

Interviewee: Laurie Tigan
Interviewer: Alexander Papoojian
Date: March 13, 2012
Location: Worcester, MA
Transcribers: Alexander Papoojian, Michael Bakis, Bridget Gagliardo



Overseen by: Prof. Carol Keyes, Assumption College

Abstract: Laurie Tigan (née D'Amico) was born in Barrington, Rhode Island in 1951 and attended Barrington High School. She entered Assumption College in 1970, the first year that women were accepted and graduated in 1973 with a degree in History. After college, Laurie moved to Newport, RI where she worked as a teacher for 32 years, also volunteering in many after-school programs. After marrying her husband, Dr. Mark Tigan, they both moved to Worcester when he accepted a teaching job at Clark University. Laurie then became the director for the Literacy Volunteers of Greater Worcester, an organization that helps adults in the community who cannot speak or read English. Laurie is an avid beachgoer and reader, who considers her years at Assumption as her most memorable. In this interview, Laurie talks about her years in Rhode Island and how they eventually shaped her into the woman she has become. She openly expounds on her religious and political views, while admitting that contentment is the ultimate goal in life. In addition, Laurie speaks of her views on Worcester and what improvements she would like to see in the city.

AP: On to the first question, what is your full maiden name and are you married?

LT: I am married. My married name is Tigan and my maiden name is D'Amico.

AP: When were you born?

LT: 1951

AP: What is the name of your current husband?

LT: Mark Tigan

AP: And any previous...?

LT: Excuse me, Dr. Mark Tigan. He worked very hard for that PhD. [Laughs]

AP: What is his PhD in?

LT: It's in Community Development.

AP: Excellent, and you have only been married once?

LT: Yes

AP: Do you two have any children?

LT: I have two stepchildren.

AP: And any grandchildren?

LT: We have two step-grandchildren.

AP: What is your ethnicity?

LT: I was born in America, but my heritage is Italian. All of my relatives probably go back to Julius Caesar; I was the first person to marry outside (of) the tribe.

AP: Really? And your parents what were they like?

LT: What were they like?

AP: Yes.

LT: They were for the most part very strict, very pro-education, and wanted the best for their children.

AP: So you had a good relationship with them?

LT: I did.

AP: Where have you lived during your life?

LT: I lived in Barrington, Rhode Island. That's where I grew up. I moved after I graduated from Assumption College. I moved to Newport, Rhode Island and I was a teacher there for 32 years. Then I moved to Worcester. My husband, I should say, at age 50, had an epiphany that he wanted to become a professor and the deal was, if he was able to get the PhD, we'd move wherever he got a teaching job, and he got a teaching job at Clark University; so I was able to come back to Worcester.

AP: Do you like living in Worcester? This is a nice neighborhood that you live in...

LT: I love living in Worcester. I love the diversity, I love the fact that you can go to any corner of the city and meet someone from a different background.

AP: And that's different from your experience in Rhode Island?

LT: Yes. In Rhode Island I grew up in sort of a white, middle-class enclave and [I] didn't see many people who were not from that [environment].

AP: Do you have any family members, besides obviously your husband, in this area?

LT: No I don't.

AP: Now you say that you like the city, and that you went to Assumption College. Do you see any challenges that the city faces or any improvements that you would like to have made, if you had the option of deciding?

LT: One of the things that I think is really lacking is a strong mayor. I come from a state where the Providence [Rhode Island] mayor was Buddy Cianci (Vincent A. Cianci), I don't know if you're familiar with him...but he was like the greatest cheerleader for the city and I don't see that people in Worcester have a positive image of their own home-base, and there isn't leadership at the top that's really able to stir-up enthusiasm for the city. If you meet people on the street they will tell you, or they will ask me, if I say that I've come from Newport, Rhode Island, "Well why did you ever leave?" "Why would you come to Worcester? And the thing is, Worcester has a lot to offer.

AP: You graduated from Assumption in what year?

LT: 1973

AP: Compared to the time you spent in Worcester when you were at Assumption, how much has the city changed?

