

Interviewee: Hanna Solska
Interviewers: Esperanza Jiminez and Daniella Pitruzzello
Date of Interview: October 22, 2018
Location: Assumption College, Worcester, Massachusetts
Transcribers: Daniella Pitruzzello and Esperanza Jiminez



Overseen by Prof. Carl Robert Keyes and Prof. Lucia Knoles, Assumption College

Abstract: Hanna Solska was born in 1947 in Warsaw Poland, right after World War II. She received a Master's in Sociology and a PhD in Law from Warsaw University. She migrated to America in 1980 and went from Ohio, to Worcester, Massachusetts, and then to Sutton, Massachusetts where she currently resides. Although she was passionate about being a professor in Poland, her law degree did not transfer forcing her to channel her passions into the Worcester community. She started working for as the executive director of International Center of Worcester, then moved on to be a volunteer director at the Ecotarium [formerly New England Science Center]. She received an MPA at Clark University and become the manager of patient relations at Saint Vincent Hospital and MetroWest Medical Center. As a mother of two children, she had to balance her work and home life, however, she found this much easier to accomplish in Poland. Throughout this interview Hanna discusses her entire life, her passions, the beauty, the pain, lessons she has learned, love, loss, family, her political views, and where she is today. She explains in detail her upbringing and her path as a woman of Worcester.

EJ: How are you?

HS: I'm fine thank you.

EJ: [laughs] So, first I want to just go over some general background questions. What is your full name? Including both your maiden name and your married name.

HS: Ok, actually this is my maiden name. I changed my name after divorce to my maiden name. So, it's Hanna Solska. Solska being my maiden name.

DP: How do I spell the last name?

HS: S-O-L-S-K-A.

EJ: When were you born?

HS: That was November 29, 1947.

EJ: Ok. Where?

HS: In Poland.

EJ: Oh, that's awesome!

HS: Yes [laughs]. I don't know, but that's what happened.

DP: [laughs] What was the town?

HS: Warsaw, Poland.

DP: How's that spelled?

HS: As in Warsaw. I can say in Polish (ph)Var-sha-va. If you want to know.

EJ: Oh...Poland is on my bucket list [laughs].

HS: Well, it's worthwhile to visit. That's for sure.

EJ: Yes. So, what was the name of your husband?

HS: First husband was Adam Paszkowski.

EJ: Was he Polish?

HS: Yes, he was Polish. Yes, he was.

EJ: That's cool. Did you meet in Poland?

HS: Yes, he was in medical school, last year, when we met.

EJ: Did you have any children?

HS: Yes, we have two children. And it's Cathy who now s 43, and Peter who is 40.

EJ: So, do you have any grandchildren?

HS: I have two grandchildren. Granddaughters who are six and four.

EJ: Six and four; that's so cute. So, what do your kids do?

HS: So, my daughter is a lawyer, and she works in lower Manhattan at a court in New York. And my son is actually currently a stay-at-home dad.

EJ: Manhattan, that's cool. So, what was your childhood like?

HS: Well, I was born right after the Second World War. So, from point of view of economic situation, Poland was very poor. It was—everything was destroyed by Germans. I am from Warsaw. Warsaw was completely destroyed so we had a difficult time. There was not much food and everything else when I was growing up. It was difficult. Happy childhood from point of view that I had loving parents and grandparents, but surviving that was a different story. Yes, it was rather difficult, the economic situation in Poland after war.

EJ: So, what would you say the impact was on your family?

HS: It's difficult to say. My father was in the army, fighting Germany. After the war, he started teaching and so, that's a professional situation. My mother was journalist. She was writing from the very beginning. So, they were very Polish. Patriotic. They wanted to make sure that Poland would be restored and we have a better future. They work very hard to make sure that it's improving every year.

EJ: It seems like they had a very big voice during all of that with your dad being a professor and your mom being a journalist.

HS: That's correct. Yes, and after the war Poland changed orientation toward a socialist country and became part of eastern block, which was associated with Soviet Union. I can say that they strongly believed in the ideas of equality and egalitarianism. And they fought for this during the war and after the war. I can say they were very involved with politics, yes.

EJ: Yes, are you currently involved with politics?

HS: No. no.

EJ: [laughs] yeah. I wanted to ask what do you do? Or what did you do?

