

Interviewee: Edla Bloom
Interviewers: Taylor Dimmick and Robert Flynn
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Overseen By; Prof. Jim Lang, Assumption College

Abstract: Edla Anne Bloom was born and raised on Belmont Hill in Worcester, Massachusetts. She lived for several years in Holden, Massachusetts, and currently resides in Worcester with her husband Randy. Now, around 60 years of age, she has been involved in Worcester for over 30 years through her work, cancer and AID's awareness, and church. At the age of 16, her mother passed away to cancer, leaving Edla and her sister to fend for themselves. She attended North High, than later went on to the Worcester City Hospital School of Nursing in hopes of becoming a medical missionary, something she wanted to pursue since her childhood. Edla left nursing school and went on to take several college courses in banking and management at several colleges in Worcester where she excelled in programs such as the Greater Worcester Executive Program and the American Management Association. With these skills in banking and management, Edla worked as director and chairwoman for several companies and organizations such as the Massachusetts Municipal Wholesale Company, Holden Municipal Light Department, Guarantee Bank, AIDS Project Worcester, The American Cancer Society, and Abby's House. In the interview, Edla reflects upon the importance of her mother and family, and their influences on her to achieve in life.

TD: We are completing a citywide oral history of the lives of Worcester women, aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences. Based on the goals of the 1850 National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on the areas of women's education, health, work, and politics or community involvement. We want to... We want to focus today on your experiences with your life in Worcester [Massachusetts]. Thank you for your help with this important project.

RF: And now we would like to ask you for permission to record your oral history. And are you okay with that?

EB: Yes, Edla Anne Bloom gives that.

RF: Okay, we would first like to start off... What is your full maiden name and what is your married name?

EB: Okay, my full maiden name is Edla Ann Johnson. I was... I've been married twice. My first name... first married name was Moir, M-O-I-R, and my husband is deceased... died in December of 1987... No, it was... oh, excuse me, 1977, right, so okay there. And my married name now is

Bloom, B-L-O-O-M. Do you need their first names or ... ?

RF: Who is your current husband now?

EB: Randolph Bloom.

RF: Randolph Bloom, okay. Where and when were you married? I mean, I'm sorry. Where and when were you born?

EB: Worcester, Massachusetts, in the corridor of Memorial Hospital.

RF: Which hospital?

EB: Memorial.

RF: Memorial and when?

EB: As a breach birth. It's [laughs] trivial.

TD: Do you have any children?

EB: No. Never have... had children.

RF: Which ethnicity do you identify yourself with?

EB: Caucasian... Well, I'm Swedish... my family on both sides are Swedish.

RF: Swedish, okay.

TD: Could you describe your parents a little bit to us?

EB: I can describe my mother. My dad died when I was three so I really can only describe him through pictures. Although I can say he was over six feet tall; he had strawberry blond hair, I...he was in World War II. He was a staff sergeant and he worked for his brother, J. Edwin Johnson...and he did work on the... with the car/automobile companies, sales companies that he owned. Plus my uncle owned other types of companies such as insulation and things, oh, sorry.

RF: Where have you lived during your life? Have you always lived in Worcester or have you moved?

EB: Well the majority of my life, I've lived in Worcester. I was born on Belmont Hill and lived on Belmont Hill, basically where a number of the Swedish folk lived. I, for a short period of time, lived in Holden [Massachusetts] from 1984 to 1996, I lived in Holden, but other than that,

always in Worcester.

RF: Okay. And now currently you reside in Worcester?

EB: Yes at Two Congress St., which is on Crown Hill Historic Area.

TD: This might be random. But your father, which front was he in in World War II?

