

Interviewee: Courtney Ross Escobar  
Interviewers: Courtney Barr and Bryanna Veroneau  
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**Abstract:** Courtney Ross Escobar was born in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in 1978 and now lives in Worcester, Massachusetts. Courtney lived in south Florida until she attended undergraduate studies at the University of Massachusetts, Boston in 2002. After graduating from the New England School of Law in 2010, Courtney worked with Kids in Need of Defense, before opening her own law firm that concentrates in small business compliance regulations and family law cases. She is a lawyer in Oxford, Massachusetts, and has many ties to the Worcester community. Courtney is on the advisory board for the Worcester County Commission on the Status of Women, and she was just named to the 40 Under 40 list by the Worcester Business Journal. Courtney also balances family life with her career and strong ties to the community. She is married to Christian and they are raising two children. In the interview, Courtney attributes her success to her strong grandmothers on both sides of her family. Courtney is proud of her career achievements so far, but she also discusses her goals for the future, both professionally and for the Worcester community. Finally, Courtney's advice to everyone is "Whatever it is you think you can't do because you don't have time or you don't have the skills or you don't- whatever it is just- it sounds like a Nike commercial- just do it."

**BV:** 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/community involvement. We want to focus today on your experiences with work and life - life as a lawyer. Thank you for your help with this important project! So, is it okay if we record this?

**CR:** Yes.

**CB:** Okay. What is your full name, including both maiden name and married name?

**CR:** I'm Courtney Lane Ross Escobar.

**BV:** When were you born?

**CR:** October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1978.

**CB:** Have you ever married?

**CR:** Yes.

**CB:** What is the name of your husband?

**CR:** Christian Escobar.

**BV:** Do you have children?

**CR:** Yes.

**BV:** Grandchildren?

**CR:** No. [laughs]

**CB:** What culture slash ethnicities do you identify with?

**CR:** I'm Caucasian [laughs] nothing exciting. My husband's Argentine though, so that's where the Escobar comes from so...

**BV:** Can you tell us about your parents?

**CR:** Yes. My mom is—her name's Daryl (ph) Ross. She was a public-school teacher for over 30 years in south Florida. She was born in Toronto, Canada but immigrated to the United States when she was like five. She was very young.

**BV:** Cool.

**CR:** My dad is Gary Ross and he was born in Ohio and he is a vice president of marketing for a concrete company called Oldcastle. They live in Florida.

**CB:** Very nice. Where have you lived during your life?

**CR:** So, I have only lived in Florida - south Florida is where I was born and raised and I came to Massachusetts in 2002 to go to college. I went to UMASS Boston and so, I lived in the Boston area until 2012, so like 10 years, when I met my husband and he lived in Worcester and so I moved down to Worcester.

**BV:** Oh, cool.

**CB:** So, you moved here when you met your husband. What neighborhood did you live in?

**CR:** We lived in Grafton Hill and we still—that's where he's lived. He bought a house there 14 years ago and we live in that house, his bachelor pad. [laughs] We have two babies in that house

so it's not the bachelor pad anymore, but yeah. He moved to Grafton Hill and that's where we live.

**BV:** So, what's that neighborhood like?

**CR:** So that's a pretty standard kind of—it's a quiet suburban neighborhood. It's about eight minutes from downtown Worcester. So, like eight minutes from City Hall and Main Street. And it's actually like a—a lot of the neighbors are older and have—I mean there are like grandparents or have adult children and then there's—so, there's like that group of people in the neighborhood and then there's the other group which would be like my husband and I. So like young [laughs] families, so we have, you know, elementary school kids and younger, so it's really cool to see that kind of—like it's very evident the cycle of the neighborhood like people who have been there for like whatever 20, 30 years have raised their families and their kids are going off to college or they're moving away and they're retiring and then new families are coming in and starting to raise their kids so the cycle's repeating itself and you can see it's very evident. You can see that in the population that lives there, which is really cool.

**CB:** So it says, were you born in Worcester, when did you arrive, but we found out that you moved there with your husband. Do you know what year that was in?

**CR:** Yup. I moved to Worcester in 2012.

**BV:** Do other family members live in the same area, or no because your parents - your parents are in Florida you said.

**CR:** My family is in Florida, my parents, maternal grandparents, and brother and sister and then Christian's, my husband's parents, have passed away, but his sister actually lives with us. She's our nanny, so there's that little family that lives with us, which is nice.

