, "I just want you to know I'm doing this as a favor to Jack. I don't have any jobs open." I said, "No, that's totally fine. It's just an honor to meet you." His name was Barry Watkins. And I said that I just wanted to network and talk to him about how he got started. He's my age, right? So we sit down and he started as an intern and worked his way up. So two and a half hours later, I'm still in there talking with him and he said, "Do you have more time to stay?" I said, "Yeah!" So I ended up meeting all these people. It took a long time, but I finally got hired.

So, I've worked at the Garden. They created a position and I ran their community relations department for about five or six years. We created a foundation that supported after-school programs. So, we supported about 120 after-school program. We worked with George Soros Organization, the after school corporation, which dumped tons of money into New York to support the schools. So, we didn't create after-school programs. We would just use all of our resources, like players, the Rockettes would go and teach dance classes. We had kids come and they would sit at a Rangers game and do the announcing up in the broadcast. Yeah. That was really another changing moment in my life when I realized these kids really need us. They come from nothing, they don't leave their four-block radius and after-school that hour between three and four is when little girls get pregnant. That's because no parents are home. Right. So then the Garden got kind of messy because of this guy. Isaiah Thomas started there, and there was a lot of scandals, a lot of lawsuits, a lot of people sleeping with other people. And at the time, I had met a guy and then Mass Mutual called me and said, "Would you be interested in coming back? We have a position." And it was like perfect timing.

So I left the Garden on good terms to return to Mass Mutual again. This guy lived in Bristol, Connecticut. We didn't last too long. He knew I liked it here. And then I worked at the Hartford, where I was the speech writer, head of communications, for one of the senior vice presidents there. I traveled all over; got to—when the California wildfires happened, I was with the families. I wrote stories back to all the employees about what it meant and how they were, how their job sitting in a cubicle made a difference to these people's lives when we hand them a check for \$50,000 to get their lives back in order and all this other stuff. So that was pretty powerful. And so then, I was like, I don't know what else is out there.

I get itchy after like three or four years. I'm like, what else is out there? What else is out there? So, I quit the Hartford. I just bought a house and I got a job. About six months later working for a company in New York City called and I didn't last there long. And because the president, they had a new president, he thought everyone was stupid. He thought everyone was beneath him. He was younger than I was, my age probably. And I was his chief of staff and I would see his emails and I saw the way he talked to people and I just couldn't do it. So, I lasted there about six months and I couldn't do, I couldn't. It's not like I'm super principled like but this guy was bad. It was so bad and people would like cry. I traveled with him and he would sit in first class and I would sit in coach and he would make a point to say, you're never going to sit in first class. So, then I come home and now I'm not working. I have this house. I don't want to go back into the corporate world.

I've never applied for a job. That's actually amazing to hear how you just from networking and talking to special people, I never applied for a job. The only time I fill out an application is when I'm through the process and they need me to fill out an application. Even how I got my job at Assumption, I taught at a couple of colleges in Springfield, Mass. My mother met someone, I met him, and then he got me hired at Springfield Technical Community College and that was

life changing. This is a community college in Springfield, which is tough gangs and everything. These kids would come in with the things around their ankles. Monitors for jail. Oh yeah.

AR: I took an EMT course over winter break. The instructor actually worked for I think 15 years in Springfield as an EMT. And he told us, right? Yeah. He was like you, he'd like to tell stories to get his point across. Show like examples of what you do in these kinds of situations. Very cool stories, but very real. Very real.

