

Interviewee: Beth Cole Foley  
Interviewers: Megan Foley, Emily Murphy  
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**Abstract:** Beth Foley was born in 1968 in Worcester MA, where she also attended Saint Peter Marian High School and Assumption College. After graduating from Assumption she went on to obtain her master's degree in counseling psychology from Anna Maria College. After obtaining her master's degree she went on to start her own private practice in Sterling MA, where she counseled children. She and her mother were the only mother-daughter private practice in Massachusetts. In this interview Beth explains the struggles she faces with being a divorced single mother while running her own business. She emphasizes the importance of hard work and a good education. She elaborates on this point further when she explains her education provided her with a safety net and enabled her success. In this interview Beth also touches upon the difficulty that single mothers face when it comes to equal pay and how in a modern world women now have to provide for families just as much as men do. She expresses some of the changes she has seen in regards to women in the work place but there is still more that needs to happen for women to be successful.

MF: 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 Nation Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on the areas of women's education, health, work, and politics and community involvement. Today we are going to focus on your experiences with education. Thank you for helping us with this important project!

[Pause as the recording device is being placed]

MF: Okay. What is your full maiden name?

Beth Foley: Beth Cole Foley.

MF: Where were you born?

BF: Worcester, Massachusetts.

MF: Have you ever been married?

BF: Yes.

MF: Do you have grandchildren?

BF: No.

MF: What cultures and ethnicities do you identify with your family?

BF: Irish primarily.

MF: Tell me about your parents.

BF: My mom and dad were married for 48 years. My mother was educated, my father was educated. We lived in Sterling [Massachusetts] and I have two brothers and myself.

MF: Where have you lived during your life?

BF: I lived in Shrewsbury [Massachusetts] for the first three years. I lived in Worcester [Massachusetts] for six months, and then I've lived in Sterling [Massachusetts] ever since.

**pause**

Emily Murphy: Where did you attend school?

BF: I actually attended Assumption College. For my undergrad and Anna Maria for my masters.

EM: What programs did you complete while in school?

BF: At Assumption I double majored in Social Rehab and Psychology and I did counseling psychology at Anna Maria.

EM: Where there any challenges in your education? And if so, what were they?

BF: Mostly deciding what I wanted to do. At Assumption I went back and forth between the two majors that my double major was accidental more than planned.

**pause**

MF: Upon finishing your formal education, what did you see as your options?

BF: They were somewhat limited back then. The best jobs were working for the state. Full time then was about 22,000 dollars a year. Some of the private companies were more like 15,000 dollars a year for a full time job.

EM: What support networks and mentoring have been important to you?

BF: My mother had her master's degree in psychology and had a private practice. so it was pretty easy for me to just follow in her footsteps and she gave me a lot of hints and helps along the way – that took a lot of time off the licensing process.

MF: Do you work outside the home?

BF: Yes I do.

EM: If you worked...you just said that, never mind. When did you become work – when did you begin working? I'm sorry about that, and what did you do or what do you do now?

BF: I began working immediately upon graduation. I had done an internship my senior year at Department of Social Services, so I graduated and went right to work there full time, kept my normal case load. Now I've been in private practice for 23 years...doing counseling psychology.

EM: Is it different than when you first started?

BF: Very much so, I'm a licensed marriage and family therapist and when I got licensed, we were not third party reimbursement but we could not collect insurance payments. So we could only take private pay clients, and about 10 years ago the licensing went through and that opened up a lot of doors for us and now we can take every insurance that a doctor can take.

EM: Who do you work for/with...?

BF: Myself (laughter)

EM: What has your work meant to you?

BF: My mother and I were the only mother-daughter practice in the state of Massachusetts up until August 1<sup>st</sup> when she passed away...so that was kind of a great distinction. But it's nice to get – to make an important difference in individual peoples' lives and you know years go by and they come back and they say, you know, 'you helped me so much' and they always remember it. It's just really nice.

EM: That seems like it's really nice.

MF: One thing about your education I know, tell us about Anna Maria and your master's degree.

BF: Okay, well...I decided to go back to graduate school, after losing my twin boys. I was working at Department of Social Services with people who beat their children and it was a difficult thing for me to do. So I decided I was going to go get a masters so I didn't have to do that anymore and I went to Anna Maria and their program was two years long, and I did it in nine months. I was the only person to ever complete it, with a 4.0 [grade point average], in nine months. They told me it couldn't be done but I was very motivated [laughter] and they said 'we'll let you do this up until you're academically not successful.' And I saw my advisor...this past August and he still remembers that, and I'm still the only one that ever did that.

EM: That's a great accomplishment.

BF: Yeah, I mean he still was like 'I still can't believe you did it!' And I'm like yeah, well... [laughter] I have a goal... I was building a house and I wanted to get my degree done. I was now pregnant with daughter, and I wanted to get it done before she was born. So when I was taking my oral exams to graduate, I was sitting there with the Saltines the ginger ale, and the trash can as I threw up during all the questions. [laughter]

MF: [Laughing] Ew, that's kinda of gross.

