

Interviewee: Barbara Trayers Athy
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Abstract: Barbara Athy is the Director of Marketing and Communication at Abby's House, a nonprofit organization in Worcester serving homeless and battered women and children. Born in 1953 in Canton, Massachusetts, Barbara studied art history at Boston College and moved to her husband's hometown of Worcester after marrying. In this interview, Barbara discusses the educational, political, and professional experiences that ultimately brought her to Abby's House. She emphasizes the importance of finding meaning through relationships in her work in spite of the low pay and high stress of the nonprofit sector. A mother of three who put her career on hold to raise her children, Barbara also highlights the struggles of balancing a career and family life—particularly in light of her husband's somewhat unconventional job operating a funeral home. Barbara discusses the ways in which gender influenced the opportunities she has had in her own life and compares this with her parents' generation, explaining the discrimination her mother faced as a teacher during World War II and her father's perception of women in the field of law. Barbara also touches upon the fashions and pastimes of her youth and the changes that have taken place in Worcester's downtown over the past 30 years.

JB: Thank you for allowing me to delve into your stories. We are going to begin with a few general questions. What is your full maiden name Barbara?

BA: It's Barbara Trayers. T-R-A-Y-E-R-S.

JB: Ok, and what nationality would that make you and your family?

BA: Irish. I'm an Irish girl.

JB: Everyone says there is something about that Irish blood. Where were you born?

BA: I was born in Canton, just south of Boston.

JB: Canton is a nice area. When were you born?

BA: 1953.

JB: Does that make you a mother?

BA: Yes, I have three children.

JB: Wonderful. Boys...girls?

BA: I have a daughter who's through school and she is living in Chicago now. That's Emily. A son who is in his junior year at BC (Boston College), Adam. And another daughter, Sarah, who is still in high school.

JB: Oh wow. Who was easier, the boy or the girls?

BA: Oh wow. You know that is an impossible question to answer. Fortunately, they seemed to have timed their difficult periods so two at any given time were going through difficult stages so. *[Laughs.]*

JB: Oh well that's nice! You had them spanned out nicely, that works! Great. Have you ever married?

BA: Yes and I'm still married to the same man.

JB: So good to hear about lasting marriages. How long have you been married?

BA: Twenty...eight years. Yes, twenty-eight years.

JB: So you married before you moved to Worcester?

BA: That's right. Well, he was a native of Worcester and we had met in Boston while we were both working out there. His business is in Worcester so I moved out here because I knew I needed to be with this man.

JB: So tell me the story of how you met.

BA: Well we were both working on a political campaign and we just finished school. He was working in a family business but part time as an advance man in this campaign. And I was the assistant director of scheduling in advance for a presidential candidate. I met him that way so...

JB: And the time was right. That's wonderful that you share similar interests. Would you mind telling me a little about your parents? Where were they from?

BA: They both were natives of Canton, Massachusetts. My grandfather immigrated here from Ireland but my other ancestors came longer ago than that, generations prior to that so...

JB: So your parents were born here and lived in Massachusetts for the majority of their lives?

BA: Yeah, with the exception of military service, the two of them lived in Canton all their lives.

JB: Are you close with your mother and father?

BA: Well they passed away. My mother passed about five years ago and my father about seven. But they were quite elderly at the time. My mother was ninety-three. But yes we did have a very good relationship at the time.

JB: So was your mother a working woman?

BA: My mother was a school teacher. Oddly enough, talking about women in work, she was a school teacher in Canton, Massachusetts and when she married during World War II they had a policy that didn't allow married women to be school teachers. She had to give up her job.

JB: Oh, no way. Did she ever go back to her job once the war was over? Do you know if the policy was ever lifted?

BA: I do not believe the policy was lifted until the war was over. When I—I'm the youngest in my family—and when I was about twelve or so she started to do some substitute teaching at that point, but that's really as far into it as she got. In that day and age when my father was off in the navy, she was just sitting at home unemployed because she was married.