**CB:** What challenges do you think that the Worcester city still faces today?

**CR:** I think Worcester faces a challenge that, as someone who's come in from outside Massachusetts, I see a lot of communities that are trying to revitalize and renaissance in Massachusetts. It seems like a lot of Mass residents won't let city, or town, or a place who's trying to come up or revitalize, let go of its past. I lived in Boston, I lived in the Jamaica Plain area and Jamaica Plain's beautiful and people who have been born and raised in Massachusetts refuse to or thought to refuse the changes that have taken place in JP and I see that a lot in Worcester. I know my husband and I and a lot of people that we're connected to in the city are working hard to force people to accept that Worcester is really changing and really coming into its own as the second largest city in New England. It is behind Boston, so it faces that struggle, which is a very difficult one because that's one that doesn't matter what we do in Worcester, people are still just opposed to this idea that it will never be—they don't let it rise up even though it is. So, it's hard—that's a hard challenge because you have to change people's

perceptions of reality. But I think Worcester also faces a challenge that we do have control over and that not letting this renaissance displace the community of people who made Worcester what it is and not allowing (\_\_\_\_???) and wide sweeping changes that over development come in and start pushing out people who built this city and are a very vital and important part of this city and for lack of better terms, start white washing neighborhoods and, you know, sky rocketing rent, that's an issue that Boston is dealing with right now. So, it has been for a long time and that's something that I hope Worcester figures out how to handle that, how to have the proper balance with, you know, revitalization and renaissance and balancing that with preservation and, you know, community - you know, community inclusion that reaches everybody and not just get focused on, "Hey let's get young people in here," like that's great wanting people to come wanting people to stay and build their families and build their business, that's what my husband and I are doing and that's wonderful, but it shouldn't be at the expense of people who have built their families and their businesses here for decades.

**BV:** What distinct characteristics make Worcester the place that it is?

**CR:** So, Worcester has an amazing network of extremely dedicated and devoted and talented people that I've never seen before. The people that really care about the city and devote their spare time and their professional career to advancements for the city. I think that I've never seen a talent pool like that that's in Worcester and I think that that has a lot to do with just the kind of people who come here and the kind of people that are attracted to Worcester, the kind of colleges that we have in Worcester that kind of talent that those institutes attract and people who are just raised here and really believe in the strength of and success of Worcester and they're going to do whatever they can to help the city achieve that goal. But, it's a really unique place, like I really love Worcester and when I moved to Worcester from Boston, you know, people are like back to the bad rap thing, they're like, "Oh, how's life in Worcester?" And I'm like, "It's pretty amazing actually." We're a city. We have an awesome food scene. If I want to drive 20 minutes, I can go wine tasting at Nashoba Valley. I can go pick apples. I can go to a million draft breweries and I don't want to get into Worcester versus Boston, but it's like you can't do that in Boston. You know, you can go to Harpoon and [laughs] and I don't even know where a winery is 20 minutes from Boston, there isn't. So, I think it's a really cool place, I love that Worcester is such an industry textile, all these old mills and surrounded by farmland, like I think that's a really cool mixture of two really neat types of communities.

**BV:** Yeah Worcester definitely seems very central to everything and in any direction you can find something that you need.

**CR:** Yes and it's nice It's great, it's like we're five hours from Montreal. We're three hours from Manhattan it's really a nice place to live. It's easy to get you to go to New York or just stay here—it's a nice location.

**CB:** What do you think women's experiences in Worcester have been like, generally?

[laughs]

**CR:** I don't know. I would say that women's experiences in Worcester have probably been the same that they are anywhere else. I think women face the same struggles in whatever community they're in. So, I don't know—I don't like—clearly there's systematic sexism [laughs] and you know things like that. I don't think Worcester is, you know, incubated from those things. But I see so many women doing so many amazing things and Worcester embracing those women and so, I'm hopeful that our experiences in Worcester are more positive than women's experiences other places. I would say that I do feel like Worcester is really—if you want to be active in the community, Worcester has a way to help you be active in that community, whether it's volunteer or start a business or whatever it is. To me—and maybe it's because I'm involved in those things, but to me it's highly accessible. I moved out here in 2012 and I didn't know anybody in Worcester except for my husband and none of my friends from Boston are going to come out to Worcester because it's like so far away. So, it was just me and I met women on my own and now I'm involved in a number of nonprofits that are based in Worcester, which is another amazing thing Worcester has going on. It's home to I don't even know—it amazes me how many nonprofits are based in Worcester. I sit on the advisory board for the Worcester County Commission's on the Status of Women and I've just been able to get into the community, not knowing anybody and that's because that happens in two ways, you have to put yourself out there and then people have to be willing to accept that you're putting yourself out there. And that happens in Worcester and I was just named part of [*Worcester Business Journal*] 40 under 40 class of 2017, which was an amazing honor because of the type of women who win that award, but also because that means that the city recognizes what I'm doing and I just came here in 2012. And so, that speaks to I think women and other people's experiences here that the city is welcoming and supportive of people who want to be involved. I hope that extends to other areas of Worcester life as well. [laughs]

**BV:** Can you tell us more about what the 40 under 40 is?

**CR:** Sure. So, 40 under 40 is an award that the *Worcester Business Journal* puts out every year and it looks for people who are active, you either live or work in Worcester and they have been successful in their business life or professional career, professional life, as well as giving back to the community. Which is really nice to see that because I don't know that any other awards that are given by business journals or that really care like what you do on top of work? Like what do you do for the community? And so, they do that every year and this year I was part of it and there's a lot of events that you do as a group with the other 40 under 40 winners throughout the summer before they have the awards dinner. And it was always really cool to go and do these cocktail hours or receptions or whatever with the fellow class—fellow award winners because it's just like, “Oh, like what do you do for a living?” Well I'm a lawyer, but then it's like, “Well what else do you do?” And then people are rattling off lists of all this cool stuff that they've got going on and it's just like these people like live and work in my community like that's amazing and *Worcester Business Journal* find 40 every year that they give awards to but hundreds are - you have to be nominated so, hundreds of nominations come in and it's like there's all these

people out there doing all these fantastic things. And they are connected to Worcester and so I thought that's really cool and it was quite an honor to be included with people who have won that award this year and then also in the past because they're pretty cool. Some pretty amazing people on those lists.

