

Interviewee: Barbara Mercier
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Worcester Women's Oral History Project

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Barbara Mercier, born in December of 1946 is an extraordinary women although she claims to have lived an ordinary life. Barbara and her family moved to Worcester, MA from Billerica, MA when she was just fourteen years old. She said the transition was hard but she overcame any and all obstacles. She attended North High in Worcester and then went on to study education at Worcester State College from 1964-1968. She has since retired but after graduating college she became a teacher in grades 4th, 5th and 6th where she was able to really extend her knowledge to her students and share her passion for history with her classes. Barbara also volunteered in various organizations in and around the Worcester area where she really made an impact. Barbara has two children and four grandchildren whom she adores and spends much time with now that she is retired. Barbara and her husband of 47 years Robert Mercier now live in West Boylston and are enjoying their life together.

NM: Alright, so we are just going to start off with some general questions. What is your full name, including both maiden and married name if applicable?

BM: Barbara Ann Doody Mercier

NM: And when were you born?

BM: December 29, 1946

MC: You have children you said?

BM: Yes, two

MC: Where have you lived during your life? Did you grow up in Worcester or...?

BM: No, I was born in Somerville, Massachusetts and then lived in Billerica, Massachusetts right outside of Lowell. And then we moved to Worcester when I was 14 years old, so 1960. So I've been in Worcester ever since, except for now I'm in West Boylston which is right down the road.

MC: Yeah, just down the road.

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MC: Okay, what would you describe your neighborhood like growing up generally?

BM: Well the two—because I was 14 when we left Billerica, *I loved Billerica!* It was country, it was country. Everybody seemed to know each other, all the kids played together. When we came to Worcester in 1960 well I was older, you know, I wasn't playing outside. It didn't seem as close of a neighborhood, it didn't seem as welcoming.

MC: Do you think growing up in a more country type town has shaped how you are today?

BM: I think so.

MC: Okay, so now you said you live in West Boylston now right?

BM: Right.

MC: Does your family live in this area still?

BM: Our son lives in Worcester and our daughter lives in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania. We actually just got back from visiting her yesterday.

MC: My sister went to school in Pennsylvania

BM: *Ohh..*

MC: Where did you attend school?

BM: Elementary school, Ditson School in Billerica and Howe Junior High in Billerica, and then North High School in Worcester, and then Worcester State College. But the new North High means nothing to me because it's not in the same place

NM: Yeah, it's a new building. The new building is amazing though

BM: I haven't seen it

NM: It's really nice

BM: We went right across from the [Worcester] Art Museum, that was the old North High.

NM: Oh, okay yeah.

BM: That's where we went. Double session, so sophomore year we went 7:00 until 12:30, junior and senior year we went 12:30 to 5:30

NM: That's how it was back then?

BM: Big Baby Boomer year, 1960 yeah.

NM: That's crazy

BM: Yeah

MC: And you said you're a retired teacher?

BM: Yes, yes.

MC: And you went to Worcester State, so obviously you pursued education as your major?

BM: Yes.

MC: And then, what did you teach?

BM: I taught—the only grades I taught were 4th, 5th and 6th. I never wanted to do the real little ones. And mostly I taught in 5th and 6th. We were departmental, so I taught social studies or math.

MC: Okay.

BM: Which I liked a lot. Rather than teaching everything.

MC: And was Flagg Street the only school you taught at?

BM: Oh, no. I taught at Chandler Magnet School

MC: Oh okay.

BM: And Abbot Street as my very first school but that turned into condominiums. It seemed like there was a period in my life that everything I touched turned into condominiums. Where I practice taught turned into condominiums, my first year teaching it turned into condominiums, my high school it turned into condominiums

BM: It was a trend.

MC: Was teaching, was that what you always wanted to do? Did you always know that?

BM: No.

MC: What did you want to be?

BM: First, I wanted to be an astronaut

NM: Oh, wow!

BM: Then a secretary, then a lawyer.. and then kind of fell into teaching.

MC: What made you decide to teach?

BM: Well my mother was a teacher. I liked being in school so that was a comfortable place for me. I originally wanted to be a high school teacher, high school history teacher. But then when they told me high school history teachers are a dime a dozen that's when I switched to elementary.