JB: That's crazy. We've actually been reading this whole semester about how women will get all these go-aheads to jump into the work force and then something will emerge to hold them back. People are always looking for ways to block the progress of women.

BA: Well that seems really weird to me especially in the WWII era because you hear so much about, you know, women working in factories and taking jobs that men left. It's not as though men were out there looking for teaching jobs but I think it's just a social attitude. Honestly, I think the thinking was, "She may be pregnant and we can't have a pregnant woman in the classroom."

JB: Exactly.

BA: And she was very soon, very soon after that. But you know that just seems crazy.

JB: That is crazy because they needed so many more people in the workforce with the men away. You would think that all that should matter would be keeping the economy stable by filling jobs left behind by men with whoever would be willing. What other people and relationships have made such an impact that you couldn't go without thanking them?

BA: Well you know I would say we had a pretty strong nuclear family in that small town. I was close to my grandmother and an aunt, my mother's sister who hadn't married. She spent a lot of time with our family. Sunday dinners were just sacrosanct. Of course in those days, retail stores weren't open on Sundays so people's lifestyles were just very different.

JB: I do think that our culture has lost sight of the meaning of family Sundays. There is just so much else going on in everyone's lives it is so easy to be absorbed into your own small world.

BA: I absolutely agree and do even think that I've even been guilty of putting family on a back burner at times. Other than my family keeping my life sane, I would also have to thank some teachers.

JB: Teachers have more of an impact than they know. How many siblings do you have?

BA: I have an older brother and an older sister.

JB: Are they much older?

BA: Yes, actually. My sister is about ten years older than I am and my brother about seven years.

JB: Have you lived anywhere besides Worcester and Canton in your life, whether the moves have been on your own or with your family?

BA: Well I went to school just outside of Boston and I lived in Boston for a year before I was married.

JB: Ok, so I'm sensing that you like the feel of the urban environment?

BA: I do. I do. I like the Northeast and I like at least being near or in a city.

JB: What neighborhood of Worcester do you currently live in?

BA: I live on the Westside. I live somewhere between Newton Square and Tatnuck Square, just off of Pleasant St.

JB: Oh ok. You live near Worcester State, actually.

BA: Yes, that's right.

JB: It's a nice area right there. Do you have other family members around Worcester?

BA: Um, no. My brother lives in Wellesley and my sister lives in Canton.

JB: Not right around the corner, but certainly doable. Have you seen any challenges that the city of Worcester faces in terms of political, economic, social dilemmas?

BA: Well, economic challenges certainly. I think the loss of a manufacturing base has really wreaked havoc with the economic situation here. To lose major employers is really devastating on a community. I'm not sure if it's statewide policy that's lacking, probably more so than local policy but together we just don't have the appointment that we should have in this city and that's a real difficult challenge. And I see that in the economics that bring people to Abby's House.

JB: You see improvements in the city being made in terms of how many jobs are being offered. You would clean up a lot of the unemployment.

BA: If there was a way to attract employers who would be looking for a significant-sized work staff because then that spins off on the housing market and you know where and how people are spending money.

JB: What major historical events have you witnessed while being a resident of the city?

BA: I was here for the opening of the Centrum, that was a big deal I guess. I think that was right around the time I was moving to Worcester and I had heard a lot of discussion about it, pros and cons about whether or not that was a good idea. I've seen the changes in the downtown. When I first came to Worcester I worked in the Filene's downtown where the mall is now. It was a mall that had major department stores like Filene's and Jordan Marsh which became Macy's. That was a pretty lively area and to watch that turn over and ultimately decline in subsequent years has been hard to see.

JB: I'm sure. What about national events having an effect in the city? Were you around Worcester during the time of 9/11?

BA: Yes. Well it was personally difficult for me because I lost a cousin who worked in one of the towers. He was a young father.

JB: I am so sorry. *[Pause.]* What do you think women's experiences in Worcester have been generally? Would you say the life of a woman out here is a positive one?