EMO: Yeah. So I had a kid, George, who sat in the back of the room. He was all dark and he would sit in my class even when it wasn't his class. He would come and sit in the back and I would be like, "What are you doing?" He'd say, "I just want to sit and listen to you." And he was a drug dealer and he had been stabbed twice and he was telling the classes one day, "I was making \$300 to 400,000 a year cash, stealing drugs. I'm driving a BMW 750 series. So I decided maybe I'll go clean, maybe I'll try to go straight." But he can't because this is why our country is so messed up. He said he's part of a network and he has felonies on his record. Right? Because he's been arrested a few times. So he goes to work at Wendy's. They won't let them touch the cash. So you'll never move up in management. He goes, "I'm washing the dishes in the back and the managers, 22 year old kids screaming at me. I'm making \$8 an hour. They're pushing me around. I'm going back to dealing drugs." And he told us how he would deal drugs in Springfield for three weeks, then drive up to Vermont. So the other drug dealers would—he would get a break because that's who hurts you. It's not the police. It's, yeah. So, then there was another little girl who would come in. She'd always be hung over and tired. Sometimes I'd get her out of her car in the parking lot and bring her into class with me. She worked at a strip club. She wasn't a stripper and she wasn't big enough to be a stripper. She probably had her daughter when she was 13 and we would sit in class. She took my ethics class and we talked about ethical issues. And she would cry when we talked about different things. And she was an amazing writer. She didn't write well, but her stories, you'd get so emotional because you felt like you were diving into her life. I said to her, "You need to keep going to college. You need to go and go for years." She said, "I think I want to be a social worker." So I called Elms College where I graduated and I taught there. My mom went there, we went there and they said, "Will you vouch for her?" And I said, "Yes, but she needs money." So she graduated from the Elms with honors and she's a social worker and her daughter is now 15 or 16 and I was able to make that impact and I stayed in touch with her. Yeah. So I think that's when I started realizing, wow, this teaching thing is pretty cool. Like, uh, so my husband, when I met John, I met my husband on match.com. Right. So John and I started dating, he was a golf professional in West Boylston at a country club and they had a plowing business and landscaping and he's like the nicest, kindest guy. And I said, yeah, that's it. So we got engaged two years later. I met John and so we got married and it'll be six years. So 2013, we met in 2011. I had been on some match.com dates but never got anything like serious relationship. Yep. No, no. I had dated, I lived with someone, I was engaged a couple of times, but John was the my first marriage. I'm all for getting married and people say. He has a daughter who's 22 now. I met her when she was 16. She's a great kid. She's getting her master's now. A little spoiled, but she's an only child. But even now I pushed her and I pushed her and I'm

pushing her towards traveling. So she went to Spain, she went to Costa Rica. She backpacked through Ireland, Italy and France. Yes. You know what I'm saying? It's like you have to go, you have to live. And her mother's like, I don't want her. Her mother wants her home. And I said, no, go. So, and we told her we weren't paying for her. She needed \$4,000 to go to Spain. And I said, go work, get a job. She never worked really. So she got a job. She saved up \$4,200 because we told her if she saved up \$3,200 we'll give you the \$800. So she ended up saving up the whole amount. And we got her a camera to go. But anyways, then I meet John, we're dating, we know we're getting serious and so he knows a guy, he plays golf at Assumption.

So I meet all these people and we start the sport program at Assumption. And my whole point about Assumption is—and I just welcomed a group of parents and kids yesterday—I would say 60% of my job is teaching in the classroom. 180% of my job is being out in the community, meeting people, building relationships, so that my kids, my students—I call them my kids—will have opportunities. They have to interview, they have to get the internship. But especially in sport, it's about opening the door. Right. So John Manuel when I met John Manuel like I told you, he wouldn't look at me. He was very shy and he really wanted to work in baseball. That was it. Baseball, baseball. And I said, "Well, what about football? You gotta keep your options open." "I will professor, but I really want baseball." So I end up, he ends up going on LinkedIn and I have him Link with some people I know. And there's a guy, Tyrone Brooks out in New York who's the head of diversity for Major League Baseball. So John Manuel meets him. I said to John Manuel, "Introduce yourself to him and then say to him, I'd like to come. I'm coming to New York to visit family," which he wasn't, "and I'd like to meet you for a cup of coffee and just talk to you." Right? Not ask for a job. I said to John don't ask him for a job, don't ask him. Just meet with him because then it takes the pressure off that person, right? So he goes, and he sends me pictures. Tyrone had given them a credential at the desk. Tyrone's had him spend the whole day in the MLB offices.

EMO: So John Manuel met all these people and then he comes back and his head is spinning, right? So he ends up that summer working for Fenway park, selling the 50 50 raffle tickets. And so that's between his sophomore and junior year. And he was discriminated against. White guys would say, "We're not buying from some Puerto Rican." And he's like, "First of all I'm Dominican, but okay." So then he'd go get a white kid. They said, "What were you thinking?" And he said, "You know, professor, I thought about it and I'm not going to ruin my career because some stupid guy is a racist." So he would go get a white kid to sell them the ticket. Amazing. Right. Because yeah, it would be like a black kid and you selling tickets or just a black kid. And then he'll come and say, "Arthur will you just go sell them this ticket?" Or they won't buy it.

TNA: At the end of the day he's incredibly business focused. I mean he still got the tickets sold.

EMO: That's what he says. Cause the foundation supports kids with cancer. It's the Dana Farber, the Jimmy Fund, all that stuff that the Red Sox represents. So John Manuel says the bigger issue was throwing your 20 or 40 bucks in and ...

AR: Kind of swallows his own process for a bit.