BF: Yeah, they were like 'you wanna go home and come back?' and I'm like nope I'm doing this, 'cause otherwise I would have been going back with a baby sitting there and that wouldn't of been any better, so I was committed to getting it done.

MF: What are your primary responsibilities in terms of your housework?

BF: I'm a single mom so it's all me. [laughter]

MF: How have you balanced different priorities, responsibilities, roles, and interests in your life? So, mother with psychologist?

BF: Mother always comes first.

EM: Has there been any situations where you've had to put work first? Or is just always...

BF: Always kids first. I've had to work more since my divorce...but at the end of the day, their responsibilities come first...and being self-employed I can do that. I have a lot of flexibility to make it work the way I need it to work.

EM: [coughing] I'm sorry.

MF: Do you consider yourself active politically?

BF: No, not really. [Laughing]

MF: Have you been involved with volunteer or community work?

BF: Pretty much I volunteered everywhere my kids have ever gone to school doing everything they needed, I'm also active volunteering in church responsibilities. And pretty much I'm that person that, if someone needs someone to suck it up and volunteer if they ask me they know I'm gonna do it, so [laughing] I get roped into a lot of things but it's still okay.

MF: What were the organizations' main goals that you volunteered for?

BF: Mostly they're around commemorating income and support for the private schools that my son and daughter attended. Also places where I worked if we needed donations for things for special education, I could usually get those donated as well.

MF: What would you consider some of the groups' major accomplishments?

BF: Well we opened a special needs school from concept through building an idea in seven months...and we had to go get funding, get support. I had to interview and hire all the staff. I had to negotiate building leases, which I had never done before. Sign those for a million three, and get it all up and running before school started.

EM: And when was this...the...?

BF: That was in 2007.

EM: It was in 2007? Had religion played a large role in your life?

BF: Very much. Given the different things that happened and life experiences you sort of need to have a bases and roots, and when things are pretty chaotic, knowing there are some core values that you believe in and there is support network there is really helpful.

MF: How have health issues impacted your life? Or those in your family?

BF: My health has always been a challenge. I get sick very easily and I get sicker than most people pretty quickly. It's always been that way... my pregnancies had me so sick I was on IV fluids and in the hospital most of the time. My mother just passed away from uterine and ovarian cancer, and I'll be having my hysterectomy in six weeks.

MF: What are your experiences in accessing quality for affordable health care?

BF: That's a great question. Obviously health care is important, thankfully with all my health issues I've always had health insurance. Watching my mother battle cancer, she had private health insurance with the best one there was, and therefore she could have treatments that were denied to other people. We had a friend a couple years ago that had cancer and his insurance company wouldn't pay so he died.

MF: Whose health are you responsible besides your own?

BF: My son and my daughter, and my father right now, who is elderly.

MF: Now that we are working to tell a fuller story of our history of women than has been reported-recorded in the past, what should we be sure to include about the...?

BF: Don't let anyone tell you...what the limits are and if they say it can't be done, don't necessarily believe it because if you want to do it, you can go do it. I've always told my kids they can do anything they want, I support them 100 percent. If they have an idea, let's run with it, don't let other people say, you know, you can't do that or you won't be successful or it has to be done this way, because the truth of the matter is it doesn't have to be done that way.

MF: As a single mom, and being self-employed, what challenges have you had to face?

BF: Pretty much financially it's – it's very difficult to go – being self-employed and being dependent on the insurance companies and when they want to pay the day I do the clinical session it can be up to 90 days before I get paid, and I'm still paying mortgages and college tuitions and private school tuitions, so that can be pretty stressful, but really great money management is a wonderful tool. [Laughter]

MF: Do you feel that being a single woman is looked at differently than say a single man? If it was like a single father raising two children versus...

BF: Absolutely. Single moms do it every day and that's no big deal. Single fathers are like, 'wow, how impressive that he's taking care of that child all by himself', and you go, 'really?' [laughing] It's less common that you see a single dad, so they get much more support and recognition for it. Single moms generally don't and employers would prefer not to hire a single mom, where they would definitely hire a single dad.

MF: Do you feel that you face some challenges because you are a woman, especially being self-employed? Building a house, trying to get all those things done?

BF: Yeah you definitely bump up against some stereotypes. It's better now than when my mother was going through that kind of stuff. When my mom moved to Sterling [Massachusetts] in 1971, she was the only woman in town with both a driver's license and a college degree. That was unheard of, and the people in town would say to my dad, you know, 'what does she need all that for?' Now pretty much everyone in town...is college educated or educated in some way and having a driver's license. But a lot of those discrimination kinds of issues where you know, the building inspector laughs when you want your building permit [laughter] some of those things are not so great.

MF: I can imagine that cannot be a good thing [laughing] Are there any major struggles that you know have...that have happened on (\_\_\_\_\_???)

BF: I think one of the biggest positive jumps I've made was buying a car by myself. I have never bought a car by myself. My mother had never bought a car by herself [laughing] and she was like 'Do you want me to send Dad with you?' and I was like well that defeats the whole purpose of me going and negotiating this deal by myself. So even though it's not that big of deal, it was significant to me.