BA: Um, I do. I'd like to see more women taking advantage of being on local government boards and committees. I'm not sure if they're always aware of the openings and are willing to step up and apply for positions that I'd like to see more women represented in.

JB: Ok mind moving on to education now?

BA: Sure.

JB: Where did you attend school?

BA: I went to Newton College of the Sacred Heart, which merged with Boston College so I'm actually a Boston College alum.

JB: Oh I went to Boston College for my freshman year.

BA: Oh, neat.

JB: I loved it. It's a beautiful area. I had to leave mostly for financial reasons, the tuition in the Boston schools gets a little crazy. So you certainly completed all other schooling I'm assuming?

BA: Yes, of course.

JB: What did you major in at the Sacred Heart?

BA: I was an art history major, actually and then I started a graduate program in communications at Boston University. I did not complete it as it was around the time that I got married and moved to Worcester.

JB: Are you or have you used your art history degree on a professional standpoint?

BA: No, I would not say that I've really used it at all on a professional level. The art history has really had much more of a personal effect on me because one of my hobbies is drawing and painting and I love to go into different museums when I'm visiting different cities.

JB: Even if not using the degree professionally at least you haven't lost your love for it. Did you experience any challenges throughout your education with respect to your gender?

BA: Interestingly enough, my father was a lawyer and my parents were in their forties when I was born so you have to understand the span of generations. My father was born in 1911 and he was a lawyer who worked for the federal government and he had a very good job and when I was finishing college I was toying with the idea of law school, well not terribly serious about it. But when I'd bring the subject up to him, he would say "You know that just isn't going to work because you can personally bring a lot of business to one of the large law firms, they are not going to be interested in you. And the only female attorney that I've ever known just researches titles for a bank and that's a very boring, tedious job so there wouldn't be any opportunities for you. You shouldn't really be thinking in that direction."

JB: Now do you think that is sort of a generational thing? Because I've seen in my older relatives even things like hints of racism just because these mentalities are just so much more engrained. It's not like it can be condoned but you almost can't blame them either.

BA: Oh right, absolutely. My father loved me and I think he appreciated all my talents. It wasn't as though he was assuming I wasn't capable because I was a woman. I think what he thought or what he saw was a profession that I wouldn't find easy or worth so much effort or fulfilling even and so oddly enough I appreciate his discouraging me from a field in law. It's not as though I've ever felt 'Oh gee, I missed my chance to be a lawyer.' I don't think that really was necessarily my calling but it was interesting that on one hand he was very supportive of my brother going to law school but said to me "Really, don't bother thinking about that. That is very difficult for women."

JB: Crazy how times change, huh? What subjects did you enjoy studying?

BA: I love writing, and that's a big part of my job now. So writing and English. I actually enjoyed math very much, though I did not pursue it much in college.

JB: That's awesome that your interests were widespread because there are some people who are strictly math/science or strictly English/writing.

BA: No I really was very 50-50, very equal.

JB: What were some particularly memorable books you remember reading throughout your education?

BA: You know, I think, when I was very young I loved reading biographies. But by the time I was in college I loved being introduced to great authors like Jane Austen. Reading more like nineteenth and early twentieth century American and British authors, I just loved diving deeply into books that are wonderfully descriptive. And I find it frustrating for my daughter who is fifteen to be living in a generation where things are just much more visual, kind of thrown at you and your imagination is not developed in the same way.

JB: I know. I love books where you have to read the same paragraph over just to understand all that is in it. I took an AP Major Writers course my senior year and we just read the most beautiful literature. William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* is an all-time favorite of mine. Just how much you have to expand your mind to read such books. Just to read a surface book where you can just flip through and absorb all that there really is to know, it just doesn't do anything for me. What support networks and mentoring have been important to you?