LT: Well, downtown has changed tremendously. I think it's become less [pauses] successful. So many of the stores that I visited when I was at Assumption have closed. It's a ghost town downtown at night, and the area where city hall is has become even dangerous.

AP: What do you think women experience in Worcester generally?

LT: I think it depends who you speak with. I think there are opportunities here for women for employment, but I'm not so sure that they are higher level. I think that there are a lot of entry-level positions here, but I think if a woman wants to be really successful, this is not the place to try and, you know, stretch yourself.

AP: There is a glass-ceiling factor involved?

LT: I think so, definitely.

AP: Now is that particular to Worcester, or in other places you've lived you've seen the same?

LT: Well I think the fact that Worcester's biggest employer is UMass Medical School and UMass in general. The opportunities there are pretty limited for women.

AP: Did you start your schooling in Rhode Island?

LT: I did.

AP: And were they public schools?

LT: Definitely, yes.

AP: Do you think we could get a name, not all if there are a lot, but could you name some of the schools that you went to?

LT: Sure I went to Nayatt Elementary School, Peck Middle School, they didn't call it middle school then, they called it junior high, and Barrington High School.

AP: Right when you got out of high school, did you go right to college?

LT: I did.

AP: So you never worked in any vocational jobs where you were from?

LT: I worked in the factory for several summers, putting earrings on cards, which was probably the most repetitive and boring job you could ever have.

AP: Putting earrings on cards? Oh, when you buy earrings...

LT: When you buy a set of earrings they are usually on a plastic or a paper card. And that was my job for eight hours a day, and at the time I really wasn't allowed to speak to anyone. They [company employers] wanted piecework and total production, so you really couldn't have the opportunity to even socialize on the job.

AP: Were there a lot of other people your age then?

LT: There were a lot of people of varying ages and just to give you a little background of the people that I was working with, [begins to laugh] the woman next to me at one point, when we could have a conversation, I said: "What do you think of this job?" and she said: "It's really pretty great," and I'm thinking, "Why are you thinking this?" and she said:

[begins laughing again] “My last job I sewed stars on flags”. I said: “Well that doesn’t sound (bad)...what about that?” And she said: “Well, it was in the penitentiary.”
[All persons present begin to laugh] But there were definitely many different classes of people in the factory.

AP: Upon graduation from college, you said that you were a history major.

LT: I was.

AP: What other extra-curricular (activities) did you engage in?

LT: I was the statistician for the hockey team. I was a DJ for the radio station, [pauses] I think that’s pretty much it.

AP: Did you go right to work after you graduated?

LT: I did. I worked at K-Mart for a little while, thinking I would become involved in their management program, but I also decided that maybe I’d put my name out to become a teacher, and I ended up teaching in a middle school for, as I said, 32 years.

AP: And you taught there until you moved there with your husband.

LT: Correct.

AP: Just going back to your husband, you said that he had a mid-life career change.

LT: Yes he did.

AP: So he obviously didn’t have a PhD at first, and he decided to go through the program later on.

LT: [Yes]

AP: Was it difficult doing that?

LT: It was extraordinarily difficult. To become, to think like a student again at age 50 is really pretty difficult. He went to UMass Amherst and the majority of people in his class were 30 years younger, or more. But it wasn’t just that, it was the idea that he was also working at the same time that he was going to school, so he had, you know, two very important projects going at the same time.

AP: What did you say he received his PhD in again?

LT: Well, Economic Development, but Community Development.

AP: What support networks and mentoring have been important to you, if you have been involved in any?

LT: I would say my support group is really family and friends. I haven't joined anything here that would necessarily be a support group.

AP: Currently, do you work outside the home?

LT: I do, I'm a director of Literacy Volunteers of Greater Worcester.

AP: And where is that located in Worcester?

LT: In the public library.

AP: Could you tell us a little bit about your job, what you do every day, the goals?