MC: And how do you think your role as a teacher for elementary aged kids shapes them growing up?

BM: Well, I think I was very firm about imposing structure and definite expectations and I think, I hope, although I do think that sometimes I was preparing them for the school that I went to not necessarily the school that they were going to face. Because when I would hear junior high teachers say well, "They don't even check homework," I would be like, "What?"

MC: What year did you retire?

BM: 10 years ago. So what, 19—oh no, 2007. 2007, yes.

MC: So, 2007. Okay.

BM: I retired and then my daughter had twins in Pennsylvania.

NM: Oh, wow!

BM: Yes, so I retired in January and the twins were born in October so I went down and stayed for a couple of months to help her out because twins are a lot of work.

NM: I bet

MC: Yeah, I can imagine.

MC: So speaking of your career more. What was your first job?

BM: Not just in teaching? You mean my very first job?

MC: Yes, not just in teaching... your very first job.

BM: Well, I babysat a lot. But my first real job was, it lasted about 6 days at a little restaurant in downtown Worcester and then I got a job in Head Start during the summer program. So I got tied into Federally Funded Educational summer programs early. So through college I did that kind of thing.

MC: So obviously you are married and have children, so what were the primary responsibilities in terms of household work and child care that you took part in?

BM: Well I took 10 years off from teaching.

MC: Oh, really?

BM: So I was home for 10 years. So mostly I did that.

BM: And then I went back to work part time. Well I did a little bit of substituting but that's really not what I wanted to do because I'm a person that needs to know what I'm doing. I'm not that quick on my feet and you have to be quick on your feet if you're a substitute. You also have to be very strong with discipline.

NM: Right.

BM: And I'm not unless I know what I'm doing.

MC: Yeah.

BM: So I did that for a little while. Then I taught in the Adult Learning Center part time. Helping people get their GED [General Equivalency Diploma], and that was so rewarding! Because they knew if you were busy, they'd wait, and they'd come back and thank you. And it was wonderful. The only thing was it was part time and it never was going to be more than part time. It was \$8 an hour at the time which was not going to make me rich. So I had to get back into the regular teaching jobs when my children were old enough before it became too scary to do that.

MC: I agree.

NM: How have you balanced different priorities, responsibilities, roles, and interest in your life?

BM: I used to stay up very, very late. Very late.

NM: I think that a Sagittarius thing.

BM: Oh, no I'm a Capricorn. I'm further down in December.

NM: Oh, right

BM: But I used to get by on four to five hours of sleep for many many, many years. And I was tired but that's just a state of being. It's not something you do something about, you just are tired. So I used to stay up very late because I had very active children and I didn't get much housework done during the day when they were around so all that had to be done after bedtime and so that's that. And then when I was teaching I corrected every blessed thing, so I had a lot to do. So now, now I can just get a lot in and I am done at 10:00 at night and I feel like I should be done at 10:00 at night, but I didn't used to finish until midnight or after.

NM: Right.

MC: We actually just had a conversation in our class about how women balance being a mother and taking care of the household duties and their career. Do you think that was a challenge for you or you handled it well?

BM: Well it helped that teaching gives you the regular hours and the vacations off with children so that was a big help.

MC: So having that schedule helped?

BM: That was a big help but as far as the you know teaching, you never came home from a day of teaching with an empty briefcase. You always had a lot of stuff to do at home.

NM: What are some of the pros and cons of the path that you've chosen?

BM: Umm...

NM: From your very first job until now...

BM: Well after I had been out of work for 10 years, when I was thinking about getting back into the swing of things I took a class with that book, *What Color is your Parachute?* Have you heard of that book.

MC: Yeah, I have.

BM: Okay. It's all about helping you figure out where you go and what to do and there were a lot of things out there I would like to have done. Many of them would have involved a lot more schooling and I didn't feel like I could do that at that point in time. I got my master's degree plus

30 which was about as far as I could go as far as extra schooling. I don't think I have any regrets, but I had wanted to be a lawyer when I was a younger teenager, but my mother had told me I would be really obnoxious because I'm a nitpicky person anyways. I'm a details person anyways, which probably would make me a really good lawyer. But she said a more obnoxious person. So I don't know. Not criminal law, but other kinds of law

NM: What was the most rewarding? You said helping people get their GEDs?