EMO: And that's what I tried to tell people at the end of the day, there's always something bigger than us. Do you know what I mean? There's always something bigger. And even if money motivates you, money at the end of the day doesn't always motivate. You may think it does, but you could be making \$5 million. I was making probably \$300,000 working in New York, but miserable, didn't want to go to work. I call it the pit in the stomach. Like you get a pit in your stomach going to work every day. So what am I doing? He's yelling at me. I said to him one day, what do you say about me when I leave the office? And he said, "If you were a guy, we wouldn't even be having this conversation." I looked at him, I said, "Do you know what year this is? Like you can't talk to people like that." "Oh my God, here we go!" And then I thought that I'm going to walk away from all of it. I don't care. I don't care. And sometimes you just get to that point. Some people never get to that point, but people, when they get to that point, it's like enough is enough. And I didn't know what I was going to do. I literally was driving home in my car and I think I called one of my friends and said, "I just quit my job." They said, "oh my God, what are you gonna do? Are you going to afford your house?" I said, "Oh no, we'll figure it out." And my house was two and a half hours, three, four hours away in Massachusetts from New York. And I went and sat in my house. I'm like, I got to do something. And that's when the teaching ...

AR: So would you say that your personal experience of walking away from a job that was paying well but that you weren't happy with helps you apply that to students, they aren't too well off there. They had a lot of struggles in their lives, but they're trying to work to somewhere where they could have a substantial living. But you're also trying to make sure that they're focused on their own happiness.

EMO: All day long. Yes. No, 100% I have a student, Alex, who his parents struggle and we had to go behind the scenes and help him get a free meal plan because he couldn't afford a meal plan at school. And he's like, Libby, you don't understand. I need to make a job where I make a lot of money. And I said, "I get it, 100% I get it, money makes your life easier. I'm not saying it doesn't, there's nothing worse than not being able to pay your bills and breathing hard and not having \$10 in your pocket to go down to Blue Jean Pizza and get a pizza. I get that." So there's there's a happy medium, but you don't. I'm not saying don't sell yourself out. I'm not all Sally ethical. And I'm not like, "Ooh, you know, my principals wouldn't let me." But again, just don't live your life saying would've, could've, should've, don't live your life saying, I wonder if I could have worked in baseball. I wonder if I could have worked at Madison Square Garden. Now I say, yeah, I did. And then when the guy said to me a few years later, "Oh yeah, what happened in sports?" Well I escorted Michael Jordan for a whole day when Patrick Ewing retired, all these athletes were coming in and we had to stand where all the athletes were standing. Like Dr Jay, all

these people, I couldn't even tell you. Right? And I didn't get assigned a player. My friend Larry and I were sitting there, I said, "Lt, did you get assigned someone?" He said, "No, did you?" I said, "No." Right? My boss said just because she was a little redhead, she worked for Barry, my boss, Mayor Pat, "just be quiet over there."

EMO: And I said, I know we don't play what's going on. And she's great. So, um, she called, they call us in and they said, we just got confirmation that Michael Jordan is coming and when you work in you, you're like, you can't get excited. Like, oh, okay. And they said, so you'll be escorted Michael Jordan, coach Collins, this Guy Charles Oakley and a couple other people who are like, okay, we got out of the albums. We were like that. So we had to like plan where he was going to walk and all this stuff. So when he walked in, when peoples like, and I've met [President] Bill Clinton. Yeah. Well, because when you work at the garden, and I was there when 9/11 happened, which was another big thing, right? So all of a sudden Bill Clinton walks in and you're like, wow, he's electric. When he walks in a room whether you agree with his politics or not he, oh, he wanted and we were all like, I don't, I remember one of us say, "I don't agree with Monica Lewinsky, but I understand." He was like charismatic and Hillary's the opposite. She's miserable. She's a miserable person. Yeah. Yeah. Cause she's not, she was screaming at me. Bill came in first and he went off with all the celebrities. People love him. Like they just flocked to him. And she comes in, this is right around the Monica Lewinsky scandal. When 9/11 happened and Hillary didn't go to a lot of the funerals for the firemen. And so he comes and I had met her before, so all her people knew me. So we're all standing at the door. So she comes in and her people are like to me pointing to me and I said, "No no, I'm good." So he went over and they said you need to escort us. And so she's waving, she's waving to all the people. And then literally the elevator door closed. She was, "where's my husband?" Because in her mind, which is correct, the press is looking at her and he's already in there and they're like, Bill and Hillary arrived separately. Like you know the cover of the New York Post or page six or whatever. Yeah. So she's like, you better find him. And I'm like, oh, so we're, I'm on walkie talkies or I'm like, "where's Bill Clinton?" And they said he's in the green room on the other side of the arena. Now in the meantime there's thousands of firemen and policemen. And I worked with a ton of the families. I could write a book on all that. So we bring her up to the top floor of the garden where it's this big VIP room. And I said, "is Bill Clinton in here?" And they said, no, and she, you could see her, it's like starting to steam, right? So, we get her her tickets and Pat Riley's in there who's a famous coach for the Lakers and a bunch of teams and he's there. And I wanted to meet him and I couldn't cause of Hillary.