LT: Sure, Literacy Volunteers trains adults in the community to work with other adults who don't speak English or cannot read. And the partnership usually takes place over the course of a year or two years. We found that we couldn't meet nearly the number of people who wanted tutors. When I first came on the job, there were maybe 50 people on the waiting list. Today we have over 300 people waiting for tutors, so we've offered classes to, sort of, "keep people in the loop" while they're waiting for a tutor.

AP: Now there is obviously a large diversity of people in Worcester. If you go down the street to Assumption you see Armenian churches, Greek Orthodox churches, there are a lot of different languages, is there a nationality that stands out as being more prominent in the area?

LT: Well I think we're finding that the Albanian population and the...[pauses] We're seeing a lot of Somalis and folks from Nepal and Ghana and Liberia, so there's, I would say Africa is an area that many people come from.

AP: Do most of these people have absolutely no English literacy?

LT: The majority of them have some, but not enough really to survive in the community. So therefore they stay in their own little group so that they can support each other and not have to speak outside their group.

AP: Do you observe a high level of success with the program?

LT: For the tutor pairs that really work at it, yes. There are some students that, because of their background, are not very responsible. And if they don't come to their sessions, the partnership breaks up. So it really takes both people to be responsible.

AP: Before moving to Worcester you stated that you were teaching for 32 years. How did you begin to work in this environment?

LT: [laughs] That's a good question! When my husband got the teaching job at Clark, I spent a lot of time pouring through the Worcester Telegram (Telegram & Gazette) Want Ads and the Boston Globe and I applied for many different positions. But Literacy Volunteers was the one job that I really wanted because I felt it was a good fit and thankfully, I was hired.

AP: Has your teaching experience prepared you well for this?

LT: I think so, but the majority, [pauses] you asked a little while ago about what you spend your time doing, and I would say the majority of my time is spent on fundraising. I didn't realize that being a director, the responsibility of the fiscal health of the organization is on your shoulders and it's the most important aspect.

AP: It is all volunteer, right?

LT: It is all volunteer.

AP: So this work means a lot to you, obviously?

LT: It does.

AP: You enjoy it a lot?

LT: I do.

AP: At home, do you live just with your husband now?

LT: I do, just with my husband.

AP: Well, it does ask about housework here [referring to the interview question sheet].
[Everyone present laughs]

LT: I'm not very good at it, but I do it. [Still laughing] Actually, we share the responsibilities.

AP: How have you learned to balance the different priorities, interests, and responsibilities in your life? Do you find it difficult?

LT: At this age, no. I think I have worked out a way of having all of the parts of my life that I want to be—oh successful isn't the right word—I am able to prioritize better.

AP: So when you were at Assumption College you found it a bit more difficult?

LT: Well, yeah. I think as a student when you're not as disciplined and there are many opportunities—when I was at Assumption, it was an all-male school and being in the first female class, there were many opportunities [laughs while speaking] that probably students don't necessarily have today. And balancing the social life with schoolwork was difficult.

AP: How was it, entering that male-dominated environment of Assumption?

LT: [It was a] tremendous opportunity, to do anything and everything because the men on campus were really happy to have the women there. They wanted us to feel that we were part of the campus and like I said, I was statistician for the hockey team and (I was) on the radio station, and those were opportunities that came about because we were a select group on campus.

AP: Approximately how many were in that first class?

LT: We had a hundred.

AP: A hundred?

LT: A hundred.

AP: Fifteen hundred men and a hundred women.

LT: [Nods her head yes]

AP: How would you characterize the personal/professional costs of your chosen path?

LT: [Come again?]

AP: Do your professional benefits outweigh the benefits you experience at home as a wife, or does one take priority over the other because of time?

LT: I'd say that I value my work time as much as I value my free time. I get a tremendous sense of accomplishment at work and it's a really vital part of my life.

AP: You had mentioned how you wish the mayor would seem a bit more...

LT: Enthusiastic.

AP: Enthusiastic, yes. I have lived in Worcester my whole life, and the people do not see a lot of campaigning. That's something you witnessed in Rhode Island?