BM: Yes, Yes. Working with adults. Because they all said, "Oh I should have stayed in school. Oh, I should have stayed in school." That was their biggest regret and they were so grateful. It was just amazing.

MC: Because they wanted to be there.

BM: Exactly, they chose to be there. They would come and in fact they would announce, "No school, all schools in Worcester but Central Administration and the Adult Learning Center will be open." So we would go in all kinds of weather and those students would come! And it was, it was just very rewarding. And the other part of teaching that was most rewarding was teaching math because that was really the time when you saw the "I got it."

NM: The lightbulb

BM: Yeah! You didn't see that with other subjects as much but with math it was, "Ahhhh!". And I wasn't great at math myself in school either, which I think made me an even better math teacher because I could figure out different ways to arrive at the answer and I really enjoyed working with the kids in math. Although social studies was my personal love, which I did a lot of too.

MC: Do you consider yourself actively political?

BM: Oh, yes!

MC: Yes!

BM: I've been a member of the League of Women Voters for many years, I moderated candidates' debates, school committee and city council in Worcester for many years.

MC: So very active politically

BM: I do follow the news very carefully.

MC: Have you ever been involved in volunteer or community work?

BM: Volunteer or community work, let me think. Well, the League of Women Voters I guess that counts. What other kinds of things—we have a Women’s Club in our development, I don't know if that counts but I was the president for four years.

NM: Nice!

BM: I’ve been the secretary of a lot of organizations. Retired Educators Association of Massachusetts, I was the secretary for many years. I was the secretary for the League of Women Voters for many years. Now I’m with the Worcester Women’s History Project and I’m on the committee for the speakers bureau. I’ve been proofreading, I love editing, that’s another thing I would have been happy doing forever—with my red pen in hand. I’ve been proofreading a publication that the history project has been working on so I guess that counts as all volunteer work. I’m not getting paid for any of those things. I was a library volunteer in my children’s school before I went back to school full time. And PTG, parent teachers group... all those things.

NM: And what would you consider some of the great accomplishments within any of those groups?

BM: Well, the women’s group where I live runs all kinds of social groups for the community so that’s a big job. I don’t know if I would call it a big accomplishment, well I guess it is a big accomplishment, but it’s really just a big job. Being secretary—oh I’m also secretary of the environmental association. We have a summer place up in Maine, so we are on a pond so the Peabody Pond Association, I’m the secretary for that. So I guess most of my accomplishments are taking really good notes and getting them to people very quickly and accurately. So you know it’s not like I built something, but I was an active part to any group I was in.

MC: Well I don’t want to skip around I want to stay on the topic of volunteering. You said you obviously work in the oral history project. Why is being involved in the project important to you?

BM: Well I was really surprised when Maureen asked me to be interviewed. I thought I have led a fairly traditional life and she said we are looking for people from all walks of life. So I said, “Well fine, that’s fine. I just didn’t want you to think I invented something or changed the world all by myself.”

MC: How has the oral history project helped you share your story?

BM: Well this is lovely place to chat, that’s all. I’m glad you're interested or appear to be anyway.

NM: Oh, we are!

MC: Well clearly the project is playing a role on our campus, in our class. Well why do you think it is important students are aware or involved in the project?

BM: Well, I think looking back at the—well I know when you take a class in history you don't often get up into the 1900's very much. I know myself we got up until the Civil War and some history classes got up until World War I—mainly the causes, but never really got beyond the causes. So I guess you're talking to people who have lived in the time you probably haven't had a lot of class work in and maybe you have or haven't heard much from parents or grandparents, things about fairly modern times.

MC: This is more of a women-focused question. So going through your life and that you are in a different generation than I am growing up in and other women what is one piece of advice you would give younger generations of women going thought their career, and motherhood and just life.

BM: Speak up. Speak up. Don't back down, stand up for yourself. And one of the books I really like is *The Four Agreements* have you ever heard of that? It's supposedly—oh I would have brought it along if I had thought of it—it's supposedly something that Tom Brady lives by, okay, and the first thing says, oh i forget the word. It means something like be precise with your words. And it's not just the right vocabulary, but it's the right setting, saying what you mean clearly, using the right words. The other one is don't take everything personally and that's very hard for anyone to do. Anyway, *The Four Agreements* is a very little book and it would be a good thing to look at. And when you hear that Tom Brady lives by those rules along with drinking 64 ounces—no 128 ounces of water a day or something ridiculous like that—it might be something worth paying attention to.