So we get in the elevator and we go into what I think is the green room and it's empty. It's empty. Like no one's in there. Like you could hear birds chirping. And I'm like, she's like, "Find my husband, find him now! And I said, But she's the senator at the time, right. So I ended up, we get downstairs onto the floor and there's literally thousands of drunk firemen and policemen everywhere. We have to get to the other side. So I said, "Senator, I can take you to the other side, but you're running a risk." Because they were mad at her. She hadn't gone to any funerals. She hadn't really been visible. And I said we were running the risk of going across and we can take

you to your seat and we're going to get the president and we'll bring him up here. So we bring her up to her seat and who's sitting there but Harvey Weinstein? The guy who's in all this trouble now. And his wife at the time, girlfriend at the time, the mayor, the governor of New York, governor whose wife's name is Libby. Anyway, he's there. And so here they're all kind of distracting Hillary and Harvey Weinstein. I called him Jabba the Hutt. He was so big and grown. So Bill Clinton comes up and he's like, Hi honey, I'm so sorry." And she's like, "Where were you?" He was so apologetic and so nice. I was like, oh, he really likes her. Like he, he really cares about it, you know what I mean? Like I don't know about her with him. I couldn't tell but whatever.

TNA: And this wasn't in front of the cameras, right?

EMO: No, nothing. This is genuine. So I was watching all of it. So, anyway, so then she got booted off stage and Bill wasn't going to go on stage. Yeah, it was rough. It was a rough, it was very emotional that whole time. I was there when it happened. I was coming out of a meeting on 13th Street and I'm walking out of the building and someone says, "kamikaze, kamikaze!" I'm like, what? They said, "kamikaze just hit the world trade center!" I'm like, "kamikaze just hit the world trade center?" So I go out into the street and all I can tell you, it was like a George Orwell novel, just like this weird silence and people running. So I run back up to the Garden, which is on 34th street. So I ran like 20 blocks up and they're all saying that a plane just hit the World Trade Center. This was the first one. The second one hadn't even hit yet. And so firemen are going down there at the time.

AR: So are you in New York?

EMO: It's right there. Yeah. We're very close. Yeah. Yeah. So my sister was on a plane leaving Boston, going to Washington.

AR: Oh No.

EMO: And my brother was up here in Mass, he was in the army. Right. So my younger sister was in Maryland or wherever she was, Alaska, wherever. So, um...

TNA: What was your position at time?

EMO: At the time I was the director of community relations at Madison Square Garden. So we're in the Garden and they said that the Garden may become a makeshift hospital depending on how many people are injured and then come to find out we didn't need it. Everyone died. Right? We walked up to Columbus Circle from the Garden, which was 72nd up by Central Park. So we're walking up there and literally people had car doors open listening to radios in cars because no one's phones were working. Like all the phones were out. And then the second plane had hit, the building had collapsed. So we're sitting up in a bar. I'll never forget drinking

Heinekens because it's all they had. And we had all put our workout clothes on because we were in our business clothes, but we always had workout clothes and we had workout clothes on. And I'm trying to reach my sister because she's in a plane and we don't know what plane was going to the Pentagon. So I was like, was it my sister? So I finally get through. All you do is keep hitting send on your phone. You just kept hitting send. And then I finally got through to my mother and she said, "Where are you?" And I couldn't tell her I'm drinking, right? And so I said, "Oh, I'm at a bar, we're at a hotel up in Columbus circle." And my mother says, "I just heard from your sister and she's in Washington, she is safe. Your brother is going to guard the airports with his groups because they don't know if airports in Boston we're going to get hit. Your brother said just to stay where you are and don't answer phones, whatever. Just don't, don't believe yet." So we stayed at the hotel for two nights. We couldn't get out of New York.