EB: I know he... I don't know that. I know he was a staff sergeant. I don't know where. I don't know where he was. My sense is he never left this country. I think he was in this country. And... Oh I didn't describe my mother. My mother was a little short lady. And...she... was born in 1903 and lived in Worcester all of her life. She...didn't finish school because back in those times it was difficult. Her dad died in the plague of 1917. So she... her mother and two sisters and brothers were... had to fend for themselves and take care of things. My mom... and I, I... Her sisters did not finish high school but she did because that was important she do that. My mother worked for Worcester Envelope Company for many, many years. Her two sisters worked at Norton Company and my uncle worked for Morgan Construction Company. So it was all... still all locally varied, very locally based. And only one of my aunts did not marry. My mother was full of spirit. She was a community activist. She worked very hard to bring up her two daughters, not having a husband or any means of support because she didn't feel she could go to work when she was trying to take care of these two little kids. So I guess I... we owe... I always say we were the original welfare family because my mother got social security and veteran's aid. So, you know, that was what was available at that time. She did a lot of things in the neighborhood. She was involved in many organizations, did a lot of things with the children in the neighborhood and when I bump into kids that I grew up with, they always have to tell me a Mrs. Johnson story. So she was the... It's somebody that... that they remembered very well from their... their childhood. And she was quite the role model for my sister and myself. She died when I was 16 from breast cancer and it was quite a shock to all of us. And my sister and I were kind of left to take care of ourselves. We lived with an 85 year old grandmother and one of my aunts who was not married and worked at Norton Company and it was quite different for us. We paid our... My sister is... has lots of learning disabilities and she reads on the third grade level and her IQ is extremely low. So it was my responsibility now to take care of her and she worked at Brewer Company, which was a pharmaceutical company down at Lincoln Square. We were members of Wesley Methodist Church and Mr. Brewer was a member. In those days, some of the larger companies where presidents or vice presidents or owners went to a particular church, a lot of people from that church were always hired by those businesses and so my sister got a job there, which was very helpful. She did finally finish her education in night school and that was now considered a GED [General Education Degree] and... She married, unfortunately, and... but does have a son who is quite wonderful. He went to Babson [College] on a full scholarship. When he left Babson [College] he owed only \$6,000 and tuition at that time was \$23,000. So [laughs] he did very, very well. He's... today... now he's... 40 so, young man.

TD: How hard was it living without parents?

EB: It was difficult because it was, it was... we didn't have anybody that we could talk to and ask questions. My grandmother at 85 grew up in a whole different world than what we were growing up with. My aunt, being a maiden lady, really was not worldly at all. She didn't read books. She... well... we had a TV, but she didn't really ever watch television. Her whole life was going to work and then coming home. And she didn't belong to any social groups. She went to church every Sunday as we did but we went to both Meth... We went to Methodist churches but she went to the Swedish Methodist Church, where we went to the larger Methodist Church, sort of around the corner from each other. And she could not give us any worldly advice because she never experienced anything. She never dated anyone. She... Her sense of humor was not there. My mother had been a practical joker and her brother was also a practical joker, so there the two really great personalities where the older sister and the younger sister seem to not have that. So... And my Aunt Ruth, which was mother's younger sister, she also had... She was married and had two daughters, who... they were both older than I. I'm the youngest in the family on both sides in my family. And...well, my parents were in their 40s when I was born so, so... So that's it. You know it's a whole different thing but we really didn't have people we could talk to, other than, I would say, my mother did a fantastic job in getting us ready. And, so, we had a good, Well... Yeah, I'll say we had a good core, a good understanding, our values were where you would want them to be and... We knew what we... I knew what we wanted to do and I was just one of these people that would constantly ask questions, even as a little kid so I would drive you crazy. And I was thirsty for knowledge. I was always the first kid in line for the bookmobile. And if somebody got in line before I got there they moved aside when I arrived. [laughs]. It was just my spot, you know. I would get a stack of books every week at the bookmobile and get them all read and bring them back and, and get more... [I] always asked people "What've you read lately?" which is a little... I know people do that now but, way back, in the 1950s that wasn't something you really did. And just did things because I felt I needed to do them. I used to babysit when I was young, or younger. I wasn't much older than the kids I was babysitting and you'd get like 25 cents an hour or something like that. I... would just budget that quarter so I gave a nickel to church and I would have 20 cents to do something with and I would save up my money so I could buy something for my mother all the time. So, you know, it was... Our big meal at home was meatloaf because that's what we could afford to have. And... so... it's, you know, it's a very... I guess that's how I became who I am because I had to learn to fend for myself but I had the greatest role model which was my mother.

RF: Talking about childhood, about possible hobbies or activities you might have done with your friends?