NM: Right

MC: Okay, so how has the project helped influence the choices you make now?

BM: Well I've read the books *In Her Shoes* and there was another one [*Voices of Worcester Women*], there were two and I've heard some of the people speak and I think that it really opens your eyes to the different roads that some have taken and when you read some of the things, some of the really difficult beginnings that some people have had yet they make wonderful careers and lives for themselves it's very inspiring. I feel like I had a traditional family—mother, father, four kids, grandparents and now we didn't have a lot but we had enough and of course back then we didn't have the understanding of how much some people had. We were satisfied and that kind of thing is important to remember. Nowadays things are a whole lot different because everybody knows what everybody has and wants it.

MC: I agree with that!

NM: What role has religion played in your life?

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BM: An important role. Structure.

NM: Being very disciplined

BM: Exactly! It's structure. I go to church every Sunday. My children do not, although two of my grandchildren are in parochial school right now. So they know all their prayers, no thanks to their parents. But it's very important. I did everything I was supposed to do. First Communion, and Catechism, Confirmation... all of that. I've always gone. I haven't been involved in church organizations particularly except for helping the choir director have the children sing Christmas carols at Christmas time.

NM: Oh.

BM: I love music so I helped him with that. But, it is an important role. It's kind of a touchstone. You know people have said—for I have an interesting—my sister's family is interesting as far as she has one gay daughter and one transgender daughter.

NM: Oh, wow.

BM: And the Church of course is not really warm about that. And people say, "Well how can you be a Catholic if they don't except that?", and I just say, "Well I'm a Democrat and I don't believe everything they say either." And I did come to a talk at Assumption [College] years ago about politics and they were saying mainly about the abortion issue I think, if you believe in everything else that this candidate is for and he happens to be pro choice it's not a sin to vote for him because the other one, even though he is pro life is a nightmare in every other way. So I thought you don't have to put everything in a neat little box, I would never be a one-issue candidate chooser.

MC: Did you go to Catholic school growing up?

BM: I did not, there was not a Catholic school where I lived and then we came to Worcester I just went to public school. Public school was always fine as long as you were in the honors group.

MC: Yeah, I agree with that.

BM: Always fine, always fine it's just you know the kids that middle level that get lost. My husband went to Catholic school, he went to Assumption Prep and Assumption College, and my mother and my father went to Catholic school. In the old days my mother switched to public school in high school because she wanted to be a teacher and if you went right through high school and parochial school back then you were not prepared for college, you were not up to snuff, you knew how to sew a sampler and do somethings like that. She was born in 1914 or

actually 1917 I think but parochial school didn't used to have—I mean you were very well behaved and very nice, but academically you weren't very strong and she went to college and became a teacher so.

MC: Do you think the fact the Assumption is a Catholic school will benefit it's students in the long run.

BM: Yes, I do. I think there is an umbrella of morality or ethics. Not that anyone is forced into attending anything or believing specifically anything, but just the idea of ethics and honor and those basic kind of Christian values not just Catholic, actually Judeo Christian values not just Catholic values. So I think that that is a good thing to have a moral compass.

MC: I agree.

BM: And you're here!

NM: You haven't mentioned any health issues growing up. How has health issue impacted you...

BM: Never has.

NM: Or your children?

BM: I broke a leg when I was 12 but other than that no.

NM: How'd you do that?

BM: Roller skating, going for my Girl Scout badge in roller skating. But the worst thing was they didn't give me the badge.

NM: Even after?

BM: Oh, I know! Even after injury, no I've never had any significant health issues and I'm very active. I walk ordinarily four to six miles a day, I take yoga, I take Tai Chi. I've always done all of that and I try to eat right.

MC: Don't we all!

NM: What are your experiences in having access to affordable healthcare?

BM: We've been very lucky. My husband was a federal employee. When I started teaching, when I went back full time which was 1980 something, in Worcester health insurance was free for teachers. We didn't have to pay anything so we were in mine for a while and then we

switched to my husband's and maintained that so we are very fortunate we don't have any problems with that. We have the Medicare just for the hospitalization not for the others things, because we have a very good Blue Cross Blue Shield, I guess they call it a Cadillac like program so we are very fortunate. And that's a huge issue with a lot of seniors... huge!