LT: Yes and I think that for a city this size, there has to be some, as you pointed out, visible leadership. And I think because that's missing, people in Worcester don't have the opportunity to really join together in promoting the city. I mean, there's a lot here to promote and to feel good about. And the majority of people that I meet do not feel good about living in Worcester, or at least don't express that.

AP: Do you think it's relative to their occupation?

LT: I think it just has a bad image and I think they've bought into this image and don't see it for the beauty that it is.

AP: Do you think you'd feel the same way if you grew up here?

LT: Oh that's a good question, I'm not quite sure.

AP: It's all relative, of course.

LT: It is, yeah. I don't know. I don't think I could really answer that.

AP: O.K., can I ask you, if you were still living in Barrington, what is that community like? Is it small?

LT: It's small.

AP: How far away from Providence?

LT: About 25 minutes from Providence. And it was a suburb where people who really wanted to educate their kids would move to, the taxes were very high, and the school system was very exceptional for public school. It repeatedly is in the top 10 of the systems in the state.

AP: So even the more wealthy families wouldn't feel the need to send their children to private schools because it was that good?

LT: Absolutely.

AP: Do you consider yourself politically active, or politically savvy?

LT: I am very interested in national politics. I haven't participated in local politics, mainly because I haven't been here that long. Seven years may seem like a long time, but

I don't feel that I'm as committed to the community as I would have been if I moved here at a younger age.

AP: What about nationally? Are you interested in the Republican debates currently taking place?

LT: I am very interested in what's happening with this country and I'm very scared of the directions that we're going in.

AP: That's understandable. If you don't mind, could you specify some of your political views or who you're supporting right now?

LT: Sure, well, I don't think I want to say—well, I will say. I am very much in favor of President Obama and I think that the four years that he's had, he's really had tremendous burdens and I think he's done some very significant things. One of them is, at least temporarily, stopping the Keystone Pipeline, which is running from Canada to Texas, which has the potential to do incredible environmental damage. And the Republican Party is gung-ho to have energy at any cost and I find that very frightening and I also find the idea that we could possibly be going to bomb a nuclear site in Iran and back Israel (frightening as well). I think Obama has taken the right attitude in let's wait and see if the sanctions can do some, [pause] do some good before we involve ourselves in another world crisis.

AP: Do you think it could just be the Congressmen who are doing the damage?

LT: I think so, I do.

AP: Your work is obviously a volunteer organization. Have you done any other volunteer/community work around here?

LT: I haven't in Worcester, no.

AP: How about back in Barrington?

LT: Well, when I taught in Newport I was very involved with in school. I did many activities after school, and they were volunteer activities.

AP: Now again, you don't have to answer if you do not want to, but regarding religion, will you tell us your views? Are you religious?

LT: Well, going to Assumption, it was an extremely religious campus when I was there and I think it's trying to get back to those roots. I'm a lapsed Catholic. I still consider myself a Catholic, but I am not necessarily a church-going Catholic.

AP: At Assumption you felt the Christian environment was very strong.

LT: I did, and I think it was positive, I do. Having clergy on campus I think added another dimension.

AP: And you came from strictly public schools before that right?

LT: I did, yes.

AP: How about health? Have you seen a lot of health issues impact your family in your life?

LT: Knock on wood, my father's 90, my mother's 87. They're still living at home. They're doing fine. My father says he doesn't have an ache or pain, I don't know whether to believe him. [Laughs] So I think I come from stock that's, knock on wood, hopefully hardy.

AP: Do you think that stems from healthy lifestyles?

LT: Yes I think my parents have always eaten very well, they don't drink, they don't smoke. They could probably exercise a little bit more, but I think that they've maintained a very healthy lifestyle.

AP: What are your views on healthcare?

LT: Well that's tough. As I'm approaching Medicare, I feel that there is a need in this country for having universal or national healthcare. It's completely unfair that there are people who, because of their economic situation, are not going to be treated for serious illnesses.