And then finally we got home and my sister had to drive home, they had to rent cars and come up from Washington. And through that I met a lot of the families because of community relations at the garden. We reached out to a lot of families. We did the concert every time we had tickets to events, we would host families. So I saw a lot of these children who had lost their fathers, mostly firefighter families we worked with. And these women, a lot of these women had never written a check before because the husbands did everything and now all of a sudden they're getting checks. Like I went to one house, this girl Theresa, she had four little girls that there has been New York Times article about them. Francesca, Tony and Nicolette and Daniella, he gave them boys nicknames. He always wanted boys and got four girls. And Francesca played hockey and we had her play hockey at the garden with Mark Messier and Brian Leetch. I have the picture sign in my office and there's Franky with mess and Brian Leetch next to her. And so just those stories and how Teresa had to all of a sudden become the mother and the father and I was at their house. There's a check for \$50,000 from China. The check for \$100,000 from a firehouse out in, in California, like millions of dollars flowed into these women, millions. And they didn't, a lot of them didn't know how to handle it. I was dating a fireman during that time and he ended up marrying his best friend's widow. I was fine. Yeah. He cheated on me with this widow. They ended up getting married and she had millions of dollars and he retired and they bought a big house out in Long Island.

EMO: But anyway, so all of these things, when people say what's it like I wouldn't change anything. I wouldn't change anything about my life. I've lived a crazy life. It's just my life. I don't ever think I've had the best life or I've had a sucky life, but this is who I am. This is what's made me who I am. So all of a sudden I get this opportunity at Assumption College and I love my kids. So all of a sudden, John Manuel ends up working for the Red Sox and then he goes and works for the Pawtucket Red Sox, the minor league team for the Red Sox. And he's loving it and they love him. And he's creating these Spanish nights bringing all these ethnicities to the ballpark. And Charles Steinberg, who's the president of the Red Sox, loves him. So I keep trying to get myself in there. Right? Yeah. They would bring Latino dance groups. They would do the announcing in Spanish because of their demographic, a lot of the people in their area were

Spanish speaking and they found it difficult to go to games. And Latino style food. He'd have food trucks out in the front and then in between innings, little girls would come and do like, you know, the Latino dance clubs from the neighborhood and all this stuff. And they felt so much a part of it, you know what I mean? So I've learned so much from John Manuel. And I went to a couple of games and they took pictures of us and all of them. And we'll stay friends forever. We will stay friends, we will be close.

So then Austin says to me, "Professor, I think the Pawtucket Red Sox are gonna move to Worcester." And he couldn't tell me anything because he had signed a confidentiality agreement and I said, "I won't compromise you, but if there's anything you can tell me, tell me." So then he said to me, "I think you need to start really looking at this."

AR: This was still at the Garden or if I'm...

EMO: So this is at Assumption . This is last year. That's okay. I know I jumped around. Just keep clarifying because that's the way I do things. So this is last summer. So I sit in the president's office and I said we have to go after this.

TNA: So just to clarify, right. You know, you're at Assumption and who has this connection that, that gives you...

EMO: John Manuel. My Dominican student who when I first met him, he was looking down, wouldn't look me in the eye.

TNA: Okay. Okay. So he grew up, and developed a personality. I know he had some insights.

EMO: Yes, yes. It's amazing. He's amazing, I wish you could interview him. So I'm trying to get information from him. He's at Pawtucket, he's still a student at Assumption, right? But he worked a lot in Pawtucket and he would drive everyday. Never complained. And so I meet with the president and I say, "We need to do this." And he said, "I don't know, sports, Libby, I don't know. But if you can do it, do it. Get the information." So I call Jack Verducci at the Red Sox and he says, "Clark wants it, WPI wants it, Becker wants it." Holy Cross kind of wanted it, but they don't really have a business program. He said, "We're close to signing with a couple." And I said, "Well, how close?" So we meet and talk.

TNA: What was this deal about? What was it?

EMO: So it's a sponsorship. So we paid them \$100,000 a year. The deal is for three years. We would have done five years, but they only gave us three. We'll probably renew it. But for three years, starting in 2021 when the new park is built. So they're building a new park in Kelly square and they're going to redo Kelly Square. And they wanted 21 founding partners. They're opening

in 2021 they wanted 21 founding partners. So Polar Soda was one of the big ones. Polar Park, they paid like, I don't know how many millions of dollars to be named Polar Park. Country Bank is a big one. Atlas Distributing, Wormtown Brewery. Larry Lucchino only wanted one college. So Jack and I put together a whole presentation about if we get a sponsorship, we're going to signage in the park, which everyone gets. Right? But we came up with this idea, let's put a classroom in the park. So my student who could, my students will have an opportunity to actually learn at the park. Right? So the Red Sox said, "Well, the whole park will be your classroom." So we'll have access to the whole park. So if the kids want to go do film and they want to shoot a film, they have the opportunity to go use their media room or we're starting a nursing program so the nurses can go do some practicums down with the players and take care of the players and train them and all that stuff. We're doing a physician's assistant program, so the physician's assistants can go, criminology, right? Kids who want to be police and security, you can go down and do it at Polar Park. So it's not just sport, right? It's way beyond. And then we had this other idea to do ESL, English as a second language, right?