EM: Did you run into any problems buying your own car? Or did they try and say anything?

BF: Mostly I ended up [laughter] getting asked out on a lot of dates while buying my car. And several emails followed with continuous things like that. So I don't think it hurt me but it was definitely uncomfortable [laughter].

MF: Is there a time that you felt like...that you remember that you felt completely like it was because of your sex you were being treated that way? That you can remember...?

BF: Not off the top of my head, I can't.

MF: How old were you allowed to date? And where did you go on dates when you were growing up?

BF: I was allowed to date always. [Laughter] I had my first boyfriend in sixth grade. Pretty much when we were dating in high school it was going to the movies or going ice-skating or stuff like that.

MF: Do you think dating is different from...being a girl and a boy? Do you think there's a difference?

BF: Oh yeah, I definitely worry more about something happening to my daughter than my son. He's six four, 208 pounds but it doesn't mean he couldn't have his heart broken just as easily but physically I worry more about my daughter being out places alone at night, those kinds of things are very real that are things that my son never thinks about at all. He doesn't feel like he could be at any risk in any way where, as a woman out there alone at night, you are at risk.

MF: I know one concern that people have for people – women particularly being single is that they don't have a man there to protect them. As a single parent, do you feel less safe not having a husband in the house? Or do you feel that you have the ability to protect yourself and your children?

BF: I did feel that vulnerability and I did live in a very safe place, but I did take some steps to remedy that situation.

MF: What was considered fashionable when you were a young woman?

BF: Oh boy... [laughter] 1980s really, really big hair. Really, really high heels with like fishnet...tights and miniskirts and everything did not match.

MF: Oh no...

BF: Oh yeah [laughter]

MF: How were girls treated when you were in school?

BF: The expectation was that whether you were going to school or not, you were getting married and that you were having kids and so although your education was nice, it wasn't really required. They never expected that you would have to depend on that to survive.

MF: Did you always want to be married when you were growing up?

BF: No, I didn't want to be married when I was growing up.

MF: How did people react when you told them 'I don't want to be married'?

BF: Very negatively actually. That was the expectation. I also didn't want children and that was equally as horrible.

MF: Did your mother react negatively as well or did she say...?



BF: She hoped I'd grow out of it [laughter]. When I went back for my 20-year high school reunion they were shocked that I was married and had children because those were the two things I knew I didn't want to do.

EM: What changed your mind?

BF: Meeting my husband changed my mind. Kids were really important to him and so initially I decided to have children because he wanted them and it was the best decision I ever made. I don't regret that for a second and just meeting him changed – within six weeks of meeting we were engaged and then we stayed engaged for the next two years until I graduated from Assumption [College] to get married.

MF: So how old were you when you met him?

BF: [thoughtful sigh] 20? [laughter]

MF: And you were married at...?

BF: 22

MF: Do you feel pressure from society changed that you wanted to get married? Or do you think it had nothing to do with it?

BF: It had nothing to do with society, it had to do with the person and the quality of the relationship. I still bump up against people now that are older that would feel better if I was married again.

MF: How does it make you feel that when people approach you they say 'Well it would make me feel better if you were married'? How does it make you feel?

BF: [laughter] Because it's people that care about me I appreciate that they're worried and concerned, however that's not a reason to do that again and – and I can acknowledge it and validate the fact that that's how they feel and then clearly I can delete my position.

MF: Out of – a single parent now dating, do you feel dating is different from when you were our age? [laughter]

BF: Yes [laughing]

MF: How so?

BF: I don't have a lot of time. I'm really, really busy. I don't do the bar scene, I don't want to go waste my time so it's either by being introduced or by internet, and then you

can streamline the process and only meet people that are worth meeting...worth your time.

MF: Do you feel more pressure from society to get married now that you're a mother? Do you think that they look down on you that you are a single parent or do you think that they're okay?

BF: They definitely look down on me as a single parent.

MF: Do you think if it was a male who wasn't married they'd look down at him for...?

BF: Not at all.

MF: Just a stereotypical...?

BF: Yup.

MF: Is there anything you'd like to say...about that? Say there's another woman listening and she's a single parent, what would you tell her about the pressure to marry?

BF: Ignore it.

[Laughter]

BF: You really can do it. You need a lot of friends and a good support system but you can do it.

MF: You mentioned you had two brothers...

BF: I do.

MF: Did you see any differences in growing up between how they were treated in school and how you were treated in school? Along that lines...

BF: I did much better in school than my brothers [laughter]. Other than that not really.

MF: What were some of your most significant extracurricular involvements?

BF: In high school I founded a chapter of students against drunk drivers at my high school which is still in existence today. I pretty much volunteer for everything so I'm involved in a lot of stuff.

MF: What's your most...memorable volunteer moment that you had?

BF: That's a tough one. I think changing policies on parent board at the high school was pretty significant.

MF: That's really cool. Do you feel that when your mom was your age she would have the same opportunities to change policy? Or...

BF: No, she would not have had a parent board opportunity at all.

MF: Would she have liked a parent board opportunity?

BF: Probably, but back then the parent board was 100 percent male.

MF: That's pretty tough.