EB: Oh, we... I... Well, we were at those... at that time we did things like you'd jump rope and you'd play checkers and play jacks. And those were fine, but I was more of a board game person because I could win. My mother taught me how to sew, how to knit, how to crochet, so we made most of our clothes. We would go down to Grant's when we were in junior high, which was a five and dime store and buy a yard of material and make a skirt and we had a new outfit. You know, we knit our sweaters and our gloves and at Easter time, we'd take the hat we had last year

and paint it with something different, put a new flower on it and we had a new hat. [laughs]. People didn't realize we didn't have a new hat. We, you know, we would get hand-me-downs from people so... But... so, we were then clever enough to be able to make it look new and nobody would realize that it was a hand-me-down, you know. So, I guess she taught us how to, you know, do those things. I mean, she taught me how to bake and cook, not so my sister but she wasn't really able to do that, you know, clean house. She taught me budgeting... So, you know, there was... It was more of a lifestyle type thing. I could fix... She could fix anything. And guess who else could fix anything? You know, we had our screwdrivers and hammers and all that kind of stuff and just did it because we couldn't afford to have somebody come in and do it.

TD: You said you never finished high school. Did you eventually go back to get a GED [General Education Degree] or just?

EB: No. No, I graduated high school. I said my sister didn't graduate from high school. I was thinking, my sister didn't graduate from high school. She went back and got a GED.

RF: Speaking about the neighborhood that you grew up in, what... the neighborhood, like generally, do any family members you have still reside there or did most of them move out of Worcester [Massachusetts]?

EB: No, we don't have anybody else, anyone that resides there, but I'll tell you a strange story. My sister did marry and she eventually had Stanford, her son, and they were... She and her husband and Stanford were living up in Maine, up in the... northern part of Maine and... He was... He was very brilliant and he was graduating from eighth grade... Oh, he got his Eagle Scout at age 12, which is quite [_____?]

TD and RF: Wow.

EB: The kid's bright. Excuse me. So... so he graduated from high school, when, whatever, he was 13 because he was born in... No, excuse me, grammar school. He was born in December so he had to... He started a year after, you know, the kids of his age. And so we went up to his graduation from grammar school. And I said to my sister, "Do you think Stanford come down to live with us?" And you know, being with us in the summer in Holden, but... and because we'd get a chance to know him a little bit better because... Going up there was not the most pleasant thing to do up into... up where they were living. And so, she said, "Oh, that would be fine." So she came... so all of a sudden he's coming two weeks' vacation with us and my sister came along with him. She came as her two weeks' vacation from the shop she worked in, the shoe shop. And so, my sister went back home and my nephew, we took him down the Cape [Cod] and he stayed sometime with my in-laws and then he went and spent another week and a half with his grandparents who were very elderly and lived on a Sandra's... Stanford's father was adopted so these were adopted folks. He got adopted by a real neat family who... his dad was a senior vice president Heald Machine Company which was a rather large company around here. So anyways... So they went back to Maine and Stanford was to go off to high school and we got a

call a week before school was to start in Worcester and my sister said, “I’m divorcing David and we’re moving into your house. I said, “Oh, okay,” but, I mean, what are you gonna say? Then we, you know, we were trying to find... see if we could find her an apartment and that... So we just said, “Okay, they’ll stay with us.” We had a rather large home in Holden. And so he went to Wachusett [Regional High School] and enjoyed it very well. The girls were calling him, which was a new experience for him. First, they didn’t have a ‘phone in Maine and he’s having friends, you know, people stopping by. And... but... it really was important that they get on with their own lives and live someplace and even if they lived near I, it would be fine. My sister didn’t have her license yet. But Stanford would sit with her every night and read, you know, the rules and regulations and tell her the answer and explain why the answer is this way. And so she memorized the book over... It took her a couple of years. And so they... We couldn’t find an apartment for them, anything that would really work well and what they could afford and so I called the landlord in the house that we used to live in, at 167 Eastern Avenue. Mrs. Peterson, who- and in her 90s- was still living in the house and she said, “I can’t believe you’re calling. The apartment that you grew up in is now available.” Because... And we knew the people moving out. They were moving into an elderly complex. So my sister and my nephew got that apartment and he went off to North High [School], which, I should say, didn’t please me that well. I tried to get him in to something else. But anyways, he did very well; found a great group of friends. All of them were one, two, three, four, five, six, seven in the class so they were of his – they were all of the same level. And with... I think he graduated two, which was okay because the person graduating one was really neat. And that’s how he got a full scholarship to Babson [College] and, I guess the rest is history but...

RF: Speaking about education, can you give us a little enlightenment on your education, such as high school or college after that?