HS: I'm retired. In Poland I finished sociology and master's in sociology and law school at Warsaw University. And I have PhD [Doctor of Philosophy] in law. And so, I was teaching as a professor before coming here. Of course, when I came here, then my law degree didn't really count because American law is different than Polish. Polish is based on the Napoleonic Law. I don't know if you know the difference, but it's not precedent-based law. American law is precedent-based law based on English system. Clark University offered that I can start law school from the very beginning. Since I had a PhD, I didn't feel that I wanted to do this again. So, when I came here, I didn't work for some time. I took care of my children—I came with small children, Peter and Cathy were two and five. So, I stay home, and I was at home until they were in high school. And then I started working for International Center of Worcester. I was executive director for few years. Then I was volunteer director at Ecotarium. It was [New

England [Science Center] in my time. Now it's Ecotarium. And then I eventually finished MPA [Master of Public Administration] at Clark and became Manager of Patient Relations at the Saint Vincent Hospital and MetroWest Medical Center.

EJ: That's amazing!

HS: And that's where I retired from in 2010. It's very different career than I was supposed to have! That's was not my goal but you adjust.

EJ: But you seem to have a lot of knowledge about various parts of society and the world.

HS: Yes.

EJ: Which is really cool.

HS: Yes, I hope so, yeah. I travel a lot too, so yes.

EJ: So Poland and Worcester, are those the only two places you have lived in your life?

HS: Oh no. When we came first to the United States, when we immigrated in 1980, we lived first for one year in Ohio. And that was the most miserable experience of my life [laughs]. From Warsaw I came to the basically corn fields and nothing else. [laughs] So, it was difficult. Fortunately, my husband got accepted into a residency program in Worcester City Hospital, which doesn't exist anymore, but then it was. So, we moved in 1981 here. And we live now in Sutton--I mean last 12 years in Sutton. Before, in Worcester, basically all our American life. That's how I say [laughs].

EJ: What challenges has this city faced and still faces? If any.

HS: Well, when we move here—and that was 1981—I found it very interesting city. Had lots of activities for children, for adults, cultural, social events. It was a pretty stable city. And Worcester became really crime ridden and also there was a lot of gangs in Worcester—still are I believe. So, that is one thing that prompted us to move to Sutton, which was a little, tiny, small town about fifteen minutes from Worcester. I think there is still a lot of crime and drugs really, you know? And we have this opioid crisis here in Worcester too. So, it's not a very safe city anymore. I think that's major challenge. I think on the positive thinking, it has a lot to offer—still a lot to offer. And being this place for foreign movies, lectures in different colleges. There are a lot of colleges here, so I think it's an interesting city with a lot to offer, but I think that social fabric changed a lot. You know, and that's major challenge I would say. And there is so very big class stratification. A lot of poor people, and you can see driving through it's in every corner, two or three people begging for money or otherwise. So, it's very sad to see that, yes. It was once a very thriving city—industrial revolution and after, it was fantastic city to be living in. And very rich. That's why we have those wonderful museums here, because money was donated by those

rich industrialists, and it continued in the eighties. Even downtown it used to be so vibrant. And you could walk at night, and now no--there's nobody there. And there's nothing happening. They try very hard to bring—especially the cultural council—they try to bring college students downtown to just show them the opportunities there. But I'm not sure how it works anymore. I'm not here anymore, so [laughs]. So, it's hard for me assess situation.

EJ: Yeah. No, that's really helpful because I was really...I was expecting Worcester--I've never been into to Worcester before coming here. And I never saw--like in Boston you have Boston Commons, and like--you have like a place where people gather. And I didn't really see that in Worcester, which kind of made me sad. But, I think that's cool that there used to be a place where it was more popular.

HS: Yes, absolutely. And what they call Worcester Common right behind City Hall, it used to be a nice park that they made into this ice rink. And there is—now I don't even know—they have nice concerts in the summertime. And I always go and they have several festivals like the Latino Festival, and I think one or two other festivals. So, I think it's nice they are trying to revive this. They put a lot of money into changing the architecture. Before it was a mall, so everybody was there when I came here. Now the mall doesn't exist anymore. So, I think that we have wonderful manager. And he's really turning the city around. And now it's this Red Sox junior team coming and everybody is hoping to have a lot more visitors, a lot more business.

EJ: And what do you think women's experiences have been in Worcester? Or what was your experience as a woman in Worcester? [laughs]

HS: Oh, [laughs] don't start me on this. I could not believe when I came here. What a culture shock, that women were treated like second-class and that was 1980. I could not write my name as such, Hanna. I had to be—Dr. Adam Paszkowski so, I was Mrs. Adam Paszkowski. I had no name. I volunteered at Junior League of Worcester—very posh organization—and suddenly I didn't even have a name and they couldn't understand. Women were kind of in the background of everything. They didn't really count politically, economically. I think I had difficult time to open my own bank account in my name. I just was shocked. In Poland, women were always treated equally if not better. And we have really fantastic options and opportunities to advance in career, and you had grandmas usually staying with children or state paid nursery for children. So, they can stay there for free while you work! And when you had child, we had half a year of paid maternity vacations. Stay at home and yes. And the normal vacation. Just employee vacation starts at four weeks, a month. You have month, starting in Poland. Now I came here, and after few years I have two weeks vacation. I couldn't even go to Poland to visit for two weeks. It was just ridiculous. And still women never get the same pay as men. I know that or fact. So, I don't think there is equality, and I am very committed to women's issues because I don't think it's right. And it shouldn't be that they are second-class citizens.