**BV:** Congratulations.

**CR:** Oh, thank you.

**CB:** Congrats. So, changing scopes I guess a little bit. Where did you attend school? I know you mentioned UMASS Boston.

**CR:** Yup. So, I got my undergrad at UMASS Boston and then I went to law school at New England School of Law. Both of those schools are in Boston.

**BV:** What were your challenges in education?

**CR:** Besides math [laughs] So undergrad I didn't—so I never really liked school until I got to college and I really liked school and I spent a lot of years in school at that level and I really enjoyed it, but when I got to law school that was a wake-up call. The first year of law school you have an orientation the first week and the new class coming in comes to school before any of the other team or senior class in law school come back and they kind of prepare you for what it means to be in law school. And, you know, they tell you all the things that you hear whenever you're going to go to any school. When you're in middle school they're like, "When you get to high school you can't play around you got to pull it, get your homework done." And then you go to a college and they tell you, "When you go to college, you have to focus, can't play around." And so you hear the same thing and you're like, "Okay, yeah like I get it I'm going to focus and not play around." And then you go to school the first three months for me and it's like, "Oh my God, they're serious." Like you have to focus and you can't play around and that was a challenge for me to like be in an academic situation where I felt like I have no idea what is going on. Like the first three months of law school I was like, "I don't even know what the words they're saying mean. I know it's English but it doesn't sound [laughs] right." And so that was challenging. And then all of a sudden it just it just clicked. That's a reaction that a lot of people in law school have. It's just very different style of thinking and you're getting a bunch of information that you never got before at once and it's like, "Oh, so this is what you mean by stay focused and not mess around." But I really can't think of anything else that was challenging except just being scared out of my mind every exam period that I was going to get kicked out of law school, so [laughs] that never goes away. Every six months or whatever it is, twice a year, you walk to exams and think, "Ugh God, I'm going to get kicked out, I have to tell everyone I got kicked out of law school." But that never happened, thankfully.

**BV:** So how many years did you have to go to school for?

**CR:** So, law school's typically three years if you go full time during the day, but I was working full time, so I went at night, so it was four years.

**CB:** Upon finishing law school, what did you see as your options?

**CR:** That's so funny because when I finished law school everybody else was like, "Oh, how does it feel? Like the world is your oyster, isn't that great?" And I was like, "I don't feel like that at all. [laughs] I don't feel like the world's my oyster, I feel like, oh God, I have to like figure out what I want to do," because I'd spent like—I went to undergrad, then I took a year off when I was working full time, and then I went to law school so I had a long time of not having to grow up and make the decision of what I'm going to do the rest of my life. And so I went to law school because I wanted to have options and a law degree gives you a lot of options and, but it was funny when I got out of school I expected to feel like I had all this freedom and I could do whatever, but the reality is you just can't go do whatever you want. I have a law degree and I have zero experience as a lawyer because it's not like in med school where you do your residency, which every law student is like, "We should be like med school and we should have internships." And some schools are starting to do that, but that's just now, I've been out of law school for seven years now. So, you are kind of like, "Oh yeah I'm done and throw the shackles of law school off! Let me free to the world!" But I have zero skills [laughs] so, you know. So yeah, I had to kind of—I stayed with my consulting job that I worked since I got out of undergrad and did a lot of pro bono work to kind of figure out, "What do I want to do? Do I want to do family law? Do I want to work with kids?" And I had some really amazing experiences with that. I worked with a group called the KIND organization which is Kids in Need of Defense and that organization offers pro bono legal services to children who come to the United States without parents with them, and with no parents here. And when I say they come to the United States, they literally walk from El Salvador through Central America and Mexico and ride on top of trains and get in from coyotes, however they can to escape deplorable conditions in their homeland. Like if you're walking through deserts like just imagine like at 16 or 15 like what - or even younger, what home life is like. So when those kids come here and they're picked up by immigration, they can't just send them back. Like they do, like they can with people who are adult age. They have to go through due process and so this organization comes in and gets these kids and gives them a lawyer to navigate the state—to navigate the immigration court system, but at the same time you work to try to get them citizenship in the United States. And so, I was able to work with two kids and help them get green cards in the United States and it takes a long time to go through that process. But I'm grateful that I kind of didn't know what I was going to do, a lot of my friends in school got out, they'd been working as paralegals or whatever at other firms and they started working there and I was able to work with and change lives of a couple kids. It's a long process so you don't get to do a bunch of cases at once, but I was lucky enough to have an impact on two kids' lives and that's because I came out of school and was like, "Yeah I don't know what I'm going to do. I'm going to try to get some hands-on experience and play around and see what I want to do, so."