EB: Well, I did go to it from good old North High [School], here in Worcester. And I went into nurse’s training at Worcester City Hospital. And the reason I did that is... I should first tell you I wanted to be a missionary. I really wanted to be a missionary. That’s what was my whole goal and ever since I was a little kid. And... so I decided I would become a medical missionary and made that decision when my mother was dying and I don’t even know why I did that but that was my decision. So I went to... and I got a full scholarship to Worcester City Hospital School of Nursing. And I realized when I was there it was too hard to watch people die. It was just too much for me. And so when I left to go to school my Aunt Eberth said to me... Well she brought me up to the school with all the things I needed and she said, not... “You’re not to come home. This... you need to start your own life.” So I guess I...

RF: What school is this?

EB: Worcester City Hospital School of Nursing.

RF: Oh, alright.

EB: So I... that was quite a blow to me but then.... seeing, you know... eating in the cafeteria when everybody else went home, coming up, you know... It was just a very, very difficult... I was up on the top floor, the last room and it was hard. It was very, very hard. So I decided to leave and I went to work at the Guarantee Bank and Trust Company. So... And what I've done is taken many college courses in different - the different colleges. I've gone to Clark [University]. I took a number of banking courses. I also did take some courses at Worcester Junior College. I took a couple of courses here at Assumption [College]. I... I did a lot of coursework in banking and went off to some of the schools where I could get courses through some of the programs they offered. So I... got a certificate in marketing and I always... I just wanna get all this stuff right because that's important. Okay, my accomplishments are here. I also... I did go to the Wharton Effective Executive Course which is... Again you're there with a lot of business people. And there were four women and all the rest men that were in these - this course with us and we went through for a couple years. And one of the... They used to make fun of one of the ladies because she was blond and kinda looked a little daffy but she had a Phi Beta Kappa key. So when they found that out they stopped that. And then they made fun of Mary Lowe Rose and she was this little short lady and she's a Girl Scout. She became Executive Director of the Girl Scouts of the United - of U.S.A. So I mean, you know, we weren't necessarily... They were looking at us as just women. They didn't make fun of me for some reason. I guess I look like you don't do that but, you know... So, I've done that, I've gone through many of the Greater Worcester Executive Program, which they had this... Again these are, you know... You're in - You're doing... You're taking college courses for the purpose of helping in the business world. I've done courses with the American Management Association, The Colgate Darden Graduate School of Business Administration. And then I did take a course on power supply analyzing and planning at the School of Continuing Education and Graduate Studies at American International [University]. So, I mean, those were some of the things that I did. I did that because I was in the power industry at the time and I needed to understand what all the people that were the power people were talking about. My strength was really more with them, with negotiating contracts and, you know, being out front, making speeches. I was the Massachusetts Municipal Wholesale Company, I was the chairman of the board; that's a three billion dollar corporation. And I would go to New York to sell bonds.

RF: When was this? At what time?

EB: That was in... I don't remember the... When was I there? I have so many things I have to look... Well, it was in the 1990s. I was in the utilities business from 1990 to 1999. So it was probably 1997, something like that.

RF: Late '90s, okay.

EB: Yep. And I also was the... I worked at the Holden Municipal Light Department and I was director of electric service there, which I started in 1990- 1989, when I left banking.

RF: So you started banking after you were - after you finished...

EB: High School really.

RF: ...High School right. And you used these programs... These programs were very important to you and advancing in your work ok.

EB: Mmmhmm.

RF: Anything else you want to say about those programs or networks?

EB: Well, it... Just that, you know, I realize that they're not what you're doing because you're getting a full college education. But I think it depends on the person. I was such a curious person as a little kid that I had read enough of a lot of things because I realized I needed to read broadly and so I could really, you know, go one-on-one with a lot of the different people and so... And if I was going to go in to do something, I would prepare myself by again reading up on – on some of these companies that we were going to be working with. I would... I had financial spills from, especially from working in the bank and so I would be doing a lot of financial work with the treasurer of Emmert, when we'd go in and meet with the rating agencies. That was important because he wanted to make sure that Emmert put together a good bond rating. Now I wasn't running the company or working in the company so to speak because I was working for Holden [Municipal Light Department] but still they needed to have the chairman of the board understand what was going on and making sure I was asking the senior staff the right questions so that we as a corporation were doing okay. When I was... I was... I am probably the only municipal light department manager that ever was the – took the responsibilities of the town manager when he would go away. I would be responsible for whatever was happening in the town. In getting prepared for that, I would go to a lot of the meetings that he would go to and then when he couldn't go to the meetings, I would fill in for him. So I was very much aware of what was going on in the town of Holden [Massachusetts] and almost became a consultant to him in, you know, "What do you think about this? What do you think about that?" I... He took me to the Mass. Mutual Managers in Boston and I would go in and go to the meeting with the governor. And [laughs] I remember Governor Weld said, "Well, there's another redhead in the room. She needs to sit next to me." So I'd sit next to him, petrified, because somebody was gonna ask me a question or say something. But, you know, he was just being silly, but there weren't really any other what I call "skirts" under the table. I was many times the only "skirt" under the table and many of the meetings I went to so...