EJ: I agree. I didn't know that about Poland. I didn't know that women were treated better over there around the same time period.

HS: Absolutely.

EJ: And it just shows how far behind we were. [laughs].

HS: Yes. Absolutely. So, you know everybody here thinks that communism or socialism was really bad idea, perhaps economically. But I think this put you on the even level. All my friends are lawyers or professors—girlfriends—and everybody had children, and we had help from the state too. And you couldn't do it here. And another thing is education. Two things that really shocked me. In such a really, really rich country that you have to pay for college or better education than high school. We had this all for free. Right? We never pay for any education through college, PhD or whatever. It's always free, and still is. Now that they have embraced the capitalist system, they have private schools. They have private colleges, but still they have free state colleges. And education was very good. So, that was a really big shock. A cultural shock to me coming here expecting America is, you know, leading the world. And suddenly I am not treated equal.

EJ: Yes, that must have been very frustrating.

HS: Yes. [laughs].

EJ: So, you just mentioned that you attended state schools and what was the name of the school?

HS: College you mean? Warsaw University.

EJ: And you didn't have any challenges when you were getting education over there?

HS: No. No, that was actually a given. I didn't even think about this. Of course! My mother said you are going, just choose what you want to be. And there was no challenge. Challenge was when you have children—I was actually defending my PhD when I was eight months pregnant. [laughs] It wasn't pretty. But, I did it. And yes, you have help. We had a lot of help from the state, and as I said, it was not so rich a country. I mean I know it wasn't rich country, but they could afford at least this to give you help when you have children and so forth.

EJ: I like that...You described...What was your first job?

HS: In general or here in the states?

EJ: In general. Like I think you mentioned....

HS: I was teaching. I was teaching—actually then I was teaching victimology. [laughs] At the Warsaw University. And then I then moved to Polish Academy of Sciences to the Institute of Law. We were not teaching in the academy. You don't have students, you don't teach. You just

do the research and write books. And then I do thesis. So, I didn't teach, I was paid to be there and do the research.

DP: In America, it's kind of custom to get a job when you're around sixteen. So, did you have a job when you were...

HS: No. That wasn't custom in Poland. Nobody had jobs at sixteen at all. Not even through high school I think. Nobody worked because it wasn't crucial for children really or teenagers to have money. Everything was rather cheap, whatever was available. And parents usually--both parents worked so that--that wasn't really an issue. And my daughter here worked here when she went--actually started college. Both of my children worked. One, Peter was delivering pizza, Cathy was waitressing. So, so we learn quickly, right? [laughs] If you want your own money, you have to work for it, right?

EJ: So, what have both of your works mean to you? What did it mean to you to work in the law environment and then coming here and working and kind of giving back to the Worcester society? What have those jobs meant to you?

HS: Well, it's really hard to transfer the experiences from such different country to here. What I learned maybe mostly, not necessarily just from the job but from my upbringing, that you have to give to the society. You cannot just live isolated life. I got very involved right away from the moment we came here and I was involved in many, many organizations, volunteering, and helping others. I can say that that was mostly my upbringing. What helped me to realize that you have to be active member of the society, that you cannot just take, you have to give. And so I am always involved and I am still now.

EJ: So, In Poland you said you had a lot of support which was able to help you kind of balance your career and your family life.

HS: Yes. That's correct.

EJ: How are you able to balance that here? I know you said that you have to pay for like some help for your kids or was school enough?

HS: My son went to the nursery or preschool at Clark University. I had to pay for it, of course, but mostly I wanted him to go there to learn English. Because, of course, my children didn't know any English when they came. And my daughter then started elementary school because she was five. It was difficult without any family support and friends. You have to make really fast friends, which I can do this. I have big network of friends, but at first, especially in Ohio, first year was nightmare. But when I came here I made effort. I was very involved in PTA at school, elementary school she went to. And this way I met a lot of people. But, you really you really need support when kids are sick or something. That was another thing kind of shocking to me

that when they were sick the doctor wouldn't come and then see them at home. Normally in Poland you just call and the doctor comes and sees your sick child at home. Here this was not happening. So, especially that was difficult. And you didn't know at first where to go, who to see. So, you had to learn all by yourself. Once, after year or two, I started to have more and more friends, so that was easier. But, without this support I would say—and then you have to pay of course for any nursery. Cathy and Peter went initially to a public school in Worcester, Worcester Public Schools. So, I didn't have to pay for that. But after that elementary school we realized that education wasn't really up to our expectations. So, they went to private school in Worcester, so we had to pay. That was huge sacrifice on our part, but we knew that's the only way to give them a good start in life; to have good education. They have very good education.