**CB:** That sounds amazing.

**BV:** Yeah.

**CR:** Yeah it - it's really cool and I still am in contact with my first case. My first client through KIND and he is an adult now like he's 19 and has a wife and a baby and is a United States citizen, so it's really cool.

**BV:** Cool.

**CR:** He speaks English fluently. When I meet them they don't speak English because they just got here and I'm always like, "I'll learn Spanish and you learn English," and then they're always like [snaps fingers] learn it in three months and I'm just like, "Hola." [laughs] I'm like, "You win again." Like I am so terrible at Spanish, but it's awesome to see them. They get in school and they just thrive, it's cool.

**BV:** Who would you say that your role models were when you were growing up and - and also who are they now?

**CR:** When I was growing up. So, my parents are big role models for me and my grandmothers and I have to say I come from a long line of pretty headstrong people. So, both sets of grandparents are pretty amazing. My grandmother on my father's side, so my father's mother, was a single mother because my dad's father passed away when my dad was in fourth grade. So, she had three boys to raise on her own plus they owned a beer garden so kind of like what Brew on the Grew is opening in a few months, they owned that in Akron, Ohio. And so, this is in the 50s and trying to be a woman who owns a restaurant and is raising three boys on her own and putting them through—they were in private school and doing all these things like in the 19—like now is hard, but in the 1950s and early 60s when you're supposed to be a stay at home mom and you know, whatever. She wasn't doing that; she was running a business. She was always really amazing to me. My favorite story about her which kind of like sums her up, so my dad was five and he went downstairs in the morning. They would go to the restaurant—they lived above the restaurant so my dad would go downstairs before school and the chef would make him breakfast. Well, there was a new chef. I forget why the old chef had left, but there was a new chef, or cook or whatever. I don't know that he was a chef. And so, my dad came downstairs and he said what he wanted for breakfast and the cook said that he doesn't make breakfast for kids or whatever he said to my dad and sent him up out of the kitchen. And so, my dad went back upstairs and my grandmother said, "Well, what are you doing? Aren't you having breakfast?" And he said whatever the cook said to him, you know, so, I don't feed kids. Get out of here or whatever. It was not nice. So, my grandmother went downstairs and fired him on the spot [laughs]. And then she cooked that day and ran the restaurant. So, I just love that. I don't know what it felt like. When you tell the story you think, "Oh, that freedom to just be like get out of here. You're not going to talk to my kid like that, denying him breakfast, like I run this business. Who do you think you are?" And it feels empowering stepping back and telling that story but in reality, I'm sure that was a very scary decision to make. Like, "Oh, I'm going to fire this guy. I've got to

cook, the restaurant's opening." You know, "And then I have to hire somebody else." You know, but she did it and that guy had no job [laughs]. And I like that because you shouldn't have been such a jerk to my dad [laughs]. So yeah, she's pretty amazing women. My maternal grandmother is mother to my mother and then also my uncle, so it's my mother and her brother, but she had four children and she suffered the loss of two children. That's very hard for me to think about just as a human being, but now someone who has two children, like I don't know how she survived that, but she did. So, that's something that I think is—that kind of inner strength is amazing, so.

**CB:** That definitely is.

**CR:** Yeah.

**CB:** So, what supports, networks, and like mentoring have been important to you, especially like through your education?

**CR:** So, through my education I was pretty insular. I just relied heavily on my family and my very good friends from high school - my best friends from high school, who are still my best friends today, Janelle Campbell Lacy and Matt Miller. But now, my husband is a great source of strength, and he's my forever inspiration and champion in everything I do. I'm very lucky to have him, but when I came to Worcester I met Chantel Bethea and got involved in the Worcester County Commission Status of Women and that group of women have been the most supportive, inspiring, uplifting. We meet once a month and every meeting we go to, we come out and I feel like I can do anything after sitting down and talking with them. The kind of issues we address—our job is to identify problems in Worcester County that women face and try to find solutions to them. So, you know, we're not talking about like always happy things. We're talking about opioid crisis and how that effects women and how we get women to treatment and what do we do when they're pregnant and how do we help them? We talk about commercial sex trade, human trafficking. We talk about pay wage gap and access to affordable child care for all women because everybody needs child care. So, it's not always easy conversations and it can be very frustrating that in 2017 we're trying to raise our daughters and we're trying to be women that go out and conquer the world and achieve great success in our professional careers, but society still doesn't help us when it comes to having babies, or maternity leave, or raising the children and getting affordable child care. So, it can be very frustrating and very sad or troubling topics, but it just feels amazing after we leave there because working together with a group of women who really care is amazing. I love that one hour a month when we get together because leaving there just—it just makes me so hopeful because there's like 12 of us. So, if there's 12 of us that can come together to work to solve issues, there must be thousands more across the country that can work together to solve issues. Maybe hundreds of thousands [laughs] you know. So, especially in this day and age it gives me hope.