RF: Now, when did you stop working for Holden Municipal [Light Department]?

EB: 1999

RF: 1999, okay.

EB: And then I went to work for AIDS Project Worcester and I think that goes back to my

missionary work and I wanted to do something that... where I could be working with the people that I, over the years, supported financially and... You know, had done some volunteer work in many different things. I wanted to be part – to be there and see if I could make a difference for them.

RF: So in terms of meaning, this really meant something to you helping these people out? This also goes back to maybe your mother with breast cancer helping out that cause.

EB: I think it has a lot to do with that; in particular a lot of the folks who are clients with AIDS Project Worcester...are not, don't have family because their families have rejected them for good reasons. Not maybe what you would consider good reasons but after a period of time they just, you know, walked away. Although from 1990, or rather 1989-1999, it wasn't, AIDS wasn't the stigma that it was prior to that, but still it was difficult. And one of the things that we tried to do, I didn't do it directly because I was the Executive Director, one of the things we tried to do is to try to make a family atmosphere for the clients, because that's what they so much needed, and... There were so many women that were being served by A.P.W., but there were no programs for them, so we started counseling programs for women. The men did not want a counseling program for themselves, but the women certainly did, and boy did that make a big difference in their lives and in their ability to become more self-sufficient; to deal a little bit more with their disease. Some of them would volunteer for studies in different things they would continue to do in the field of AIDS. Some of them then became members of the board of directors as client members of the board. And many of them moved on; they could get a job because their health was at the point where they could have a job and they just moved on and became self-sufficient. Not that they didn't come back because they still come back for the food bank and for some of the services that we were contracted to do, they would come back for that. They always came back for counseling, whether it was one on one or in a group counseling. Actually they liked both because they could sit with a mental health counselor and talk with her, because it was a female that worked with them on that, but then eventually one of the men took over working with them too and that was good for them because that trust between...deciding to trust a man was very important too.

We had opened up family programs, we had the kids come to things that would be interesting to them. We also did a little bit of, not a little bit, but we did HIV and AIDS counseling and talking with them. We've armed a team Teen Group to come to baseball games; we took them out to dinner, [the] sort of the things that they really didn't do with a group or with friends. They didn't go to, they might have gone to McDonalds but they didn't go to some other family type restaurant and sit and eat because of what was happening with their families. Some of them live in the very poor sections of the city. We got...under my watch, we got money to help, a lot of grants to help the clients to get first and last month rental. We supported.. A.P.W. was not necessarily known for being supportive of other programs, and that turned around in my time frame, and we would write letters so other agencies would be able to get grants and then we were part of the grant that they got or where they would purchase services from us or provide services for a charge for the folks that they had in their programs. So it was sort of like bringing that right out more in the open. We became very visible. The mosaic at the Worcester Art