BF: Yup, so they only had a male point of view for every topic. [Laugh]

MF: You said that you are self-employed, do – is it only you in the building? Or...

BF: It is only me right now.

MF: It's only you, Do you have both and female clients?

BF: I do.

MF: Do the male clients treat you differently than the female clients?

BF: Generally no, aside from the occasional threatening individual. I've never been threatened by a female but I've been threatened by a couple men.

MF: Do you feel uncomfortable being down there by yourself?

BF: Not as much as I used to. I went into some self-defense classes, I got a license to carry so I could have mace. Rearrange the office so that my chair was closest to the door that they were not between me and the door. There's now a phone line in my office if I need to call 9-1-1. So I've done some things. If I am having a client that I know could be volatile, I let people know that so sometimes someone will either pop in or at least know to come looking for me [laughter] after a certain period of time.

EM: Have you ever asked someone to come...maybe sit in or like sit outside your office in case you felt threatened by someone?

BF: I did do that once. I had to file a 51A on a father for sexually abusing his special needs son and I told him up front that I was the one filing, and he left a message telling me when he came, he was gonna bring a gun.

EM: What's a 51A just for...?

BF: It's a report of abuse for neglect on a child in Massachusetts – I'm a mandated reporter so I told him up front that I was gonna have to report that. So he would know where it came from and exactly what I was going to say. And so I did have a police officer at the office. As well as my brother who is six foot eight. [laughs].

EM: [laughs] That's always good.

MF: You've mentioned your work with children; can you explain how you started that and why you like working with them?

BF: Kids are much more fun [laughter]. Grown-ups are really, really boring, there's really not a lot of challenge. You ask them why they're there and they just tell you. Kids, you get to play with them and try to engage them and trick them into telling you they they're there and what's going on [laughter]. They don't even realize they're having therapy most of the time. But I'd rather work with the children and fix the problems when they're kids so we don't have as many messed up grown-ups walking around.

MF: You mention that your mom was the only one in town to have a driver's license and master's degree.

BF: Bachelor's degree.

MF: Bachelor's degree.

BF: Bachelor's degree, the only female. Men could have them. We're not even talking masters yet; we're on bachelors only. [laughs]

MF: Do you think she instilled in you that women can do everything that they do, that it's okay for them to have a driver's license, it's okay to get an education?

BF: Absolutely.

MF: So she encouraged you to go get...

BF: Yeah, she considered my education to be my insurance policy for the rest of my life. That no matter what happened, I would be able to provide for myself and my kids, and that has turned out to be true.

MF: If your daughter came to you and said that she [laughter] didn't want to be married, would you react the same way that your mother did? Or would you say that's okay?

BF: Perfectly fine.

MF: So that's definitely a change from...

BF: That's a big change.

MF: ..... society. What are some difficult transitions that you went through in moving from childhood to adulthood?

BF: A lot of small town stereotypes were a challenge. People thought they knew where I was supposed to go and what I was supposed to do. And then making some decisions along the way that were not easy. I transferred to Assumption [College] from an all-girls women's college, one of the top 10 in the country. Went there because my grandmother told me to go there. [laughter] 'Cause my mother went there, and for my mother it was the right decision and for me it was the wrong decision. And making the decision to leave and come to Assumption – which is what I really wanted to do – I had full support from my parents when I dropped the bomb over Thanksgiving dinner in front of all the relatives [laughter]. I did not have full support from the grandparents and the older relatives.

EM: And which school – all-girls school was this?

BF: Saint Joseph's College in West Hartford [Connecticut].

EM: Could you see a difference between how people acted in each school?

BF: That's pretty much what made the difference for me. The culture of the school was very different. It was extremely competitive academically – people did homework all the time. They would not go to an activity, they would not go to a movie, they would not take a break and go shopping. They would lie to each other about what was on exams to do better themselves academically. They would steal each other's term papers so you had to lock them and resubmit them because they would steal them and take the cover sheet off, this is pre computer, you couldn't print another one, you had to type – and so if they took the cover sheet off and put their name on...you were out of it. You were in trouble. That was not the culture I wanted to be in.

MF: Do you think that culture was just because it was an all-girls school?

BF: Yeah, it was very much the drive to get ahead. Very much you need to be the best of the best and they made sure you knew you were competing against a lot of men that the culture was gonna say you couldn't compete against. So they – they sort of instilled that, but it's not how I wanted to be as a person.

EM: When coming to Assumption [College] it was – it's a co-ed school...

BF: Correct.

EM: Did any of the men that you went to school with have any looks about women attending the college as well?

BF: The guys at Assumption were great, they didn't seem to care at all whether we were there or not. One of the best things that came out of my coming here was that my brother's wife was my college roommate and that's where I met my daughter's father – [he] was one of my other – he was one of my other roommate's brother. So there were five of us in the town house and two of us married each other's brothers 10 months apart. [laughter]

MF: That's funny, small world.

BF: Yup.

MF: Do you think that there is still a strong competition between men and women in the professional world? And how so?