So a lot of people were in Worcester, Spanish is their first language. And a lot of the players come from all over the world and they don't speak English. So we said, what if we offered ESL classes there to the players and to the people of Worcester because we don't have a presence in Worcester to schools, like Clark, you own a high school, right? And then if the kids get good enough grades, they'd come to college for free. If you do well for four years here, you get your fifth year free to get your MBA. We don't do that. Right? So, we said we have to do something to endear ourselves to the community. And selfishly, I wanted the internships for my kids. Like that was my thing. Like I didn't want Clark or WPI having that direct in. And I wanted my kids to have that in, like we have it with the Railers downtown and all these other things. And I've worked hard for that. So I put this whole presentation together, I presented it to other vice presidents at school and I kept saying, "We can't not do this. Like we need to sign now." And so they all said yes. Even our chief financial officer said yes. So we had a huge press conference. I couldn't wait. You cannot not do it. You know what I mean? Like this is for the kids, this is for the kids.

So we had these stickers made, we put Red Sox stickers all over campus. We had balloons, we had a big press event. You can watch it. I would probably Google it. I got hats, Red Sox hats and Assumption hats. So our president switched hats with Ray and it was a huge event. It made the cover of the paper, the Worcester Telegram. We the Boston papers because here's the little teeny Assumption. We beat out Clark, we beat out WPI, we beat out all these other schools. So, now we have this amazing relationship with them.

AR: Less about brand names for you about what builds our brand.

EMO: We'll build our brand. We are the only higher education in that 21 we're good. So, we've just been planning ways to really increase our partnership and become a bigger presence in the

city of Worcester. Worcester's the second largest city in New England and Worcester was just written up in NPR magazine as probably one of the biggest growing community in the United States. It used to be Hoboken. Before that it was a city in California. Now little Worcester.

TNA: So that's actually really interesting that you're bringing it up because one of the questions that I had written down was about how a lot of people we hear saying it will start in 30 years or it's going to be a second Boston.

EMO: Yeah, I think sooner, but ...

AR: And someone as you know, someone like you who's a professor at a university in Worcester, and you have all this life experience. Do you think with the trajectory of all of these young people come in here, where do you see Worcester kind of going in those years?

EMO: So that's a great question. So I think Worcester, it's sooner than 30 years. I remember growing up, I had friends who went to Holy Cross College and friends who went to Boston College and we would drive through Worcester to go Holy Cross. That's the only reason you went to Worcester is to pick your friends up because then we'd go to Boston. But I think the leadership in Worcester and I think just the energy around Worcester is making people excited. I think having the Red Sox come is a really big deal. I think the Worcester Railers and the DCU Center, I think people want Worcester to be a destination. I don't think they want it to be a pass through anymore. Like, oh, we're going to Boston. Like we don't even talk about Boston when we recruit students anymore. I go on a lot of recruiting visits and they say, tell us about Worcester. And we used to have to say, Oh, we're 20 minutes or 25 minutes from Boston. We don't even say that now because the canal district is growing and you've got really smart people in really good positions that want to help it grow because they know like Polar Soda, all of those kinds of companies, the more Worcester grows, the more their business grows. Right. Wachusett Ski Mountain is owned by the Crowley family who own Polar soda. Yeah, it's a great market. So that's one of my new things. I'm pushing to get Polar Soda. It's not about serving Polar Soda at our school. But it's about partnerships. And it's about goodwill. And it's about, right. And and in our food service, so we don't serve polar soda. And so we'd pay you, you don't pay us, we pay you to serve food to our kids.

And so that's the way people in Worcester are starting to think. And they're starting to build houses. They're starting to grow. A friend of mine lives in Worcester. I've known him since first grade. His daughter goes to Assumption, I didn't even know he lived in Worcester till I taught him in an MBA course. And he called me and said, "My friends and I want to invest in a business down by Polar Park. Who do I call?" So I called the Red Sox and they gave me a name. So more developers are coming in outside of what's happening at Red Sox with Polar Park. More developers want to build up the city because they see it as a huge opportunity.

TNA: Right now there is a lot of hype right?

EMO: Oh sure. And hopefully it'll last. So Holy Cross just got our football coach, Bob Chesney. And so it takes one football coach to change the trajectory of a school. Our athletics is doing pretty well. It'll just start building and building and I keep trying to say that the more success the school has, the more kids want to come here. And then the key is kids will stay here, you will graduate and you'll probably go to New York or Boston based on your field. But who knows? But you make time to be a doctor and go to UMass Medical instead of going to Boston. Or live in Worcester, commute to Boston because your heart is in Worcester. That was never the case ever. So now all of a sudden people are saying that it's kind of cool here. And the beautiful Lake Quinsigamond they're developing beautiful houses around there and our lieutenant governor lives on the lake now.