EJ: Yeah...so, in some cities, the public school system is not as up to par.

HS: Exactly.

EJ: And that tends to affect the society around it. So, you said that there are like a lot of drugs and violence

HS: Yes.

EJ: And that's one of the challenges Worcester has to deal with.

HS: Yes, true.

EJ: And it kind of starts at the public school. You know what I mean? Like, not providing the kids with enough support leads them to go astray.

HS: Yes. That's right and especially the extra-curricular activities. When Cathy entered Doherty High School, basically they cut all the extra programs. City-wide cuts. So, there was not art after school. There was no sports. Which she really cared a lot about, and so she was home at one o'clock. And how much have you learned in four hours or less? [laughs] So, it was just amazing to me that they learn so little. So, there's this challenge. And I have my step grandson—grandchildren actually three of them finished Doherty High School. I don't know if you are familiar with Worcester. So, they have about 50-60% of students who don't even speak English. So, English is their second language. That's a huge challenge. And I think Worcester said that by 2021 or something, majority of students won't be born here. So, now everybody speaks different languages. I imagine that it's a huge challenge for school department, too. And you have to provide some kind of common tie to all of them so they don't quit. They don't leave school and hang out around and do drugs. It's a huge challenge.

DP: And how is that high school spelled?

HS: Doherty. D-O-H-E-R-T-Y High School.

EJ: What do you think are the pros and cons of the path you have chosen? The positives and the negatives?

HS: Well, I didn't really choose, [laughs] I was forced to choose. If I had stayed on my original path, then I would be professor of law by now, teaching. But you learn to adjust, I guess. That's a plus. You learn how to adjust to different circumstances. Suddenly you are dropped in the middle of something—somewhere you've never been. And I think you just learn to adjust. And I think compromise, adjustment—that's what it taught me. Cons, of course, I wish [laughs] I could have stayed in Poland. But there was huge political unrest in Poland. That was one of major reasons why I left. I didn't want my children to go through this. So, I don't know how it would have been in 1980. That was solidarity movement in Poland and the whole of Europe was a lot of different movements—political movements. So, that was reason why I left and who knows what I'd be doing there if I stayed. But here, definitely that was challenge. But I think it made me stronger. I couldn't rely on my mom anymore, which I did a lot, and my grandmother. So, now I was on my own. I had to survive and I had two small children. You learn quickly what to do, that you can survive new circumstances you don't know much about.

That was a difficult time. Now, you have all the cell phones. Then, you had to call, and you couldn't call directly. You had to go through operator. So, it wasn't easy to even be in touch. At some point—we did at the beginning—we didn't have money for me to travel back and forth. Later, yes, but at the beginning, no. There was no Skype, so I couldn't see my mom. And we just tried to talk. And every minute it was like one dollar then, you know. So, it was very expensive. But, yes, I always relied on my mother. [laughs] I can tell you that was shock to my system. [laughs] I cannot call her, “Mom, what do I do now, and can you come and stay with children?” No. You learn, so it makes you stronger. And then divorce. That's another thin which makes you stronger. You have to go through this. It's not pretty usually. You whatever you need to do for your children, I guess.

DP: I have a couple questions. So...you said that your mom was still in Poland when you were here.

HS: Yes.

DP: What about the rest of your family?

HS: No, everybody was there except my husband who came with me.

DP: And were you close with the rest of your family that was there?

HS: Oh, very much yes, yes. Very much. And I'm still very close. My mom is no longer with us, but I have two brothers in Warsaw. I visit them at least once a year if not twice a year. Now that I have time.

DP: [laughs] When you were working, how often would you visit them? Was it still once a year or twice a year?

HS: No. That was impossible. I really started with two weeks vacation. So, it would be one time, if at all. Then after divorce, my second husband was Scottish so we would not always go to Poland. He would want to go to Scotland. [laughs] So, we had to compromise. Sometimes it was every other year maybe. Yes, if that.

DP: And what was it like being the person to step away from your family and move to another country?