**BV:** So, switching gears to work, you said that your first job was helping with the immigration status through KIND, what other jobs have you had and what exactly do you do now?

**CR:** So, my work with KIND was pro bono, it was volunteer work. So, when I graduated from UMASS [University of Massachusetts], I went to work at a Public Consulting Group which is a consulting firm in Boston [Massachusetts]. And the work we did there, the work Public Consulting Group does is provide operation and compliance management for state agencies and departments. I worked in a Child Welfare Unit, so I worked with child welfare agencies like DCF, Department of Children and Families in Massachusetts, as well as other states I worked with like Florida's, you know, answer to DCF, Rhode Island, Washington DC, West Virginia. So, Public Consulting Group also works with Department of Health, Department of Education, there are all kinds of different facets and state agencies that they work with, and I just happened to work in Health and Human Services and the Child Welfare Department. So, my job there was to help DCF achieve and maintain compliance with certain federal and state regulations that help bring money into the state, and help support DCF and the families that DCF serves. I did that from sort of near 2005 and I was there until 2013. And that's where I was working through law school. And then I started my own law practice when I moved to Worcester, working with small—well, actually I started with a practice where I did family law and estate planning which is basically divorce work and then writing bills. And that got really depressing [laughs], so after a couple of years of that and a particularly nasty divorce between—that I was involved in-- between two doctors. I just said to my husband, "I don't think I can do this for 30 years." It's like you are just helping people as their marriage falls apart, you know. So, my husband had said with your compliance background through PCG [Public Consulting Group], why don't you work with small businesses. And small businesses have a lot of compliance regulations that they need to abide by. And so, I was like, "Oh yeah that is a great idea." I started Ross-Escobar Group and that's what I did for three years. And then I came here [Oxford, Massachusetts]. I brought my clients here, so I merged Ross-Escobar Group into this practice [Doucette and LaRose] and then I also help with litigation and some family law here as well. But it's easier to do family law work when you have a balance with all my business clients that are doing all these amazing cool things, like florists and candle makers and breweries and salons and they're all doing really cool versions of their industries. They all have some kind of social awareness to give back to their businesses. So, it's easier to like do divorce cases when I know that I am going to be meeting with my other clients that are going to have awesome happy news [laughs] so that's what I do here and that's what got me to here.

**CB:** So, going back to like when you were younger what made you want to become a lawyer, like head into law school?

**CR:** I studied dance from the time I was two up until I was 20 or 22. Because I really thought that—like my first major in school was dance, like I was planning on making that my career, and going to Emerson [College], and major in dance and then become a dance teacher at some point at like Emerson or whatever. And then I took up a Political Science class in my undergrad and I was like, "Oh I really like this," and then I always liked like law and shows about lawyers [laughs] so I thought why don't I get a job at a law firm and see if I like it. So, I did. I was like 20, and I got a job as a receptionist at a law firm, and I told them what I was thinking. They

asked, “What do you want to do?” because I worked in the restaurant industry before. And they were like, “Why do you want to do this,” and I said, “Well I want to know if I really want to be a lawyer.” And they were like, “Okay.” They were really supportive of that, and I think one of my friends gave me the movie *A Civil Action*, which is a true story that takes place in Boston and John Travolta is the star of it. I think this must have been like 1999 or 2000 and it must have been 1999, I was 20. You guys probably weren’t even born yet [laughs]. I watched the movie and it was about environmental law, that’s the area of law that this lawyer practiced. And he was a Boston based lawyer. He is still alive. He was this up and coming best of Boston lawyer, you know, very famous, and he lost everything taking this case on. It was a pollution case where he (\_\_\_\_\_) companies were polluting, factories were polluting into the ground and into the water system where the people in the communities were dying terrible deaths. So, he lost everything, he lost his practice, he lost his house, he lost everything but he sent the case on to another firm when his went bankrupt from trying to win this case. And that firm won and was able to get sanctions and stuff in place. But anyway, when I saw that movie I came into one of the partner offices the next day and sat there like waiting for him to come in to work and when he came in I was like, “Is environmental law real and is it something that I can do,” and he said that it was real and was something I could do and he talked to me about it. But I chose that partner because he came up to my desk a few weeks earlier and I was like the receptionist and he came and sat against my desk, and he was like, “Why are you in school to be a dancer, that’s something you can do, you don’t need a degree in that to open your own dance studio whenever you want. You know, you should really be looking at law,” and I remember being so like, how dare he [laughs], who does he think he is, sitting on my desk and telling me about like... But I also knew that he was right. And when I saw that movie, and I realized like you know he is right. I shouldn’t go to school to be a dancer, I should go to school to be lawyer and I want to... That’s why I went into his office. He still practices in south Florida and he actually—my younger brother just graduated law school and passed the bar this summer and so he actually has been like a little bit of a mentor to my brother, he reached out to him. So, yeah.