AP: How do you think the Obama administration is addressing... (the current healthcare situation)

LT: Well they tried very hard with Obamacare and I couldn't really tell you too much about the program, but just the notion that it is trying to cover everyone I think is a very important aspect of being an American.

AP: What are some of the best experiences you've had in your life?

LT: My years at Assumption I really value. I don't think you realize when you are going to school where the experiences of college will play out, but they do. They play out in everyday life.

AP: Do you visit Assumption?

LT: I have a couple of times, but I don't, I haven't participated. I know they have an awful lot of lectures and movies and all kinds of activities, but time is—when I do have free time I'm not necessarily going in that direction, I go to Clark because that's where my husband is.

AP: Does the campus look a lot different?

LT: It does, it looks huge to me. When I was there, there were five buildings. Now there are so many more.

AP: And you lived on campus?

LT: I did.

AP: Is there anything else that you would like to add to the interview? I have a few other questions, but if you...

LT: [pauses] I think you've been very thorough. You know everything but my shoe size!
[Everyone present laughs]

AP: Well, a couple of extra questions... What are the major historical events that you can recall, right off the top of your head?

LT: The assassination of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King. Those were the two [most] important, and of course, 9/11.

AP: Growing up, you stated that your parents were strict.

LT: Very much so. I couldn't drive until I was 18, I couldn't go on a date until I was 17, not that there was anywhere to go in the town I grew up in. But they definitely, [pauses] and I was the oldest, so I was kind of there test case. My sister and brother had it a lot easier than I did.

AP: You have a younger sister and brother.

LT: I do.

AP: I see. Now if were to have a daughter, or ever had a daughter, would you bring them up the same way, or at least the first one?

LT: Ooh, [pauses and speculates] I think there's something to be said in having strong boundaries. I don't know that I'd be as strict as my parents, but I know that I would have some, [pauses] rules, that's not the word I'm looking for, boundaries I guess.

AP: So you feel like it helped you?

LT: I do, yup.

AP: Were you interested in fashion growing up?

LT: Always. My mother was a fashionista, she instilled in my sister and I the sense that color is important, her rule was never go into a store and just buy one piece of clothing. Buy something to go with it or it will sit in your closet.

AP: Wow.

LT: [Laughs]

AP: What was your favorite musical group or singer growing up?

LT: Oh I used to love The Jefferson Airplane. And they did come to Assumption and that was one of the highlights of my years there.

AP: You mentioned that girls were treated very well at Assumption, probably stemming from the Catholic environment and the happiness that girls were finally there.

LT: Exactly, yeah.

AP: So you were appreciated.

LT: We were appreciated. We kind of broke the atmosphere of, you know, guys in the cafeteria, guys in the gym. It was fun for them to have women on campus. It was a very different experience.

AP: How about when you were in high school and middle school. How was the treatment of women?

LT: Well I think [that] when I was growing up, the options that we were given in terms of what our careers could be was nursing, teaching, the traditional women's roles. No one ever suggested that you could become an executive or a trader on Wall Street. I mean those were things that were never even in the realm of possibility.

AP: And most women in your parent's generation were homemakers, weren't they?

LT: Exactly. And I would say my generation wasn't that far removed from that. It was really [pauses] when I said to friends that I was going to Assumption and [spoke of] the

ratio of men to women, the whole thing was “Well, you’ll get a husband out of it”. And that was really a very important feature of going to college for women: to meet a husband.

AP: You did not meet your husband at college though.

LT: I didn’t, no.

AP: I actually didn’t ask you that. When did you meet your husband?

LT: I met him in 19... [pauses] well, I sort of fibbed to you. I had been married once before, but that was a relationship I really didn’t want to talk about. [Laughs] So I did meet my husband, my second husband at age 48.

AP: What would you consider the most difficult transition of moving from adolescence to taking on a more adult role in life? And did that start for you right when you got out of college?