HS: Well, it was very difficult. I can tell you because as I said I was close to my siblings and my parents and grandparents. I actually lived with my grandparents when I was a student. I never imagined I would stay here. I came and waited. In my mind, this unrest in Poland would subside and everything will go back to normal and I thought I would be able to go back. I came on tourist visa for three months and that's what I was expecting. But it didn't happen this way, so it was getting worse and worse and worse and so eventually I couldn't even call my parents, the letters were opened, and censored so it was just dramatic. Dramatic yes, dramatic, yes. So it's hard to not to have family. My husband's mother used to live in Dorchester, Polish area in Boston. So they were not really helpful in everyday life, but from time they would come for holidays and so forth. So I had some help once we moved from Ohio here. At least I had some kind of ties to Polish community and to them. That was good for better or worse [Both DP and HS laugh].

DP: I want to go back to your experience as a professor in Poland. I know sometimes people will specialize in specific types of law maybe for domestic violence or something like that. Did you have a specialty?

HS: At that time, we didn't talk about domestic violence. My specialty was criminology and I wrote my Ph.D. thesis was about young offenders and their background—economic and social background. I interviewed young offenders in Poland between 16 and 21 age years old. And so I try to see how upbringing and living in different parts of Poland, influence you being criminals. That was my specialty. I never practiced law as such. I went into research from the beginning, and teaching. I did not want to be a lawyer, practicing lawyer.

DP: Were there any personal experiences that led you to go down that path?

HS: Well, no.

DP: It just interested you?

HS: Yes, because first I graduated from sociology department, so I am sociologist really. I wanted to see how society works and that's what led me to research. Research always was on my

mind and I know being lawyer is not always as glamorous as it looks [laughs] and especially criminal law. So I was sure I didn't want to practice criminal law. So it's tough, but I wouldn't be able to anyway so that was not problem. But research actually was interesting to me because it shows you what society you are living in and I think that's more interesting than representing criminals in the court.

DP: Yeah. I agree, I'm a sociology major too. [Laugh]

HS: [Laugh] oh, good, yes.

DP: And then I just had a couple of more questions that I wanted to ask before you continue. One of the things that you kept mentioning was that you really seem to value education. And so I was wondering, I also noticed a connection that you said you seemed to have with your mother, was she the one that instilled that value within you or what made you really start to value education?

HS: Yes, absolutely, yes. I knew from the beginning, from when I was born [laughs], that I have to go to college. There was not even any question about that. My mother, unfortunately she didn't finish her studies because of the war. So, she never actually graduated from the university. She felt very badly about this, but by that time, she had me and my brother. She was young, but she had children so she couldn't really study. Then, I don't think we even had night classes, it was just students during the day. I am sure she wanted to make sure—actually she pushed all three children to have Ph.Ds. She was really taught us that education is really key to the future. And I believe in it strongly; that's why I push my children. Pushed so there was no doubt that they'd want to go to college, no matter what. So yes, absolutely. Yes, absolutely. She did. [laughs]

DP: That's great, yeah, its always good to have that influence in your life.

HS: Then it's also a little different situation in Poland because we were theoretically a classless society, but it's not true. We were called *intelligencia* class. And so everybody who I knew was going to college, so that was like peer pressure, or that was given that we all go to college so it was expected of you. People from small villages, that's different story. But also because this was egalitarian system when you apply to college, you get points for your exam, like SAT, something similar, you know, points. And if you were from small village, you got extra points. Or if you apply to certain departments that have mostly women, like medical school in Poland, then men would get extra points. So the State was trying to even the opportunities for everybody. If you come from small village. obviously your elementary or high school is not as good as in Warsaw, so they tried to even for everybody the starting point.

DP: And did you like that system?

HS: Yes, I think it was fair, it was fair. Because I had a lot more opportunities than somebody coming from small village. Yes, absolutely.

EJ: I have a question. You said that medical school was more popular among women than men?

HS: Oh, yes, absolutely.

EJ: That's fascinating. [laugh]

HS: Yes, absolutely. In my time the student body was 90% women. And the reason was because it wasn't well paid. So, of course. Also, it was felt that women have more feeling, but honestly it was state position. There was no private clinic, there were state hospitals so everybody had salary, salary was not very high. So naturally women would go to positions like that or they would go to nursing school, but they could as well go to medical school. Now it's different; they have private practice clinics and private hospitals and so forth and doctors earn real money. But still they like to immigrate. Now that they are a part of European Union it's very easy for everybody to work abroad. So 90% I would say or more were women students in medical school.

EJ: That's amazing!

HS: Yeah!

EJ: I wish that was here. [laughs]

HS: [laughs] I know. And it was free too.

DP: One more before we move on. I know you're talking about the difference between women and men in Poland. Were there any feminist movements in Poland when you were growing up?