**BV:** So, what has this work meant for you?

**CR:** My work as a lawyer?

**BV:** Yeah.

**CR:** So, I would have to say the ability to help people is really nice. To help people achieve their dreams, to start their dreams, to protect their dreams with my business clients. And even though the divorce clients it’s hard and sad, the truth is they aren’t happy in the situation they are in and they need help getting out of it. And that’s what my job is, is to help them to get out of it, and do it in a way that they are protected. Because when you are going through something like that, you are not thinking the way that you normally would think because you are in a lot of pain and a lot of sadness. And if there are kids involved, so they are trying to deal with the kids and that’s an extra layer of stress on top of it. I know lawyers don’t ever get the rep of like, “Oh lawyers, how helpful, they are so wonderful,” but lawyers really are helpful [laughs] and for the most part—

I'm not saying that every lawyer is altruistic. But I am also really happy for my education, it helps me understand policies and legislation that comes out in the work that I do in the Worcester County Commission and with LIFT [Living in Freedom Together] and with other organizations to help them. My ability to understand and interpret legislation or write policy and things like that is helpful in making more wide-reaching change. As a practicing lawyer, you can help people one client at a time, but in the work that I do in the commission and other nonprofits, I can use that education to help put policies and help support legislation to benefit more groups of people or all of society or whatever verses just like one client at a time. So, I am very grateful for that opportunity.

**CB:** Do you think that being a woman has put you at like any disadvantages or made it harder for you in any way?

**CR:** Yes! [laughs]

**CB:** -in becoming a lawyer?

**CR:** Yes, I am very aware that women deal with all kinds of challenges that go on behind the scenes, and I think that a lot of young women who don't have—people don't understand that if you are not constantly inundated or someone is not telling you to your face that they are discriminating against you based on your sex or race or religion or sexual orientation or whatever that it's not happening. But, it is happening and it happens every day and it's just because the systems that are put in place. It's a challenge for us to find childcare that is affordable and I am a lawyer and my husband is a marketing executive, so if it's a challenge for us, what does it mean for people who makes less money than us? And we make a comfortable living, so [laughs] that's something we like have to face. It's not because people don't respect men in the workplace. It's the reason why we don't have access to affordable childcare, it's because society still doesn't respect women in the workplace, because if they did we would have government funded childcare and we don't so that's a challenge I wake up every day to. As we essentially going to have to put our kids through college twice, because it's like 30-40,000 dollars a year for them to have childcare. And then we are going to [laughs] have to do that zero to five then we have to put them through college or whatever they want to do when they get out of high school. That is a reality I wake up to every day because it's supposed to be my job to stay home. You know, society views it as my job to stay home, and we shouldn't have to pay for childcare because I will do it, but I don't want to do that [laughs]. So, that is a challenge, it's a challenge to be a lawyer because my days, I don't work nine to five. I am at the mercy of client needs and the court calendar and whatever else on top of that. I am trying to give back to my community and those obligations are at night so we have a full-time nanny and a part-time nanny and it costs a lot of money to do those things. And so that is a challenge. And I'm just thinking when I remember I was pregnant with my daughter, even women I remember would say, "Oh you're pregnant, how are you going to do it, work and raise two kids?" I was taken a back, I was like why is a woman asking me this, she is supposed to have my back and I know it wasn't like how are you going to do it because you shouldn't be doing it, it was literally like how are you going

to do it because you work in a demanding field and you have two young children at home. Like she was genuinely asking how are you going to do it and the answer is you just have got to spend a lot of money [laughs] to do it. That's a big challenge. And I don't think people understand that access to childcare is part of the systematic sexism that women face. They think its separate, and it's not because we are pushing women and girls to get into college and go get through the STEM subjects and become engineers, and go to Silicon Valley, and become doctors, and becomes lawyers, and do all these things. And it's like, "Oh yeah, but who is going to help the children," and no one talks about that.

**BV:** Do you believe that some men have been threatened by your success in the past?

**CR:** Yes. [laughs] It's so funny, yes, I think successful women are scary even to men who report that they want and like successful women. I think it's easy for men to say they support women in the work place, that's not really like the kind of thing that men that we would—that you guys and my generation know, like women in the workplace would probably be that something in your generation or my generation believe that we should be in the kitchen. [laughs] Even though there are people that exist like that, but I think it's really easy to say, "I believe in women's rights to choose and rights in the workplace, and I support women, and women are equal, and I'm a feminist as a man." And then really be faced with what that means as far as like, oh well okay you can't just say these things you have to act upon them so where are you as far as helping with the children and what are you going to sacrifice in your professional career and your aspirations to help meet the goals of the family? Versus is it just going to be your wife doing those things and even simple things like can you even really have a conversation with a woman that you think or know is smarter than you, is that going to be a problem for you? Some men say that they support all these things and then when they are faced with a woman who really is all those things, it is intimidating and I don't know if they realize it, but I realize that they don't really mean all those things [laughs]. It's one of those in theory yes I like those things, but in practice I want a more traditional female partner, or a more traditional female work partner, life partner, whatever it is. I think people are most threatened by people who are smarter than them or have more power than them. And then I think it's especially threatening when they don't expect a certain person to be those things.