MC: Just some other additional questions that are going to have us kind of jumping around again. What major historical events in Worcester do you remember happening during your time?

BM: Not so much in Worcester, but the Kennedy assassination of course was huge. Martin Luther King, JFK, RFK... all when I was in college, well high school was JFK... and the Vietnam War... HUGE! I haven't watched the Ken Burns things but I plan to slowly. Those things were huge. Worcester... I don't remember anything major happening in Worcester. Oh! Proposition 2 1/2 override, many years ago on which I worked very hard making calls and holding signs and all that stuff. That's a little thing and the other things were huge, but all those good people getting killed in formative years it's kind of –now my husband remembers the Worcester tornado, he was in Worcester during the tornado which was 1950 something. [June 9, 1953]

NM: 1957 I want to say.

BM: He was under the dining room table in his house as the tornado passed over so he remembers. I was alive during that I just was not in Worcester so it really was not a memory for me. But when we moved to Worcester and my mother started teaching, she did some substituting and then some regular teaching. She was amazed by everyone in Worcester saying, "Oh that was before the tornado," or "That happened just after the tornado." It was like a defining moment in Worcester people's lives that wasn't part of our experience. But the unrest of the '60s was HUGE but I was pretty isolated from that. At Worcester State we were still pretty much, even though it was no longer called Worcester State Teachers College, we were mostly a teachers college, mostly. Everybody went into teaching. We had to wear skirts, we could not wear pants. This was up until 1968, even in a snow storm. As far as free expression, not a lot of it was encouraged.

NM: Not as much as today anyway, right?

BM: No. If the student newspaper came out with anything controversial it would disappear. Administration would whisk it away. So even though Kent State and all these places were starting, at Worcester State we were separated from that.

MC: Some of these questions are more about your childhood and when you were younger. Would you consider yourself a "fashionable young women" when you were younger?

BM: I sure tried! I spent a lot of time on hair. When I was in junior high in Billerica all the girls would go to school with their hair in pin curls all over their heads with a scarf. Then they would

get to school and the bobby pins would be flying and they'd be combing out their hair and they'd have these beautiful waves. Then I tried pin curls and nothing. So yes I always tried to be fashionable. But a huge thing was when we moved from Billerica to Worcester, I was in the 8th grade in Billerica, finished junior high, came to Worcester, was back Worcester middle school was 7, 8 and 9. I was dressed all wrong! Moved 40 something miles and it was completely different. We in Billerica were dressed like the movie Grease. You know, full skirts, pony tails and bobby socks. We came to Worcester and that's not the way they dressed. Ninth grade it was a very hard grade for me. I walk in being the new kid in ninth grade when everybody else has already been with each other 7th and 8th, I'm dressed wrong, I hadn't had a language in Billerica. All the honors kids in Worcester had a language seventh and eighth grade and so I spent half the day with one group and half the day with the other group. I was the only one that didn't spend the whole day with one group. Ninth grade is a year I wish I could erase from my mind but by tenth grade I had it figured out.

NM: There you go.

MC: Where you involved, you said you liked music, where you involved in any musical groups, dance club?

BM: Always Glee club and Chorus, always.

NM: You ever get to do any solos?

BM: Yeah, at church.

NM: Oh nice!

BM: I could tell you what, Panis Angelicus and Oh Holy Night, those were my two. I still love to sing!

MC: How were you treated in school?

BM: I was a good girl, I was treated well. The classes were large. I always loved all the teachers and I hoped they liked me too. I was never any trouble. As far as other kids I was never part of the popular group but I always had friends.

MC: And you said you moved from Billerica to Worcester was that a difficult transition for you?

BM: [nodding head]

MC: It was?

BM: Oh, yeah especially at that age. My sister was going into seventh grade so she was starting with a group, but I was in ninth grade so it was really hard.

NM: Right, because everybody already had their cliques and all that.

BM: Exactly. Then high school was fine I went to North High and everything was fine there because I figured out what to wear. Knee socks, Bonni Doon they had to be because if you got cheaper ones they felt down and that was not an attractive look.

MC: What did your parents' education consist of?