HS: No. No, because there was no really reason. Women weren't necessarily politically active—run in elections, for example. But we had women ministers of different ministries. Ministry of education, I believe there was a woman minister of health. So there were women, it was rare, but that was long before our times. So no, I would say no. Now, yes, there definitely is. There was actually a big women's conference when I was visiting about 3 or 4 years ago, yes. So they are much more aware, and there is a lot of books by sociologists. I buy all of these books because I am amazed, [laughs] interested to read them, about feminist movement in Poland and European countries, yes. That's much different. But I don't think you had—you had here the feminist movement. Sort of you with glorious time, but other than that, in the 60s, 70s not much. So I think, now it's different, everybody's aware.

DP: Yeah. Alright.

EJ: I think that you answered the political and community involvement a lot. The only question that you haven't answered in that section is what role has religion played in your life, if its played any?

HS: None. I am Atheist. And that's how I was brought up. Poland was very Catholic country so it was another sociological observation when I came here. All I knew was Catholic church, that's all we had in Poland, and I come here and on every corner there is different denomination church, and I just couldn't believe it. And there are priests who are married, and priests who are not wearing the long black robe, it was total cultural shock for me.

EJ: How did—you were raised atheist? How did that affect your family when you were growing up being surrounded by people...

HS: Well officially, really it was not a religious country, because everybody—I mean people were going to church on Sundays, but officially if you were in a government position or part of the Communist party were not supposed to go to church. So, not a lot of my friends were not religious. So it was not expected of me to go to church.

EJ: That's good. Have health issues impacted your life or those in your family, if any?

HS: I don't think so. We have been pretty good. Healthy, yes. [laughs]

EJ: [laughs] I feel like everything over there is way better.

HS: I don't know how to think about this. My brothers actually—since they are younger, I'm the oldest one—it seems to me that they are doing much worse than I am, you know. [laughs] So I don't know what's up with—I go with them sometimes on different trips around Europe. And, you know, they have problems walking up or long, and I don't, so I don't know...

EJ: [laughs] Women are healthier.

HS: Yes [laughs]...healthy and strong yes, healthy and strong.

EJ: Yes [laughs] Because it was a Communist society, healthcare was available to everyone and then, and you mentioned that it was kind of, maybe not difficult but a shock when you came here and realized that its not available. It's like a luxury to have healthcare, not everyone was able to...

HS: Yes, that is correct.

EJ: And I think even still it's a luxury to health care. I mean we--we have general health care in Massachusetts correct?

HS: Yes.

EJ: Yea, but not in every state in the U.S...

HS: Yes, that's correct.

EJ: Which is really sad.

HS: Yes, that is another shock to me, that not every citizen of this country, born or not born here, but if she or he is a citizen, should have healthcare. That should be like anywhere else. And it's not luxury, it's heartbreaking when you hear that people have to choose between their pills or food. How can it be? The richest country in the world...unbelievable. It's another thing which I really feel awful, it's awful. And now even the current president is trying to cut even this Obamacare which was very limited. We are very lucky we're in Massachusetts, but other states don't have access, so that's terrible.

EJ: This question asks, who's health are you responsible for besides your own, but since your children are already grown up and...

HS: Yes, yes. They have their own insurance, yes.

EJ: Any animals? [laughs] No cats or dogs to take care of?

HS: No, no. I always had dogs all my life, but now that we moved to a condo I don't feel that it's fair to animals to keep them in a condo. I love dogs.

EJ: I love dogs too...I have four. [laughs]

HS: Oh! Good for you. [laughs]

EJ: [laughs] I love them.

HS: Yes me too.

EJ: They make life happy.

HS: Yes, and they are happy, make you happy too, they always love you unconditionally and...

EJ: [laughs] Yes, even if you smell weird they still come hug you.

HS: Yea [laughs] that's right, exactly.

EJ: So some closing questions, which I think you've kind of gotten through some of them, how did you get through the difficult times when you were going through the transitions, and things changing, and you couldn't talk to your mom, like every single day that you wanted...how did you..?

HS: That was very difficult. I might have to say, this first year. It was a difficult adjustment. You had nobody really to talk to. My English was so, so. I knew English, but the English we were taught, was not spoken, just read and write, so I couldn't understand on the phone anybody, neither on the T.V. It was not really English. That's American English, so it was different, so that was a difficult time. And my kids didn't adjust very well either. They didn't understand why nobody understood them. And my husband was first year residency in the hospital, so he was working 36 hours, came home to sleep, and next 36 hours on call so he wasn't there. We had one car, and he had to take it to go to hospital so it was extremely difficult time and very little money too. And so that first year was extremely difficult. It would get—well, what do you do? You can't return when your own country of origin is in turmoil. Political turmoil, economic...there was nothing to eat there. I was, with what money we didn't have, I was sending them food, because all they had in the stores, in the grocery stores was vinegar. That's all the pictures I was sent from everybody. So we were sending them packages of food from here. It was extremely difficult time, I have to say. If it was better I would probably return, because I didn't want to live here much then, but it was too long and too difficult to return to the country. I didn't know what would be future of my children if I go back? So I couldn't do this to them.