**CB:** So, you kind of touched upon this, but what are your primary responsibilities in terms of like housework and childcare and how have they changed over time at all?

**CR:** Well so, when I was living by myself I was the only one in charge [laughs] of doing those things, but with my husband I am very lucky that I actually live with a man who likes the theory and practice of a strong woman. Neither one of us are good at cleaning the house so we have finally hired people to help with that because it was getting pretty bad [laughs]. But as far as childcare and things like that like raising the children we both do. We both share those responsibilities. But he has a job where he can't get away as easily as I can and I think that goes back to again the fact that, well, he is a man and he doesn't need this flexibility. And so that's his work place, that's not his view, that's his workplace's view, but that again is evidence of the

systematic sexism. You know if we really do want men to be sharing the burden then we have to have employers that allow men to share the burden and not constantly be docking them time and pay, or whatever it is, vacation time, to go because they need to take the kids to the doctors. But since I am able to be more flexible, I am the one who does the majority of taking the kids to the doctor. And I am the one who runs the household, and that is more of a—my husband is like we just do whatever—he defers to me, we do whatever I want to do when it comes to the house and the kids and all of those things. He is very supportive in that, but it is my responsibility I guess in my own choosing to embrace those things. When I kind of think back and wonder like, you know, you're raised to think a certain thing and you wonder how much—I don't know how I would explain it, but how much I am fitting myself into roles that society places on women and then as you are just raised you do that. Not necessarily your own parents, because my parents are very liberal and progressive parents but just by society itself. Like if you watch like commercials for cleaning products and grocery stores, those are directed at women and they send the message to girls and women that this is for you, you are those things. So I wonder am I like the one in the grocery store because I am the one that has the time to go to the grocery store—we usually go as a family, but still [laughs]—or is it because I believe we are conditioned to believe that it is my job to go to the grocery store and it's my job to take the kids to the doctors and it's my job to do this and my job to make the sacrifices to come home when the nanny is sick. I wonder like a lot of those decisions feel natural and I wonder why they feel so natural you know what I mean? Sorry that was kind of going off on a tangent [laughs].

**BV:** So how do you get through tough times- what kinds of thoughts keep you going?

**CR:** Through tough times, I am not really good at like—I like to wallow in tough times [laughs] it's like terrible. I would say I really try—I guess this sounds a little cheesy, but I like to value and be grateful for the things I have. And when I feel like oh something has gone terribly wrong or sad or depressed about things I try to think about the things that I should be happy about and proud of and accomplishments. And just when we were talking today when we first started the interview, I was like, “Oh god I have only been here like five years and I feel like I have built like a whole new life and accomplished a lot in five years. I moved out here single, I got married, had two children, started a practice, brought it in here, I have been awarded 40 under 40 like that's crazy.” So, I try to think about things like that when I am upset about things. Now you know that like tough times, those types of thoughts don't help me get through a death or a serious illness that kind of stuff. I just feel like that kind of stuff I don't try to work through I just try to accept.

**CB:** Speaking of health, how have health issues impacted your life or like those in your family?

**CR:** So, my husband's mother's side of the family is very sickly. She had a number of siblings, and only one or two are alive and there was like six or eight of them. So it worries me, and I have said this to my husband like I do worry because they have had strange cancer and some strange blood disorders and I do worry. Like God, it's a lot of them that passed away with unusual things happening. And I am a big supporter of science and so [laughs] I think like he

might be genetically predisposed to some of these issues so that I think about a lot. His father's side of the family though is very healthy so that's good [laughs]. I'm sorry I try and think of that too like these is 50% that is pretty healthy and the other 50% had a rough history. But a number of my—so my husband lost both his parents, my best friend lost both of his parents, and my very good friend, she lost her father all when we were in our late twenties, early thirties. So, I try to like—I don't know what that is like when you're just a young adult and you are trying to come up and you have lost your parents, and what type of impact that has on your life. And I know from my husband, it's like every great moment, like every birth of a child, or every first Christmas with a new baby or whatever, it's kind of a bittersweet moment because it's very exciting for him, but then he also is missing his mom in those moments.

**BV:** So, what are your experiences in accessing quality affordable healthcare?

**CR:** My experience is that we have awesome healthcare. As far as access to fantastic healthcare through the UMASS Memorial system, it's fantastic. Health insurance is terrible, we have health insurance, it's like the amount of money we spend out of pocket on health insurance is ridiculous. My son just got tubes put in his ears in July, and we will owe \$1000 for that, and that's after insurance. I had my wisdom teeth removed finally [laughs] and we owe like \$1200 for that after insurance. And it just like goes right back to the childcare discussion where it's like we are struggling with medical bills and we don't make minimum wage; we make more money than that. So it's like we have access to phenomenal healthcare, but we don't have affordable insurance. And I don't think anyone does except the government because they have government healthcare [laughs].