Museum which is not on Lancaster Street anymore, but it is in the building right now near the food court. There was a wall; they've constructed the streets differently so you wouldn't see it now, but the stairs to the education area were different and it had a cement wall, and a mosaic was being put on. It was about like the seven hills in Worcester, because we have seven hills here and it was spring, summer, fall, and winter in those seven hills, and agencies, and there's a list of agencies, worked to help make the mosaic. So this big form came into our agency and we made...this that ended up being...we didn't know...ended up being the center and we made one half of the heart. It was just amazing to watch the client...they just...it was their heart. There's just no way else to say that. Then we painted our hands so there are hands all over the place, and then also, we all made tiny mosaics all around the border. So you go in, and I would always stop my car and look at all the ones that were made by us, and I would many times just stop and put my hand on the heart. It was...just amazing, and to watch the folks grow. I just can't tell you, you know, they came out. We were no longer a secret, no longer a secret. We were out there and we were part of everything, and we stayed out there. Just because people were not going to come to us to see us, but once we went out they did come to see us. So we expanded our HIV testing to all day. We used to do it once a week at night, and I don't blame people for not wanting to come down where AIDS project is and go up in the back when it's dark and everything. So they can come in all day. We went to colleges, I know we've been here, and I am not sure what they are doing now. We would come here during AIDS awareness week and do testing; we do testing at Holy Cross and Clark. There was many a time I went to Worcester State College, was the college at the time, and do some programs with them, and do some of the classes for them and then I also went into the evening school and did the same thing. Because I want people to be aware of the disease, not afraid of it, and I wanted them to know that you don't know who has it. And so we're all people and we all put our shoes on the same way, so we need to do that. So...I did those things. I just was looking down. One of the greatest honors I have received is, Governor Weld, honored by Governor William F. Weld, by having July 9, 1997 declared Edla Anne Bloom day in the state of Massachusetts. And I have my proclamation but they don't do that, I mean that is something they do all the time, they give out proclamations when people retire and people get promoted, but they don't honor people for the day...that much, so...that was quite a surprise. [Pause] One of the other things, I am not sure where we are here, when I was in banking, Mr. Ireland, who was our president, called me up one day, to his office and said, "I've been watching you". I said, "Oh," because he came in the front door and whoever saw him I don't know (laugh). He said, "I have decided you are the person I am going to get involved in the community, and I want you to represent Guarantee Bank." So I did a lot of things for...in the community. I did work with the United Way and I did work with some of the committees in the city, and one of the things that I think was one of my most special ones, was to work with the American Cancer Society, having both parents die from cancer. So that meant a lot to me. And when I was president of the local cancer unit, Hope Lodge opened. Hope Lodge is a...home, housing for people receiving services, you know they are here for some sort of therapy in the local hospitals. And Hope Lodge is now 25 years old and I've sort of, I haven't lost track of it, but I haven't, you know you do a lot of things and you move on to something else. And I haven't lost track of it, I've gone to the fashion shows for it and send donations and all that. But, the concern that I have is that Hope Lodge has fallen off the radar screen because

it's just not something people, you don't just walk into it, you don't know what's going on in there. Somebody said to me, "Is that one of those recovery houses?" And I said, "No, It is a house for cancer patients." Yes it's a recovery house, but it's a different type of recovery house. So just a couple weeks ago I held the first, I held many, of awareness events at our house. We have food and beverage, and just talked about Hope Lodge. And many of the people that were in the room were people who have been involved somehow or other, previous to that. But we're trying to get that going, and that was just something that just sort of happened. But that was just such a wonderful thing. And I've been a [unknown] from rotary; I was the president of the Wachusett Area Rotary Club, now that got a different name. But you know, so those are some of the things I guess that I can look at.

RF: So this Guarantee Bank when you became involved in the community? When your president asked you? When was this happening, around what time? [Pause] You said the Hope Lodge was 25 years old, so it might have been '70's or '80's?[Pause]

EB: It was, it was in that time frame. I became an officer of the bank.[long pause, shuffles through paper] Yes it was in the 1980's. It was in the early 1980's. I was branch Administration Officer and Vice President.

RF: Right, we're just keeping a time frame, we've got the '90's down with the Municipal Light Department, and the AIDS Project. Are you still involved in the AIDS Project?

EB: ...No I am not.

RF: When did you stop?

EB: I stopped working there in 1999, because then I went on to work at Abby's House, which is housing for woman who have been....Well...that are now changing in their life. They've had situations where they've been finding themselves alone. Troubled woman, battered woman...all of that.

RF: And how long have you been involved in that, or are you still?

EB: No, I actually retired in March...of this year.

RF: Is that all volunteer work?

EB: No I was actually paid. I was Director of Development. I wasn't paid a lot of money but I was paid. Because you don't make money in non- profits. And they have more important job, when you make big money in government and business. But that was just, Abby's House has been something that's been very important to me ever since it was opened. We now live right near Abby's House; my husband and I have a home right near it. And...Annette Rafferty, who was the founder of Abby's House, is the most amazing woman in this whole world. So...actually

I am going back to volunteer after the first of the year, because Abby's House, I say we, but I am not a part of Abby's House anymore. Abby's House has a program for consumer and management, financial management, and that has been one of the greatest programs, that's only been in existence for about two and a half years. And it helps the women learn how to manage their finances, what they should be doing. You start off with the basic budget, which they've probably never budgeted before. And you keep moving up. One of the agreements is they will open a savings account. Because some of them are on disability, some of them get social security; some of them get jobs. You work on those that want to get a job to help them with their resume and all that. Then it gets to be a little bit more... serious, not that it's not serious, but you're not doing the elementary basic things, your moving on so they can save enough money to be able to move out, get an apartment, and you know all that. It's life changing for them.