DP: Did your family support you coming to the United States?

HS: Well, knowing what's happening politically, but that was the first time my mother said, "You pack your bags and go. Take children and go." My husband was already here. He was studying for board exam, to pass the board for medical board. so he was here and I was home, and it was getting really, really politically very dangerous. And also Ronald Reagan was telling on T.V. that army, that Russia would come in, just like they did to Czechoslovakia or Hungary and there would be war. So yes, from this point my mother said, "You have no choice, you have to go. Leave now." I had no problem coming here, having my Polish-American husband, you know. So I went to consulate and got the visa right away. Of course, if I didn't have Polish-American husband, I probably would not get the visa. But since he was here and my mother felt that we should be together and it's safer for everybody. Yes, so she supported me at this moment. At the very beginning I was not leaving my country, and that was the agreement we had with my husband. He would stay there and work there, but you know, the political situation changed, you do what you have to do, what's best for your family. So yes, so at the end she did, because again it was safer, it was—we had everything you know, basic things.

DP: Did anyone else in your family consider moving?

HS: My younger brother did, but I talked to immigration lawyer here and for the siblings to actually be able to get visa as a family would take about 20 years. So that wasn't really

happening for him. He couldn't do it. He would come then if he could get visa or permanent residency, but he couldn't, even if I sent him an invitation. For siblings, it's much longer than for parents or children so that wasn't happening. They are both now back, they stay there, survive. Actually, they are doing very well now!

DP: Good!

HS: They have own businesses because now you can. Yes, and they are traveling all over the world, and sometimes they invite me to go along [laughs]. So yes, they are doing pretty good.

DP: So the rest of your family, it sounds like they may have come if they could have.

HS: Yes, at that time yes. But now political and economic situation in Poland is excellent. It's because they are a part of European Union so its standard of living is very high. And so I can say that they are doing extremely well, both of them. They actually changed from state jobs. Before when one brother was journalist, the other was engineer and they started their own business and they are doing very well.

DP: Yea good for them! You said that you knew English before coming here and how to read and write, was that uhm...a course that you were required in school?

HS: Yes. In we started Russian, obligatory Russian, in fifth grade through college. English was one of your choices in high school. English, French, German or Latin...the four languages you had to choose one. So I took Latin and English, actually. And I continued English through college. So I could read and write, especially research papers and so forth, no problem. But because the teachers of English, then, didn't travel abroad, they themselves couldn't talk really well [laughs]. So we were never taught conversational English or anything like that. But you know grammar yes, and reading yes.

DP: Okay, it kind of sounds similar to our school system then. You learn in high school. You have a few options for the languages.

HS: Yes. What language did you take?

DP: I took Italian.

HS: Ooohh!

DP: Yeah!

HS: Alright! You look kind of Italian.

DP: I am! [laughs]

HS: [laughs] Oh I see, so that should be easy for you.

DP: Well... [laughs]. I don't know about that, but...

HS: [laughs] I see.

DP: You were talking about how you had so many expectations of the United States. What was it like here to come and then realize that everything you thought about this country was very different in reality?

HS: Yes, that was a lot of shock. We had always kept picture United States as this beautiful country, everybody's democratic country, everybody's free, and basically freedom is very important, freedom of speech, freedom of religion. And what we realized was that people were free because they had money. There were more free people or less free people. Democracy...hmm...that's also debatable. So suddenly we see that it's not like we—everybody thought that the money is readily available as—I mean we were not as naive, but some people thought that money is basically growing on the trees here. Streets are paved with money. So, a lot of people did immigrate for that reason. But for me it was much more than money, that wasn't the question of money, the question was democracy, the question was political access for people in different political classes and education. If you don't have money, well, then you are stuck in an inner-city school. And so for all those kids, especially kids of different color, you know, what chances they have? Thank goodness my husband was physician and he eventually made enough money that we could put the kids in private school, but how many people can? And now I see New York, when I visit my daughter often. I mean, inner-city schools are still very poor, buildings are no good, infrastructure is falling apart. In New York City, which is like window to the world for every person who comes to this country wants to see New York. And what, potholes? I refuse to drive my car there because every time I drive, I get the flat tire from potholes! [laughs]

DP: [laughs]

HS: So no, it's terrible. I was very disappointed, very disappointed from this point of view, you know? It's not what you expect. My brothers on the other hand didn't want to come for long time because they were watching westerns so they thought everyone was on the corner with a gun. Which is, you know, most of the country, but you know they were scared. That's how America is portrayed. That everyone has gun, everyone is shooting each other. But we were growing, thinking how wonderful country it is really and then reality came [laughs]. My first letters, when I came first year—then I eventually stopped writing—but it was like “guess what” [laughs] ... “what is here” [laughs] ... “I can't believe it but...” [laughs]. You know it was very different than what I expected.