BF: Men still get paid more than women for the same job. That's really frustrating [laughing] and they say, "Well men need more money because they need to support their families." So do women, but there's really a closed-minded mess about that.

EM: Do you think that's changing?

BF: Not so much. I mean it's better than it was, but it's still not enough. You know, if we're doing the exact same job, we should get the same pay.

MF: Do you think...if...how do you think women can change that? To show them that I have a family that I need to support too.

BF: Well I think that as more women are single heads of households, and they're out there actually doing the job, I think it will change but it changes very, very slowly.

MF: You mentioned head of households, do you think that in every family, the man is always the head of the household? Or do you think sometimes even when they are married that the woman is still...

BF: I think the men always think they're the head of the household [laughs] I don't know if that's actually true in reality, but for legal purposes and tax purposes they are.

MF: How did that aff – how did that change being...going from you're married to his name was on everything to now that you're single? Did people look at you strangely when they see that you're the head, there's not a man.

BF: Yeah pretty much and where I live is a small town so everyone noticed the name change back which got everybody all upset. But that being said, over time they sort of have gotten used to it, it's not nearly as big a gossip topic as it was at the time.

MF: [laughter] I know that you had mentioned some small town stereotypes that you have run up against, could you explain what some of those were?

BF: Pretty much that all the women wanted to be home and be only home makers and caregivers – a lot of questions as to why I worked during the marriage since my husband made enough money that I didn't need to work. A lot of people when I decided to stay home with the children said things like my professional life would be over, it was a serious career set back, I could never make up the ground that I was losing – turns out not to be true.

MF: So it sounds almost like you're trying to make a double standard before you had children and you wanted to work, they were saying well why are you working your husband can, but when you had children and wanted to stay home they flipped it around and said well what about your career...

BF: Correct.

MF:...you can't just do that..

BF: Correct.

MF: How does that make you feel? That double standard that's placed ... [laughter]

BF: Well it's really stressful and for me I had such a hard time having my children – I lost four before the two that I have – that once I had them, I wanted to stay home and take care of them. So I stayed home all day, and then went to work at night. But you always feel like you're not doing the right thing. The working moms are giving you dirty looks for being home, the stay-at-home moms are giving you dirty looks for going to work and

it's because we have this false concept which is you can do everything perfectly. You can work full time and be the perfect mother and be the perfect wife and you know there's never a dust bunny in your house – and that's just an impossible standard. You know, they don't expect the husband to get home first and make dinner. He still walks in and looks at you and goes, "I know you worked all day, but you know dinner and kids and laundry and housekeeping are still all you." [laughs]

MF: So would you say that the 'supermom' stereotype is definitely more prominent now, with you have to work, you have to take care of your kids, you have to keep the house clean, you have to do all this.

BF: Yes, yes.

MF: Would you say that it's essentially the same stereotypes that were on before but are just tacked on like another branch?

BF: Slightly different. When my mother was married, in addition to staying home and not working while you had children, you also had to pretty yourself up before your husband came home. So you had to go put on a nice dress or a clean shirt and skirt and do your hair and do your makeup even if you had been home with the kids all day. So when he walked in he had a nice visual. I never went that far. [laughs]

MF: How does that make you feel knowing that was the expectation? [laughter] Does that bother you?

BF: It bothered me, but I didn't live in that generation. As a result when my mother passed away, my father doesn't know how to do laundry, has no idea what to clean or how to clean it, he's never had to do any of that in almost 50 years and he's very lost.

MF: So would you say that women do have a greater part in society than they have credit for?

BF: Yup, [laughs] very much.

MF: You mentioned that your parents were educated. Can you tell us what their education consisted of?

BF: My mother ended up with her bachelor's from St. Joseph's, a master's from Assumption, and a doctorate from Stone...Crest University. My father had a bachelor's from University of Tennessee, a Master's from Boston College, and a secondary master's from someplace else [laughs] that I don't remember.



MF: Since your town had so much to say about her Master's degree, how did they react to her Ph.D.?

BF: [laughs] A lot of the guys in town gave my father a hard time.

MF: How did you father react to that?

BF: He has a great sense of humor and he was fully supportive of her and he was like, "Hey I'm married to a doctor." You know, he was fine. [laughter] My brothers all have advanced degrees also.

MF: When you aren't at home, how do you spend your time?

BF: I work [laughs] and if I'm not at work I'm on the sailboat.

MF: What particular areas of the city did you spend some of your time? Would you say?

BF: Well I was born in Hahnemann Hospital [Worcester] so that was brief [laughter]. I lived in Worcester [Massachusetts] on the Assumption [College] campus for three and a half years, which was really nice. I got married and moved into Tatnuck Square area [Worcester] for six months. It took me longer to get to work from that side of Worcester than it did from Sterling [Massachusetts] to Worcester [laughter]. Then I moved back to Sterling and I spent some of the worst years working for DSS [Department of Social Services] in the slum and drug infested...areas. Getting my windshield smashed, getting my tires slashed, yeah that was a great time [laughs].

EM: Do you think the city has changed at all since it was?

BF: It's still pretty rough in some parts. It's more ethnically diverse now than it was then. But yeah you definitely – you were at risk in some of those areas and you still are at risk in some of those areas.