AR: Do you see the mentality of your students just on a personal level also shifting to not being, I want to break out of Worcester?

EMO: They all want to go to Boston, but that's okay. We'll shift more. I think so. Yeah. I think it's still too soon. I don't think they've seen because Polar Park is not built, things like that. There's a lure of Boston. There's a coolness to Boston. Like we were just talking about Burlington, Vermont. If you've been up to Burlington? You got to go. Okay. Yeah. Saint Michael's is up there. UVM, is like the number one party school in the country. Dartmouth, UVM. There's a couple of other ones, but Burlington is a great city. You can walk everywhere. There's bars and pubs and restaurants. I love to use the word eclectic, like hippyish. You know, you got kids walking around with their dreadlocks and smoking pot on the street and then you've got other kids who are preppy and with their lacrosse sticks on their shoulders. So you've got like a very big contrast and I think hopefully that's the way Worcester will become. Like I hope they take downtown Worcester and they are starting to do it and close it in so that kids from Clark and you and all over can walk around and go to restaurants and bars and then Uber back to school.

AR: It'll feel a little more like, like Boylston Street, Newbury street.

EMO: And we're getting there. We're not there. Like all my kids now want to move to Southie. "I wanna live in Southie" and they have to live with eight kids cause it's so expensive to live in Southie. But I'm so proud. Like when I first moved here, when I met my husband, people were like "Worcester? What're you living there for, you're going to live on the outskirts?" My husband was born and raised in Worcester. His family lives in Worcester. I can't ever see us living anywhere else or maybe one of the little suburb towns outside of it. But he's invested in Worcester. His businesses are in Worcester. We share a life in Worcester and I think it's amazing and I'm proud to be part of it.

TNA: So I see in person that you have a clear vision have about the future of Worcester. What, where do you see yourself?

EMO: I don't know. I don't know.

TNA: You are somebody who likes to go with the flow of, based on the story.

EMO: I don't know. I think something will happen maybe in the next year or two. I don't know. My husband says that to me because sometimes I get really mad and I'm like, "I'm quitting. I'm going to go teach at Providence, I'm going to go teach at Bryant, because they have good support programs. I'm going to go to UMass I'll just commute." Yeah, it's good school. And my husband's like, "You are not, just stop it." And then I sit with my kids in class or like yesterday I had all these seniors in high school and the mothers were hugging me. This is why I do this a hundred percent. I just finished my doctorate last year.

TNA: Congratulations!

EMO: Thank you. Now I have to publish more now to get my tenure. I have to do academic writing, which I have no desire to do, zero, but I'm going to do it on Latinos and their struggle. And I have another kid, Manny, who's a junior who my husband and I had basically adopted this kid, his father is an illegal drug dealer in Roxbury. His mother is still in the Dominican and this kid doesn't have a dime to his name and he almost didn't come back this year and he belongs to this organization called The Base and it's run by a guy Robert Lewis Jr, who's going to be our commencement speaker this year. And our governor Charlie Baker loves Robert. Robert is probably one of the most influential people in Massachusetts and he's so inspirational. He's one of seven children. His mother was 17 when she had him. He's a black kid. His best friend who was white threw a Molotov cocktail through his window and his house caught on fire. And so he's on a mission to give to kids—he calls them black and brown boys. That's what he calls them, my black and brown boys. And now he's got girls in there. And so every year we give two scholarships to Base kids. And so this year we have two more came. So this year we're graduating four. Manny almost didn't come back which is very typical in the Latino culture. You have got to stay at home, you've got to raise money, you have to help support the family, you have to go to your job. And so we had Manny come in and this kid Alex, who's also Base kid, he and I sat and talked to him and I said, "You're coming back. You're so close, Manny." And he had a lot of terrible things happen to him. And we went to financial aid, we went to the registrar's office, we did all this stuff, we spent the whole day.

And then Alex got him housing because he knew someone in residential life and the next day Manny was back. And so Manny, he's now back on the baseball team. Just got back from Florida. My husband and I will help him financially. Not a lot, not a lot, but it's everything to this kid. \$10 is a lot of money, but we gave him like he was going to Florida. I said, you have pocket money. He goes, "I'm good, I'm good Lib. I'm good." And he's tall kid. So we gave him a

few hundred dollars and what I'm trying to do at Assumption is educate the administration on the struggles of these kids. Like the people in our treasurer's office, he has a refund check coming, right? And he needs this money. And then he had problems with his health insurance and they were charging him \$800 and I said, you don't understand. The lady said, I don't care. He either pays it or he gets kicked out of school, he needs health insurance. And so then you can't register for classes and all the social stuff. So we paid the health insurance and I went to the president and I said, you can't do this. You can't. It's not the way the world works anymore. Like you can't write a check for \$800 when you're Manny. You just can't. I said, "there's bullets flying through his house because gang members are fighting over drugs. His two friends got shot." Like what? What? And I said, this is life, this is real. But we live in up in a bubble, but I also think that's the reputation of Worcester. That it's crimes. It's a lot of underprivileged people, but you don't have to be privileged or underprivileged to be smart, to want to work hard, to want to do better.