LT: I don’t think you’re ever prepared for adult life, I think it happens to you. And it happens to you in a way that you might least expect it. I know for myself, I had always lived at home other than living on campus. Moving to an apartment was a huge, a big deal for me. It was something that, you know I had to pay my own bills, and I had to have a job that would be sustaining. And I think people grow up at different times.

AP: Did you live alone?

LT: I did.

AP: Now do you prefer living alone or living with other people?

LT: That’s funny that you ask that because my husband and I were just talking about that. Time Magazine had a major article last week, about people, how 52 percent of Americans are living in single family households or living alone. We were saying how really sad it is that people are choosing to live alone. It’s not because of circumstances; they are *choosing* to live alone. And that how, how important it is, I feel, to share your life with someone.

AP: Just to build off of that, how long have you and your husband been married?

LT: We have been married 11 years now.

AP: I believe the current divorce rate in America is somewhere around 50 percent. Half of all marriages fail now. What factors do you think contribute to that statistic?

LT: I think there are so many stresses in life right now. I think life is harder than it's ever been. When I look back, [speculating] I think life without technology, and I'm probably the worst person to talk about this because I don't, I have a cell phone that I only use occasionally. I use e-mail occasionally. I still write letters. I think everything has become so detached with technology.

AP: Do you think that younger generations are always looking for something more? Are they not content with what they have currently?

LT: Yeah, I do. I think there's tremendous pressure to have things that either other people have, or things that they think are going to make their lives better.

AP: Especially with your parents being close to the World War II generation, given their ages, they knew not to take things for granted, correct?

LT: Exactly.

AP: And we don't really have those experiences.

LT: You're right.

AP: When you're not at home, is there any place that you like to spend time or visit.

LT: I love the beach. I absolutely love sitting in the sunshine with sand between my toes and then being able to go underwater. I think there is nothing better than that.

AP: Which beach do you go to?

LT: In Newport I go to three different beaches: Gooseberry Beach, First Beach, and Second Beach.

AP: Do you ever go to Scarborough (Beach)?

LT: I've been to Scarborough, but because I lived in Newport for so long those were my favorite beaches.

AP: Yes, Rhode Island has good beaches. Any other hobbies? Music, reading...

LT: I'm a big reader and most of the things I read are magazines and newspapers. I can't live without the newspaper, and it's usually *The Boston Globe*. I'll pick up the *T&G* [*Worcester Telegram & Gazette*] every once and a while, but I really like *The Globe*.

AP: Throughout your life, how did you get through difficult times, stress-related times? (Is there) anything that you clung to or fell back on?

LT: This may sound corny, but I think having forgiveness is really important. Forgiving yourself for making mistakes and also forgiving other people who have done things you don't approve of, or have hurt you in some way. So I think having forgiveness in your life is crucial.

AP: You don't keep grudges?

LT: I don't. I have none.

AP: Wow. So no regrets either then?

LT: I can't say I have very many regrets. I think probably the only regret I would have had is maybe not teaching as long as I did, and try something else. But then I got to try something else when I came to Worcester.

AP: I feel the idea started to cultivate itself in my generation, in which there is a lot of pressure to go to college, to get degrees. That is, that success is considered by what career you have or how much money you're making. So what now exactly do you consider to be success?

LT: Hmm [thinking]. Contentment.

AP: Contentment?

LT: Yup. Happiness is a ridiculous word to describe anything, I think. But I think in place of using the word happy, I like contentment, or 'at peace.' If you're doing something that is pleasing to you, it may not be the ultimate goal that you have, but to be content I think is a very important way to live your life.

AP: Have you ever had trouble finding things that you're interested in?

LT: As long as I can read, I feel that I can survive and find other things, through reading.

AP: Based on what you have experienced in your life, what advice would you give to a young woman at Assumption, or anywhere for that matter?

LT: Stay true to yourself. I think that's very important. Don't get caught up in extraneous situations, stay true to yourself and things will work out.

AP: Do you feel that you have a legacy?

LT: I hope I do. And I hope that my legacy is that I have given back as much as I've gotten.

AP: Well, that concludes the interview. Thank you.