MF: As a woman, did you think it was difficult to go in the high-risk areas than say a man who was your co-worker?

BF: Absolutely. So you know you needed to take precautions, you need to let your co-workers know where you were going. That was pre cell phone so you couldn't call and say, "Hey I'm out," but it was like "Hey if I'm not back by lunch time, this is the client I'm going to see, this is where you need to come find me."

MF: Did your male co-workers have to do the same thing, or did they just say I'm going to work, bye?

BF: They didn't check in 'cause they weren't at risk.

MF: Did you find that you weren't given the respect you deserved during that time?

BF: No I was a protective worker so I took children from their parents so I had a whole lot of respect, I just didn't have a lot of warm fuzzy feelings from the parents I was taking the kids from.

MF: That must have been very difficult especially.

BF: Yeah, very much.

MF: You discussed that you've gone through some tougher times, what keeps you going?

BF: Lack of a choice? [laughs] You have a choice, you can stop and give up or you can keep moving.

MF: Do you instill on your children the same value to just not give up...?

BF: I try [laughs]. I don't know if I'm successful but I try.

MF: How do you define success in your personal life?

BF: Being surrounded by family and friends that love you.

MF: Do you think this definition has changed over time for you personally? Or does society...

BF: I don't know that society agrees with me. I think society would decide that money matters. Don't care about money. Never have, never will. It's a necessary means to an end. Other than that, it doesn't matter. Having good relationships with friends and family that love you is the most important. Being nice along the way matters.

MF: Would you feel that society views you as being successful?

BF: Right now, probably because right now in my private practice I earn enough money that society recognizes that as success.

MF: Have they always viewed you as successful?

BF: Probably not, I've probably made some choices they wouldn't have agreed with along the way.

MF: How do you feel about the choices that you have made?

BF: Overall I'd make most of them again. I think I would.

EM: Are there any that any choices that you made that you would like to go back to change if you could?

BF: I think I would have liked to have started at Assumption and not give into the peer pressure of my grandmother, but I sort of deferred to her thinking she knew better than I did at that point. So I think I would have trusted myself with my own decisions more, that was a process of having to learn how to do that. And not deferred to what other people wanted or thought because even though in my grandmother's mind that was the only perfectly right decision and for my mother that was the perfectly right decision, that was the perfectly wrong decision for me.

MF: Have you used that ability that you gained to say no to people regularly throughout your professional career?

BF: Yeah I practice that on a regular basis [laughs].

MF: When men ask you what you do and they find out you're self-employed, do they react strangely to that? Or do they....

BF: Pretty often they do, pretty often they're kind of surprised.

MF: I know that one of the stereotypes is that if a woman tells a man, "Oh I'm this successful, I'm a single mom; I provide for my children", that they feel intimidated? Do you think the men that you have met have felt intimidated by that?

BF: Yeah and they tell me they are.

MF: And how do you react when he says, "Well, I'm intimidated because you have a job?"

BF: They're not intimidated that I have a job, they're intimidated that I run my own business, the type of job that I have, and the amount of money that I earn. 'Cause I usually out earn them.

MF: Do you think that that will affect if you go into a relationship or do you think that he will eventually...

BF: If it's a problem for that person, it's not the right relationship.

MF: What advice would give to young women who aren't finding relationships since dating is hard and we have all these rules put on us we're supposed to be like quiet, we're not supposed to try to be compete with him and success so to speak, what would you tell them?

BF: I would buck the trend. I would – I would definitely not do that, I wouldn't sell yourself short, I wouldn't see yourself out.

MF: Based on your life experiences, what advice would you give women today, and future generations?

BF: Get. An. Education. [laughs] We would not have been okay without my education. I would have been making...not enough for us to stay in the house. My children would not have stayed in private schools. We would not be driving new cars. We would not be taking Aruban vacations. The education was huge. You may never need it, but if you need it, you need it.

MF: That's pretty true. Do you think – you mentioned that you were divorced, do you think a divorced man is looked at differently than a divorced woman?

BF: Very much. [laughs]

MF: If the man initiates the divorce, is he looked – how is he looked at compared to if the woman initiated the divorce?

BF: If the man initiated the divorce, it was the woman's fault. That's why he left. If the woman initiates the divorce, she's ungrateful.

MF: So essentially either way...

BF: Either way it's your fault [laughs]. As long as you know that, doesn't matter.

EM: How did ...your parents react when you told them you were getting divorced?

BF: My parents were not surprised, my marriage had been very difficult. I had wanted out for a very long time. I did not initiate the divorce. I wanted until he said he wanted it, and I said okay [laughs].

MF: Do you think that in court, as when you were in court, do you think the judge looked and heard of the two sides differently? Or do you think it didn't matter?

BF: Ironically I had a woman judge. Who after the fact I found out was the most father friendly judge in the Worcester Probate Court system.

MF: Oh no...

BF: So had I had any of the other men judges, I would have done better in my divorce than I did with the female judge.

MF: Do you find that ironic that the men would have done better than the woman?