And we need to give them those opportunities. My mindset, politically, spiritually, everything has changed so much. My father thinks they should build a wall. My father thinks everyone should speak English. Yeah, it's so hard for me to process it. He thinks we should send all the Mexicans back. And I said to him one day, "What if we sent all the Irish back when your father, when your grandfather came, or my mother, her parents came from Italy and my grandmother never spoke English, never drove a car, never gave back." My grandfather built a successful business and my mother says, "That's different!" And I'm like, "No, it's really not." So my brother and my sister are very conservative, my little sister and I are more—I am much more, more liberal. I still think people should be held responsible for how they behave and what they do and the decisions they make. But Manny has been put in a situation just like John Manuel to want to do better. But no one's helping them. So we have to help them. We still hold them accountable. I still don't let Manny mess up. I still smack him in the head sometimes when he doesn't go to class or if I get an email that he's not doing well. Right. Because everyone knows to email me—all his professors—and I'll call them in my office. And he goes to class and because he doesn't want to disappoint me either. But there needs to be, it can't be one way or another. We'll get there. I think Worcester is definitely going to get there. I think the energy is there. I think the excitement is there.

I was at so many city council meetings and Economic Development Committee meetings and people want this to happen. The pride in Worcester, that heart, their logo. It's so real. It's so real. It's so exciting. So I think it's going to be amazing and I don't know what part I've played. The Red Sox were coming to Worcester anyway, but the fact that Assumption College—and we're doing so much like we're going to support after school programs, that's our thing. We are going to take our resources and support after school. The president doesn't believe me yet, but we're going to, we're not building after school programs, but the opioid problem is a big problem in Worcester and we are going to help fight that problem with after school education.

TNA: From what I'm seeing, you are making a way hiring back just with the brand name of Red Sox. You're just so involved. It's way beyond just the brand name.

EMO: Because I tell kids when I teach marketing, sport marketing and all these other classes, you could put the Nike Swoosh and I think the Nike logo says it all too, a brand isn't a logo, right? You look at the Nike Swoosh and how do you feel when you look at that? Like what do you think of and my kids say running? I'm like, "No, what do you feel?" And then some kid will say, "Power, like just do it." That's the brand. It's not Assumption or we're Catholic and we turned out good kids. No, it's like what do, what do people feel when they say Assumption College? What do they feel when they say Worcester? Like it used to be a drive through town, a lot of industry that had died there, but now all of a sudden people are starting to build it up again and it's becoming exciting. So you want the brand to be I think I want to live in Worcester. I think this is pretty cool what they're doing. That's a brand. That's how you feel, when you feel it, then you know. That's why Nike—did you see the Serena Williams commercial? Crazy! If we look at her, look at Serena Williams herself. Serena Williams started, she and her sister, don't think for a second they weren't discriminated against. I had a basketball player, Jordan, and we were talking about the video with Serena and she told me that her mother played basketball for, I don't know, I want to say big school down south. They went to an all white college to play. And I think Jordan's mom was the only black woman on her team too. There was a straw doll with a black face with a noose around its neck hanging from the hoop.

And Jordan told the story and literally the whole room went quiet. And this is Jordan's mother's younger than I am. I said, "What did your mother do?" And she said that her mother wanted to play, but the coach was afraid that she would get hurt, they would hurt her on the court. So they left and my mother was not happy. And so the kids were all looking at me and I said, "So when you guys think you know about racism, because we're all white and we all live these lives, you don't know until you walk in and you see a doll of yourself hanging in a noose." That's insane. When you think about that, like who would do that? Who? And so we have to change that and make Jordan feel welcome here and want people to come to Worcester and know it's a welcoming community. And we can't have all these biases and I don't know, it's wasted energy to me.

TNA: Well thank you very much again for this interview, it was incredibly interesting.

AR: Yes it was very unique and inspiring. Thank you for coming.

EMO: My pleasure, I know I talked for a lot, like I said I like to tell stories.

TNA: Well it was super interesting and thank you again.

EMO: No problem I hope you guys enjoyed.

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