BM: My mother graduated, well she didn't graduate she went to Salem State Teachers College and back then you didn't have to have four years of college to be a teacher, you only had to have three. I guess they gave you a certificate or something not a degree. She taught in Boylston for a long long time. She always says that she thinks that they were glad when she left so that they could say that all their teachers are college graduates and beyond. But you know she was an excellent teacher. In fact, I got a letter I had in her treasures, a letter from one of her former students who is now a teacher saying that from my mother she learned to treat everyone like ladies and gentlemen and she learned to speak more softly instead of loudly when she wanted their attention. It was one of my mother's treasures. My father apparently, I didn't know until recently only graduated from the 10th grade. He had a very hard life. His parents were separated and divorce wasn't an option. He didn't meet his father until he was 19. So he grew up with his mother working and he went to an orphanage during the school day, "The Working Boys Home" which I don't know if it's still there, but it use to be down around Boston and he was always very proud of his penmanship because the brothers would whack you if you didn't do it right I guess. But he was a very smart man. He read a lot, he read the paper from front to back all the time. He did well in his career. He started off as a bus driver and ended up as a ticket agent for Trailways Bus, and ended up as the terminal manager in Worcester. That wouldn't happen today with a tenth grade education. You just wouldn't get in the door so he did very well.

MC: Do you think that your parents' educational upbringing influenced how they raised you?

BM: Oh, yes! The expectations were high as far as of course you do your homework, of course you go to school every day. You know it was no discussion about those things. Of course that didn't work too well for my two brothers. They were children of the '60s they were you know with the hair and the beards. It was a difficult time and being boys...

MC: *Boys in general!*

MC: What are some particular areas in the city that you spend a lot of time now?

BM: Well I go to the Hanover [Theatre], lots of plays. But other than that I go more to West Boylston, the library and the senior center in West Boylston. It's a crumby looking place but it's

in walking distance so I add that to my four mile walk when I go. It's West Boylston that I'm more connected with now.

MC: And you said you have grandchildren?

BM: Yes! Two in Worcester and three in Pennsylvania.

MC: Do you think that's hard, having them apart?

BM: Well we know people who have grandchildren in Hong Kong so we say you know we can get there in a day if they need us. So it's six hours away.

MC: It's doable.

BM: Yeah. It's not impossible. The ones in Worcester we see a lot of!

NM: That's where you spend most of your leisure time, spending time with them?

BM: Not most. Right now it seems to be just Wednesdays and either sporting events because the four year old plays soccer and the nine year old plays flag football and fall baseball.

MC: Oh so they're little, younger?

BM: Yup!

MC: Oh, well that's fun!

MC: Okay is there anything else that you would like us to know and to share within your story that we haven't asked you about?

BM: Just—and this was something I was thinking about—I was invited last year to a tea at Dr. Cesareo's wife's, well at their home [the wife of the president of Assumption College] to meet with some juniors and seniors and kind of talk about life and the differences and things and one thing I wanted to say but never got around to saying was how different it is for you people getting out of school now. I don't know anyone who left school with a loan. I don't know anyone. I was a commuter and so was my husband when he went here and there were no dorms at Worcester State back then. So, I mean our families and our summer jobs covered our tuition and so many of us got married within a year or two of graduating because we didn't have this hanging over our heads because we all had jobs, we had no student loans. People got married and had babies within a couple years, you know, really began lives. I can't imagine how people with a \$100,000 loan hanging over their heads, and don't get the big job they wished they would get, how they do that. That's why kids are still are home until they're 35 now and that's not a good

thing! It's prolonging adolescence because it's impossible to start. I mean we all bought houses you know?

MC: It's a lot harder to find jobs nowadays.

BM: It is!

MC: The qualifications are crazy now.

BM: I know. When I got out of Worcester State the top 25% could get a job in Worcester but everybody else got a job! Everybody got a job, no problem. My husband got a job right away. He started teaching, he got an internship I think. He was teaching but he wasn't officially an education person, but he was teaching at the Detention Center in Worcester. *Bad kids*, bad kids from 6 to 16. So he did that and then he became a probation officer then a federal probation officer so you know he never had any problem finding a job and luckily benefits. Benefits are so important with jobs. I have a sister who's worked with her husband for many years and they're looking at having nothing except for Social Security and I just don't know how they're going to make it. The decisions you make now are so important. Start saving for that IRA or something as soon as you can! It's all so important. That's why we all got married in our early 20s it would be foolish to get married that young now when they both have debts.