BF: I actually think it's one of the ways the stereotypes would have worked. They're older men and they would have said okay, well you know, the wife can't earn as much and she can't do this and she needs to be home so many hours for the kids, so financially I would have been much better off if I had one of the male judges than the woman judge that I had.

MF: Do men see you as helpless? Do you feel that they need to come in and swoop in and save you and do your yard work and clean up and all that?

BF: [laughs] Yeah, they do.

MF: And what do you tell them?

BF: If I need your help, I'll ask you.

MF: How do they react to that when they want to play super hero and you're just like I don't need you...?

BF: I usually tell them I've got it covered. The other problem I run into is men who want to help me financially. When I don't need it [laughs].

MF: Does it bother you?

BF: Sometimes.

MF: Have you learned how to do a lot of the quote unquote, man's work?

BF: [laughs] Sadly. I snow blow, I shovel snow, I take leaves, I refinished my hard wood floors, I've done a lot of stuff that I would never want to have to do. But it's okay.

MF: How do men react when you tell them that, "Oh I can do it by myself?"

BF: A lot of men are now telling me that they don't even know how to do those things either [laughter] so they're kind of surprised. I remember fixing my dishwasher from a YouTube video [laughter]. The guys are like we have no idea how to fix a dishwasher

and I'm like got this YouTube video and – and it worked and they were stunned. That I would fix my dishwasher by a YouTube video, but it was there and it worked so... [Laughs].

MF: Do your brothers look at you differently...not differently but do they view you being a single woman different than your father just cause it's two separate generations?

BF: No, they're all equally as – as sad [laughs]. All of them would be happier if I was married and “taken care of.”

MF: It seems that society just wants to be like, “Oh well, you're a woman you need to be taken care of.” Do you think that men need to be taken care of too? Or...

BF: Yeah, I find men need a lot of help on their own. That there's a lot of things that they can't do, and they're not expected to do it. And we're expected to do it anyway.

MF: Do you feel that women are now more likely to stand up for their rights than they were?

BF: I think so. One of the saddest days for my mom was when I went to the movies by myself and she was pretty horrified by that and I was like it's really not so bad [laughs]. Really you should try it sometimes! I wanted to see the movie, there was no one else that wanted to go so I went and – and she was literally in tears over the fact I had to go to a movie by myself.

MF: Why did that affect her so strongly?

BF: 'Cause she had never done that and she's never eaten at a restaurant by herself. It – it would just never occur her to do. If she wanted to see a movie and there was not someone to go with her, she would have stayed home. It's the generation difference.

MF: Did you see a generation difference between your mom and her grandma? And your grandma?

BF: My grandmother was a tremendously hard worker. She did not get educated past high school because her family had limited resources and they educated the sons. She worked tremendously hard. She came in as a sales woman for Avon and when she retired from Avon she was the most successful manager in the country and had the entire New England region to herself.

MF: Wow.

BF: Yeah, so as a result she wasn't home. So my mother at 12 years old was cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, ironing, and making dinner and taking care of her younger brother and her special needs sister.

MF: Was her younger brother expected to do anything? Or....

BF: No [laughs].

MF: If he was a female, would you think the workload would be split?

BF: Yes...yes.

MF: After your mother had grown up doing that, did you feel that you and your brothers all had equal chores?

BF: No [laughs]. I had household chores, they had outside chores. I wasn't allowed to help them cut wood, split wood, move wood, I was never allowed to mow the lawn, nothing like that. I couldn't wash the cars, I had to cook and dust and polish silver and learn how to take stains out of clothes.

MF: It doesn't sound too exciting.

BF: It doesn't, although when it was snowing I wasn't feeling so bad [laughter]. If it was bad out, I wasn't very upset to be in, but as a result, when I got divorced my mother was like, "Well who's gonna shovel your snow?" Well that would be me, and she was very upset by that. Who else is gonna shovel it? [laughs]. I'll send your father. No I – I got this [laughs].

MF: Do you – if your daughter said, "Hey mom I want to mow the lawn today," would you say yes? Or would you say...

BF: Go ahead.

MF: ...you're not allowed to? ([laughter]. So you took that differently where your daughter and your son can both have outdoor chores.

BF: They can both do dishes, they can both do laundry, they can both mow the lawn, they can both shovel snow.

MF: Do you think that's better that they know both sides, so your son if he needed to, can make himself dinner. And your daughter, if she needed to, could go out and mow the lawn?

BF: That's the idea. It's life skills.

MF: Do you feel that parents that do put the stereotypical this is women's work, this is man's work, almost put their children at a disadvantage?

BF: I do, because you know, eventually they're gonna go off on their own and they need those skills.

MF: Did you find that you had to learn those skills by yourself? Or...

BF: Pretty much [laughs].

MF: In your brothers' marriages, do you see a lot of the same stereotypes?