RF: What is the age of women who Abby's House helps out or is it really a wide span?

EB: It's a huge scale, yeah. Right now they are starting to see a lot of older women coming in, because they just don't have the resources. So, and they have, most of their facilities are for single women, but then they have one building that has seven apartments for mothers and children. And they have a really nice program, depending on where you are in life you can participate in all of these different things. It's, it's very well run.

TD: Just for clarity, the AIDS Project, did you start working there in 1999 or did you finish in 1999?

EB: I finished in 1999, I finished. I started working in 1989. When I left the light department I went there. And I left the light department because I wanted to go to work there.

TD: You kept on talking about you wanted to become a missionary, so would you say religion was a big role in your life?

EB: Oh yes, yes... We were....yes. That's where my nickel from my 25 cents went. To my Sunday school, in my envelope. But we were very involved; my mother was very deeply religious person. My sister and I, we always went to Sunday school, we sang in the choir. I would, in high school, I would go over to the church and help the church secretary, and you get to learn a little bit more about all those things. I said very early in life that I wanted to go into religious work. So they knew that was something that I was interested in, and the church did....I used to... in high school, we used to have a worship service every Sunday night, and either I would do it or I would get somebody to do it, so I was responsible for that. I was responsible for the "Youth Sunday in Church" where you got kids to get up and say something, kids to read the scripture, and kids to do the usher, so I would organize those.

RF: Are you currently involved in church?

EB: Oh yes.

RF: With Sunday school and stuff like that?

EB: Well, right now...no I don't do Sunday school any more. But...I am going to. I am a member of Pakachoag Church in Auburn and...it's a growing church and I am the Assistant Treasurer. I help out with all kinds of programs. The Pakachoag Music School is in our building. I don't work with them but I work with the church, I mean it's all a part of what we do. But I have been...the church that I grew up with, which was Wesley United Methodist Church, and my husband and I were the prayer leaders there for 8 years. And I've done everything. I've been a part of all of that. I was chairman of the finance committee. I don't know, I can't say what else.

RF: Well we know about your parents' health issues, but personally have health issues impacted your life or those in your family?

EB: Oh yes, my sister has metastasized breast cancer, it's in the bones. We've been dealing with that for...

TD: Can you spell metastasized?

EB: Well she has metastasized...I don't know how to spell it. But that's what they call it... Metastithis, or something like that.

TD: Right that's ok.

EB: And hers has gone to the bones. She has had a tough life. She was a battered person. All of her life...and...she just... It's just whenever the cancer decides to continue...She tells everybody she's cured which is fine. She's not taking chemotherapy anymore but she is, she was on a bone strengthening regime, but she won't do that anymore. She's decided she's cured, "why should I do that." So her next visit she will have had another...bone scan, so we'll then know if the intensity or the density, whichever word he wants to use at the time, the doctor, has decreased or if it's started marching again, we don't know... So her health has not been... This is her third scare, or third time with breast cancer. And she is unfortunately estranged from her son, so that doesn't help matters. I keep in touch with him; he's got two little boys. One has just turned six and one is three, and they're adorable. We went to their soccer game; you probably don't remember playing soccer at that age. My husband said to Christopher, "Christopher what do you do out there?" "Uncle Randy, you kick the ball."

TD and RF: [Laughing]

EB: Randy said, Uncle Randy said to him, "Well, where do you kick it?" "Into the net, don't you see that?"

TD and RF: [Laughing]

EB: Well, my husband knows nothing about sports because he's a church organist and choir director. So that's his thing, so sports is not big with him. But...you know it's so cute to see them out there, and of course Alex got the winning goal and the only goal of the game, so that worked out well.

RF: Speaking of these tough times such as when your parents had cancer, or your sister. How do you get through these tough times? What kind of things do you do, or what kind of thoughts keep you going, such as church, or friends, and stuff like that?