NM: I definitely agree.

BM: Yeah.

MC: School is a lot longer now too.

BM: Right, a lot of people just keep going. They say, "Well I don't see a job so I might as well get my master's, I might as well get my Ph.D. and that still may not land you the job."

MC: Yeah some people go to a four-year university and then have three or four years left afterward and still have trouble finding a job so that's definitely a big change.

BM: Yeah, it's tough. Tough, tough situations.

NM: Even when you get a degree the job you land isn't always going to be what you went to school for, you know what I mean?

BM: And part-time jobs are kind of killers too because they make you feel busy and they occupy your time.

NM: They still schedule you for 40 hours a year.

BM: Yeah and then you don't have time to search for the great thing out there, if it even is out there.

MC: Or go back to school and work, that's hard.

BM: Yeah, I got my master's at night and master's plus 30 all at night. I didn't go straight for it right away. In fact I was excited about going for it because I had just worked very hard in school and I felt like I needed a little break.

NM: So how do you get through tough times? What keeps you going because you seem like a very optimistic person?

BM: Well if someone is late, you know I'm not really good with people being late, but I look for some possible reason and so I am an optimistic person. I think you decide to be happy, I decide to not let certain things bother me. I say there's nothing I can do about that, it's not my problem or I'm just going to let that one go. So, I feel like I am very fortunate and we've have been very lucky health wise, housing wise, every wise. We've been married for 47 years now.

NM: Wow, congrats!

BM: Yeah, we have a good life.

NM: How do you define being happy and being successful and has that definition of being successful changed over time for you?

BM: Well success never meant for me a lot of money, just enough money. So success was never measured by money. Luckily I've always had enough. I haven't had to deprive myself of anything, but I feel like I have reasonable expectations too. So that helps, reasonable expectations coming from a family that didn't have a lot and just the expectations of being satisfied, of "Okay, this is enough, this is okay."

NM: Being a woman and growing up through that time I know you were fortunate to go to college, how do you think other women who didn't have the opportunity to go to college handle the challenges and difficulties of being able to get a job that a man had? You know what I mean?

BM: I know. It's a whole lot harder and I read interviews sometimes of women who have babies in their teens and they're talking about going back to school and some of them want to be doctors and lawyers and I'm thinking you know that might be a little too far of reach. Maybe you should look at being a dental hygienist or something that's workable. They seem to have unrealistic expectations. I mean maybe realistic, shoot for the moon but you've got to think about the time and the money and all that too. It's interesting because my grandmother she was one of five children and she was born in 1885 and all five went to college. Now that is extraordinary. The three girls went too. My grandmother went to the Conservatory of Music and taught piano. One

of her sisters went to Framingham State College and the other went to Boston State College. Her two brothers went to Lowell Tech and her father died when he was in his 30s. Now how they did this is a mystery to me and what was also a mystery to me was how the next generation didn't rule the world. But they didn't, my mother's brother had five children none of whom went to college. Now how did that happened you know? That just seems like it shouldn't have happened that way. They should have all been college graduates and they should have all been in some professional line of work but it didn't happen that way.

NM: So do you think women are able, like the rights of women over time, do you think that over time they have more of a voice, less of a voice?

BM: I think we have more of a voice but you still see it. You see it in class, you see it in groups where it's mostly women and a couple of men and the man raises his hand and he gets called on. He gets called on. Every time I have been in groups of mostly women, mainly or possibly just because he stands out because he is different but also occupies a lot of the energy and time of the teacher or the moderator or whoever is in charge that it is still hard and all this Weinstein business is really pointing out what a lot of women have had to go through. Things that you don't know if you are interpreting right... "Is that right?" or "Did I feel that or hear that or see that or am I just imagining things?" There's a lot strange stuff going on.

MC: Do you think that your success and the opportunities you were given would have been different if you were brought up different culturally?

BM: Oh sure, but I have no idea what that would have been like.

MC: But you recognize the difference of it?