BA: Let me think about this. One group that was actually very important to me as a young mother was the Junior League of Worcester. I found it—not being a native of Worcester—I found it very hard to make connections with people before my children were school age. Once they're school age, you kinda get to interact with other parents and parents of their friends. It's a different ball game. But when they were very little I found it very isolating. And I wasn't working at the time. I found the Junior League, who is a group of women and their purpose is to develop women to be trained volunteers and board members of different agencies. So on one hand I learned a lot more about

Worcester and the different non-profits that are operating here and on the other hand I met a lot of women who were similar age, who had similar interests and that was really helpful for me.

JB: Wonderful. Were boys treated any differently than girls in your school environment?

BA: In grammar school I would say the differences were very much so there. I was taught by the sisters of St. Joseph. They were very—you know, fifty kids in a classroom, and it was very rigid and it seems to me that the sisters had both the highest and the lowest expectations for boys and the girls fell somewhere in the middle. There were a handful of boys, they were the smart boys and they gave them all kinds of perks and credits. And then there were the other boys who were known as the troublemakers who would never amount to anything ‘cause they were disruptive. And somehow the girls fell in the middle and I can remember a particular incident where Luanne McPhee and I were raising our hand in the air in the eighth grade. Sister was asking one of these questions, a grammar question, the usage of pronouns. And Joseph Malone was the smartest boy in the class and he had given the wrong answer. She very routinely said “That’s right” and my friend Luanne and I were out of our seats waving at her to correct her. And I just remember being overwhelmed because it was the first time I remember being really conscious of the fact that oh somehow, Joseph Malone, the smart boy, everything he says is considered to be right and it didn’t really matter that we were right.

JB: She didn’t even think twice about saying ‘That’s right’.

BA: Yes and it was a very minor thing but I think it was the first time in my life that I was very conscious of such different expectations of boys and girls. But I went to a girl’s high school, which actually had a lot more opportunities because everyone who was in student council or who was a class officer was a girl.

JB: So the highest expectations went to the girls. Do you feel that your education has prepared you for the phase of your life that you are in now?

BA: Interestingly, you know I am relatively new to this job and it’s funny for me to see things that I’ve prepared myself for years ago all coming into play in this one particular position. One thing I will say is that I had excellent training in high school and college in writing skills, and of course that is a big part of my job now.

JB: Upon finishing college with your degree in hand, what did you see as your options?

BA: I was interested in museum administration, having been an art history major and I did an internship with a small museum in the Boston area. I sent résumés everywhere, and wasn’t really having any luck. And so in the interim, was working on a political campaign. I worked on another political campaign and things began to progress without much of a plan. Ultimately, I wound in Worcester because it was where my husband is from.

JB: I think that life progresses without a plan more gracefully than it would with one. We'll move on to your work experience now. What is a typical day like for you here at Abby's House?

BA: I actually have a lot of autonomy in this job, which is very unusual, so I am very lucky in that way. Because salaries are so incredibly low here, flexibility with time is one of the things that they do offer as compensation, so that's very nice for me. I rely a lot on email for communicating with people and for any Internet for researching information about companies I may be dealing with or individuals that I may be dealing with. I write lots of inquiry letters or thank you letters to people who might be interested in Abby's House. Weekly, we have a staff meeting that I think is very valuable, a very good team operation here related to development. It is good for us to find out what other individuals are doing and how we can help each other. And often someone will have a suggestion for someone else that will help them do something better.

JB: What is it like working for a non-profit organization? Is it just worth the while to work so closely with such strong women?

BA: It really is. It's especially great because our offices are in a building where residents live so get to actually interact with the women that we're trying to help and not feel as remote from the situation as we would if we were elsewhere. I definitely wish that I were making more money. I'm very realistic about the prospects of that not being good here but that's part of the trade-off, feeling that I'm doing something to really help an organization that I think is very important.

JB: Mind explaining why Abby's House is so important to you? What is Abby's House really all about?