EJ: I hear that a lot too, when I go abroad, that America is...right now we're just a joke. [laughs]

HS: Oh yes of, course! [laughs]

EJ: I went abroad two separate years. I went abroad two years ago to England, and England, they don't, they do think were a joke, but they're not as harsh on us when we go to visit them, but I went to Spain this past summer and I speak Spanish so, you could tell when someone is American, but they didn't know I could understand everything they were saying [laughs]. So they were like, "Look at those Americans, they're so loud walking everywhere," and I'm Mexican-American, so I'm extra loud. [laughs]

HS: [laughs]

EJ: But it's funny to hear what they think, because we're—I think reality is setting in more abroad, that we're not—I think the perspective has changed, we're not as great as like used to be. Now we're looked as...

HS: Yes, that's true. And now, unfortunately with current government it's not getting any better. And it's a joke. But you know, we have similar situation. In Poland they elected somebody similar, like our president and in Hungary, and in Bulgaria. All these Eastern Europeans they are going for this kind of people who are very nationalistic. It's only their country, they don't care about European Union or anybody else. It's awful, it's really awful. I don't know where all this is going. So it's not any better now in Europe, especially, I mean Germany is...but also Brexit now. It's constant turmoil now. Too bad Hilary wasn't elected—or she was, but you know, she was but...[laughs]

DP: And. **EJ:** [laugh]

HS: Anyways, were not talking politics [laughs]

DP: And. **EJ:** [laugh]

HS: Maybe Elizabeth Warren will run in 2020. Vote on the 6th of November girls

DP: And. **EJ:** Yes!

HS: Yes. The one thing you have to do is to vote, yes, one way or another.

EJ: I've been told that from my mother, my criminology professor, that's the one job you have in America. [laughs]

HS: [laughs] Yes, are you registered?

EJ: Yes.

HS: Excellent, good, good.

EJ: I think I'm going to kind of combine the concluding questions because they add up to one question. I'm going to ask you two more.

HS: Okay.

EJ: Based on your life experience what advice would you give for women, especially of our generation, today?

HS: Be active, be aware of what's going on, be aware of your rights and fight for them because that's the only way you can achieve even to be paid the same as men. You have to be very active and you don't have to demonstrate, but at least be involved, be aware of what's going on. So that's the most important thing for you.

EJ: I agree with that. I don't know what do you think are—should I ask, I think she's answered sort of, how she defines success in her life and all of that. Is there anything you want to add?

DP: We kind of talked a lot about your life in the past, I don't want to keep you for too much longer, but what is your life like now? I know you said you live in your condo, you don't have any pets with you, but...[laughs]. But what is your life like now?

HS: So, my second husband died three years ago of cancer, so now I'm...

DP: I'm sorry.

HS: Thank you. So now I'm alone and I'm retired. I also I have two granddaughters, who fortunately moved three years ago, about three years ago from Virginia. So they live in Maine.

DP: Oh okay.

EJ: Oh that's closer.

HS: Yes, that's much closer. I don't have to fly actually, I can drive. So I do a lot of travelling. I spent about three months in Europe this past year. I traveled all over the place, Italy included...

DP: Well look at that! [laughs]

HS: [laughs] Yes, and so I travel a lot. And if I'm here I take classes [Assumption College WISE courses]. So I think my life is wonderful actually. Take classes, so my mind is not getting into dementia yet, so [laughs] I'm working on it.

DP: and EJ: [laugh]

HS: I spend some time with my granddaughters. I want them to remember me and since I am in good shape, I can actually go with them and do things. I signed them up for different camps in the summertime, so they stay with me and go here to different camps. And I visit my daughter often enough. I go to New York. So I think my life is actually wonderful. Yes, and I feel good. As long as I feel good [knocks on wood] [laughs]

EJ and DP: [laugh]

HS: Then yes, absolutely. And you know I have wonderful children. I wish my son maybe work already, but he still wants to stay with the girls so okay. He has one more year then the youngest starts elementary school, so he has to start thinking about this. And so yes, I think the future looks bright!

DP: Yay!

HS: Yay [laughs] that's right!

DP, EJ, and HS: [laugh]

EJ: Thank you so much. I mean your life sounds like it has been an incredible journey, and we really appreciate you coming here and sharing it with us. You give us hope and you give us a lot to think about, on how we want to lead our lives and how we want to make it a strong one.

HS: Good, yes, thank you very much, thank you.