BM: Oh absolutely. I know I have read articles by Hispanic authors that say that the mind set of Hispanic culture is that the child is born with a certain intelligence and that there is not much you do to it as far as helping with their school work. That's just not part of that culture because they believe that it's kind of set and so the schools are trying to work through that mindset because they need and they want parent involvement now for kids to be successful in school.

NM: I know I'm backtracking a little bit but for you the work and the career versus the home life balance were you able to manage that pretty well?

BM: It wasn't easy, but you know I didn't keep an immaculate house but I kept the house in order. I love laundry and I actually enjoy housework it's just having the time to do it.

MC: It's relaxing.

BM: I don't dislike any of the jobs. If you feel a sense of accomplishments from doing something then that's good for me.

NM: Do you think that the dynamic of the household has to change a little bit? Where men always choose their careers and the women have to wait and put a pause on it and be home?

BM: Yeah, it is a choice. I don't know how two people, working parents, manage two children in preschool and even then when they get into school with sports and everything.

NM: Yeah, you have got to make the games.

BM: I don't know how my daughter's works. She's got the 13 year old and the 10 year old twins. She's got a part-time job that she can work mostly at home and her husband has flexible hours so they are so lucky they can do all that. But I don't know how anyone who's working a 9:00 to 5:00 or 8:00 to 6:00 handles all that bringing them here and bringing them there. It's a hard balance but I think there needs to be, somebody has to give up something. And it shouldn't always have to be the women, somebody has to give up something.

MC: Earlier you had said you had children young and you were married young, do you think it would still be doable for our generation if that was a case?

BM: No.

MC: Why do you think it's so much different?

BM: The loans, the money, the additional schooling, the lack of a job that can support a family. We were married when I was 22 and my daughter was born when I was 25. We were unusual that we waited that long. Almost everyone we knew had a baby within a year and well I just wasn't quite ready. But, nowadays I can't imagine. You know when I hear now of somebody in their twenties getting married it's unusual now, it's usually much much...

NM: And the divorce rate has sky rocketed since your time and your parents.

BM: And you know it's funny. Of all the people we know very few were divorced and they got married very young. I don't know if it had to do with kind of growing up together. That might have had something to do with it. Nobody was really set in it, we all came from our parents homes to our married home. We didn't have an apartment or live on our own and neither one of us, my husband or I, lived at college. He commuted here so we didn't have that experience. My daughter went away to college. She went to the College of Notre Dame in Baltimore, so she lived away and then she lived down in Baltimore and then she met her husband who was from Pennsylvania and that's where they are at now. My son went to Quinsig [Quinsigamond Community College] and he lived at home; he wasn't the stellar student. Neither was she really but she was a nice girl.

MC: Do you think the reason it's different too has to do with women's—and men too I guess—desire and drive for career first versus settling down and having a family life?

BM: And I think it's probably necessary. You have to get the career established and get some money in the bank to start a life. It's irresponsible to do it otherwise unless you expect grandparents to do all the babysitting.

MC: We already asked about cultural influences. Your parents always lived here correct?

BM: In Massachusetts, yes.

MC: Okay.

NM: So, you personally have been very influential I want to say, right? So, what qualities do you think are important for a woman to have in order to make change or bring about change or even start change?

BM: Well I think knowledge and learning all the time. Paying attention to what's going on in the world and acting appropriately when you can. Voting, speaking out, writing letters. I love to write letters! Just standing up for yourself and being an active part of whatever group you are in, being connected to other people. I don't hang out with a lot of people, but I'm in a lot of groups. Socially for me it's kind of tied up in being in interesting groups that I am involved in. I'm not sure I answered that question fully.

NM: I think you did it justice.

MC: Okay, I think we are pretty good unless there is anything else you would like to tell us.

BM: You know I did interviews—I was a part of interviewing teams for jobs for school positions and I learned a lot from watching. Most times at an interview, you already did this, at the end the person in charge always says, "Is there anything else you want to tell me?" and the person most the time says, "Oh no, that's about it." And if you're interviewing for a job or something that's when you put in all the stuff you wanted to say that they didn't ask you. It's like the essay question you studied for that wasn't on the test. "Please let me tell you blah blah blah." I always thought that's a big opportunity missed if at the end they say, "What else would you like us to know about you" or "What other accomplishments haven't we asked you about?" And you already did that so that was a good question!