EB: I think...I think first place...my...just my faith, and what we've...what I've learned through all my church association, and all of the...what I've done. I think that reading...reading the Bible, books, shore me up. I'm a funny person, 'cause I will tell you I don't have any friends. It's almost because I'm afraid, because people die. And so it just seems like people just die on me. So it's very hard for me to make close friends. It's just more in the last, I would say, 10 years in my life that I have allowed that to happen, because I...what I do is I have this, I live in this glass thing, and the door goes up, and it drops, and I see it drop. So when my husband Everett died, you know it just dropped. That was it. I could hear everybody, and I was very pleasant, and people would invite me to things and I...I wouldn't go. I mean I went to work, and I had a big job at the bank, but, and I always went to the things I was supposed to go to, but I would go home. So I guess I coped through...just my inner strength and relying on...on what I have learned in life. But most people would tell you, "Oh no she's out there and talks," and I do, but I also like to sit and read and listen.

TD: How do you define success in your life? And has this definition changed over time?

RF: Such as with programs you have been involved with or jobs?

EB: Yes I know, I am just trying to think of how to answer that.[Pause] I have very high expectations of myself and I am not sure I have been successful yet. I think that's because when my mother was dying. [Pause] She said to my aunt...she said to my aunt, "You'll have to take care of Sandra, but you'll never have to worry about Edla Anne; she will take care of herself." And that's what drives me.

RF: Would you like a minute?

EB: Yes that's ok.

[Stop tape recorder]

EB: So that's quite a compliment, but it's also a curse, so it goes both ways. But, that's what keeps me going.

RF: Based on your life experiences or things that you have been a part of, what advice would you give to women of today or of future generations about their life and what they should do with it?

EB: I think they always need to remember to be a lady, because that's what they are. I think that is important. And I think they should not try to be like the guys; they should be themselves. And, their voice will be heard. It's not important to have a loud voice, it's important to have a voice that says something. And...these are the things I've seen or... by that I guess I mean don't be pushy, let folks give their opinion. But when you speak, say something that everyone...it's meaningful. It's not...You're not saying something just to say it, and too many women do that, because they don't know how to...to relate to what, or... You know, they're pushy, is the best that I can say. Don't be pushy; you'll get your point across. You'll get...you'll have your opportunity... And...I think, those are some of the things that , I mean that's been my...my rule. Not that I haven't pulled some good jokes on the guys but, you know... I just think that that's...were just people. And you know...they have...men have the same pressures on them that we have, as women. I mean they have a household, or they have a family, or they want to make sure that their kids do well, so they're trying to do things...and...I think woman have gotten to the point that they get to this, that they have to dress better than the men, so they wear clothes that they think will be better. Just a basic suit, makes more sense. And when you're out with the guys, 'cause you do go out, you know, to meetings and all that. You don't have to do what they do...you don't have to drink what they drink...you just...do what you would normally do... And I think too, don't get into conversations that are going to lead to things you don't want to talk about.

TD: Well thank you very much.

EB: Oh, you're welcome.

TD: We just have one more question. Is there anyone else that you suggest we talk to?

EB: I don't know, because I don't know who you are talking to. I've heard other people say that.

TD: Just like women in general [that are important in Worcester]

EB: Well, a lady by the name of Christine Kardokas...I have her name and telephone number at home. She was the children's...no she was the assistant librarian in the city of Worcester at the library for a long time. She's one of the...founders of First Night. She's just somebody everybody knows. She's gotten quite a few awards, and should have. And she is just a woman that a lot of people know...and I have great respect for her. [Paper shuffling] They may already have her. I think she would be a great person. If she hasn't been interviewed she should be interviewed. [Long Pause] I'm sure there are a couple others, let me think of that.

TD: If you just think of any just let them know. Or you can contact us.

EB: Okay, I'd be happy to do that. I live right near there. I live downtown Worcester, in the oldest residential neighborhood in the city. We're trying to... We're well on our way to becoming a local historic district. We're on the national register, but we want to be a local historic district. It's where people don't really know where we are, but it's up off of Pleasant Street, and all around us is you know...are issues. But our house was built in 1856...and all the others are around that time too. So...it's the...if we become a local historic district, which I think we will, we will be different than the other two local historic districts they have, which are off of Salisbury Street, near Salisbury Street. Because, we represent actually the first working class neighborhood. So it's a different type of thing. And...not that the folks that built these houses didn't move on to bigger and better things, but when they built the area, they were the new tradesman, because the canal had opened, the railroad was coming in, so you had lumber men and those kinds of skilled things [people]. Not presidents of Norton Company and all that.

RF: Well thank you for your time.

EB: Thank you.