BF: My younger brother's marriage is very traditional. He works full time at a Nano tube company that he's self-employed in, and his wife stays home and she has not worked a day since the day they met. And she takes care of their house and their son. My older brother is a lawyer and they reversed rolls. My sister-in-law had my nephew and she had been working full time, spent four weeks on maternity leave, was completely bored. Absolutely hated it, said it was nothing like she saw on TV. Flew in an au pair from Brazil and went back to work. And that girl stayed with them for five years and now my brother is pretty much Mr. Dad. He's the one that does homework, puts my nephew on the bus, takes him off the bus, takes him to the sporting events. She goes to work and that's the end of her thing. She goes to work, she comes home, she's done.

MF: Did your mother have anything to say about that?

BF: Lots [laughs].

EM: She didn't agree?

BF: She did not agree. Last winter when February school vacation came up, she made a comment to me that she felt badly for my brother, that he was gonna have his son home alone all week to take care of and I said, "Why? I did it with two and you did it with three." And it was sort of a shocking realization for her cause she's like, "Oh yeah, you're right." I'm like why is this so traumatic? And it was more the idea for her, like you know, oh he shouldn't be left alone to take care of his son all week cause it's hard. Really!?! [laughs]. We all did that and I think she was surprised at her own reaction when I called her on it.

MF: Do you feel that you were in a more traditional marriage or...?

BF: I was definitely in a traditional marriage.



MF: Would you have – did you like being in a traditional marriage or would you have liked it to have been more equal?

BF: I think ideally I would have liked it to be more equal. I went into a traditional marriage, we both discussed it, that's what we wanted to do. The plus of that is, that division of marriage was cut and dry. Everybody knew what everybody's jobs were. So, you know, there was no one stumbling around going, "Hey there hasn't been any laundry done for a week" because no one could decide who's turn it was. It was always my turn [laughs]. And there was some benefits to that, the kids had consistency, they always knew who was in charge of taking care of them, who would be there, who would be picking them up, who would be driving them places, and they knew who to ask for what they wanted.

MF: So you think that both sides can be effectively done if they're done...

BF: Yeah as long...you know...

MF:...properly...

BF: Yeah, yeah I think it can be done. Fewer couples do traditional marriage now 'cause more women are working and they go, "Yeah we're both working 40 hours a week why do I have to cook clean and do the laundry, why can't you help out?" And men are pretty resistant to that at this point still.

MF: Why do you think they are still resistant to that?

BF: Because that's not how their mothers are – most of them.

MF: Do you think that this generation of men will be less resistant if their mothers were more... if they work forty hours and saw the struggles. Would they be like, "Oh yeah I'll do the dishes."

BF: Possibly. Definitely something you want to negotiate before you get married, you need to have those conversations about what those expectations are.

MF: Do you think men feel bad that they aren't helping out or do you think they think they just aren't supposed to?

BF: They feel they aren't supposed to.

MF: Do you think this causes most of marriage problems?

BF: No, actually most marriage problems comes from selfishness – both people wanting their own way and limited abilities to compromise and few problem solving skills that are functional and healthy. Yelling and cursing and screaming is not a healthy problem solving skill.

MF: In some of the articles we have been reading they have talked about how women solely shape their children, that if your child ends up robbing a bank it's 'cause the mother did not do them well. Do you think that's true or do you think the father has a good amount of influence as well?

BF: I think it depends upon who is raising the children. Traditionally it is always mom's fault back to schizophrenia being the mom wasn't warm and fuzzy enough. Turns out that's not true but if the kids do well the fathers get credit, if the kids do poorly it's usually mom's fault. But at the end of the day you need to look at whose raising the children and if at the end of the day both parents were inactive in society and t.v. was raising the children then that is who raised the children.

MF: Does it bother you that if your child gets into an Ivy League college they go to the dad and go yeah you did really good and if they don't then they look at the mom and go why didn't you do homework with them?

BF: Yeah but it's always been that way.

MF: Do you think that will change?

BF: It will take an awfully long time before that would change, because you would need men to be involved fathers and they are getting better but they aren't there yet.

MF: Do you think that more women being single – women in this generation – is going to help that, or do you think that is going to hurt that? Do you think that because they are fatherless they are going to say, "Oh I want to do better," or are they going to say, "Oh I can leave?"

BF: I don't really know. I think that a lot of fathers decide that how they feel and their happiness is all that matters. Moms are generally more willing to sacrifice for their children and for their family. They start by giving things up as soon as they're pregnant. They can't drink, they can't smoke, they can't eat certain foods, they can't take certain medications, and they start right away deferring their own wants and needs for their children and fathers don't tend to do that as much.

EM: Do you feel that you have a legacy?

BF: I do have a legacy because I have children and as long as they are happy, healthy functioning adults that's all that I can ask for.

MF: Looking back are you... how would your life have been different if you didn't get married, didn't have kids? How would you...

BF: Well if I didn't get married I wouldn't be divorced [laughs] I would have been working a lot harder, a lot longer, but I would have missed out on so many really wonderful experiences from having children. My life would have been pretty empty at that point.

MF: As we're concluding this interview, what is something that people listening to this interview take away from hearing this.

BF: Back to the girls getting an education... you know if you never need it that's great, but you never know what's going to happen and a lot of fathers don't take financial care of the children after the divorce and you're stuck and you need to be able to support yourself and your children.

MF: Thank you

EM: Thank you