**CB:** Have you had role- has religion played a role in your life?

**CR:** What's that?

**CB:** ...religion, has it played a role in your life?

**CR:** No, I am a non-believer.

**BV:** How do you feel about the choices you have made in your life? Do you have any regrets?

**CR:** I don't have any regrets. I have wishes, I wish I would have met my husband sooner because I only met him five years ago [laughs]. But I don't have any regrets I am happy to say. Maybe when I was younger I would have looked at certain things and said they were regrets but now as an almost thirty-nine-year-old woman [laughs], I realize that life is ups and downs and good decisions and bad decisions and everything is a lesson and some things pay off and some don't. So, I don't have any regrets.

**CB:** How do you balance the different priorities or responsibilities or roles like in your life?

**CR:** I don't know, I feel like I am probably not good at balancing them. Well what's balance in the sense like you hear how do you balance your work life and (\_\_\_\_\_??). I feel like you put it that way am I supposed to sit down and like weigh out what I am doing. I don't operate like that. I just do things I want to do and just make them work. So, like I said we have a part-time nanny to help us out when we have appointments at night and I have a supportive husband and he has commitments in the city too so we try to just make our schedules work. But as far as being like a mother and a wife and that kind of stuff, it comes very natural. I was just talking to our paralegal, Sophia, about that. People say, "Oh when you become a parent, your whole life changes," which it does but I don't feel any different. I still feel like twenty-year-old Courtney except I have two kids that I need to be aware of [laughs]. But I don't feel like—there is no different like feeling. Like I think when you graduate school and you have a feeling of accomplishment in your life, you feel like relief, like, "Oh that's over and I'm done with school and I can go on and start the next chapter of my life," and I don't feel that with being a parent or wife it just is very natural. Like this is just what life is. I don't know if that answers the question [laughs].

**BV:** No, it does [laughs]. How do you define success for your life, and has that definition changed over time?

**CR:** Yes, I think when I was younger success was probably more by material things and just recently in the past few years I realized that success is more about the experiences and not necessarily the kind of car that you drive or what your house looks like or how much things cost. And I think when I was younger—I think a lot of people when they are younger feel like that is how you mark success, by like status-able things. And when you get older or when I got older it just changed and now my view is just more focused on experiences and having enough time and money to do things with the kids. Whether it's just as a family, whether it's just like taking the kids around—like the summer we took the kids every morning on the weekends, we would go to a Mass Audubon Society property and do hiking or nature walking with them, and taking them to museums, and doing stuff like that is to me—being able to do those things and having the time to do those kinds of things and spending time together as a family is success for me. Because I have made the right decisions in my career and because I made those choices I have this time now to be able to spend with them. So, I guess that's how I would mark success.

**CB:** So, I think one last question just to wrap everything up is, based on your life experiences what advice would you give to women today or in future generations?

**CR:** Oh God, I would tell them what I tell everybody when they ask like how I do certain things—just do it. Whatever it is, you think you can't do it because you don't have time or you don't have the skills or you don't—whatever it is just—it sounds like a Nike commercial, just do it [laughs]. Because it will work out like if you try from the outside to plan and be strategic about how you are going to tackle things, it just for me it doesn't work like that. If you want to be a lawyer or be a dancer or get involved in the community or run for office, just start doing it and things just work out. I think a lot of women or people in general, want to plan everything and

they are like, “Well at first I am going to get married at this age, and have kids at this age,” and I just feel like just start doing things that you like doing. And put yourself around people who also like doing those things, and that’s how you accomplish things you never thought you would accomplish because you put yourself in situations where you can build in that work, and have team support and be able to work through things and have people help you get where you need to go. But standing outside of that trying to figure out how you are going to do it, or things like how am I going to work and have kids, just do it. It all just works out. Obviously, you have to have some type of effort involved on your end, but don’t get caught up in how you are going to execute the plan or having a master plan for your life. Just be open to achieving the things you want to do and start doing them and then that leads to something else, which leads to something else, which leads to something else. And before you know it you’re a lawyer, and married with two kids in an awesome city you never thought you would live in, one you have hardly even visited before I met my husband. I just had breakfast with a number of state senators last week. They invited the Worcester County Commissioner to come and speak with them and present and hopefully get some funding to help fight the opioid epidemic. I would have never thought ten years ago, even five years ago that I would be doing that, that I would be going to present at the State House on trying to get funding into Worcester to help with the opioid epidemic in the city. How would I plan for that? You can’t, I would have never—it would not have been on my radar, but because I just started putting myself out there that’s what I am going to be doing in a couple of weeks [laughs]. So, that’s what I would say, just decide what you want to do and start doing it and let everything else that you think is going to hinder you work itself out.

**CB and BV:** Thank you so much for your time.

**CR:** Thank you for coming, I hope that is helpful.

**BV:** Yes.