BA: It originated thirty years ago as an emergency shelter for women and children, and we still operate that shelter with nine beds on Crown St. It evolved after that into transitional housing, and so now we have three properties where we have a total of seventy-eight units of housing for women. Seven of those are two-bedroom apartments for women who have children living with them and the rest are single-room occupancy living for women. We also have a variety of programs, meals that we offer. We have a thrift shop here, which is both a fundraiser for us and a service to the community and our residents because our items are so inexpensive. And if any of our residents are in need we certainly give them vouchers, and they take whatever they'd like.

JB: I've actually been down there a few times while I was volunteering at Abby's House. There are a lot of nice things down there.

BA: Yes. We've just expanded it to having household items year-round, so those items are going very quickly and doing really well.

JB: You certainly don't have to get very specific as I know there are people to protect but what are the women like that come into Abby's House? This is a battered women's shelter?

BA: Yes, it is. It's for homeless and battered women, is really who Abby's House is for. A great many of the women who come to the shelter have been dealing with addiction problems and for the most part those addiction problems have resulted from abuse issues that they have had in that past. Whether it's physical, sexual, emotional abuse, nearly all the women that into the shelter have had those experiences. It is not a wet shelter so the women we take in are not actively drinking or using drugs. And we have very strict regulations about that, both to protect the safety of the other women there and the volunteers and staff in the shelter.

JB: What has this work meant to you?

BA: You know, it can't help but put much of your personal life in a different perspective and the importance that you place on certain things really can't help but change. I think it helps you focus on the most important basic elements of your life and what is important and what is not important. I don't particularly care about shopping. I don't particularly care about acquisitions. I don't have the same kind of interest in that kind of thing as I did when I had more free time and that was kind of a way to fill the day. It's had a profound effect.

JB: It's humbled you. Work doesn't end when you come home, I'm sure. What are your primary responsibilities in terms of the housework?

BA: At home? I do everything. *[Laughs.]* My husband has an unusual job. He's a funeral director and he has kind of crazy hours. It's a family business so it's a small staff, which means that his schedule is unpredictable. I have a housekeeper who cleans every other week, and for the first time this year I've just hired a lawn service to fertilize the lawn. But when my son is home he'll mow it. When he's not home, I'll mow it. Other than that I do all the outdoor work and the indoor work.

JB: He is a lucky man, however demanding his job is. Do you ever get bitter with him or wish he were more appreciative?

BA: In the past there were many times that I did, especially when the kids were younger. It's frustrating because parenting can be exhausting. It can actually be really tedious, even and that contributes to it being exhausting. There are times when, if you don't have somebody to share that with at the end of the day, that can be really difficult. And because my husband has to work calling hours in the evening and would not be there for bedtimes, would miss family dinners... Yes, that's definitely been a big strain.

JB: Quickly recap for me your work history. What jobs have you had prior to this one?

BA: Right out of school I did that internship in an art museum, I worked some retail. I was a huge part of a couple political campaigns, I worked for a lobbyist in Boston, I worked for a printing company that did work for advertising agencies because I was somewhat interested in that. When I moved to Worcester I worked in retailing both here and in Framingham for a large chain department store. Then I took time off for raising children and did a great deal of volunteer work either through their schools or on various local boards like Friendly House. Or I also worked for United Way as a staff person about six years ago. And at that time also started working part-time in my husband's business, which is a funeral home. I did office work there, and I have been here at Abby's House for about seven months now.

JB: Do you see any similarities in what you and your siblings have done and do for work?

BA: No, actually. My brother is an insurance executive. My sister actually works for an insurance company now. So, no.

JB: Ok then. We were actually just brushing on the next one. You've done a lot of volunteer work for non-profit organizations, Abby's House being one of them. Now I know that you said this field of work is extremely underpaid but very rewarding. So you basically do your job out of pure goodness?

BA: You know part of it is that it makes life interesting—to understand more about what's going on in the city, to meet the people who are involved in all of these organizations. Ultimately, working here, I find that connections that I've made in the past have been very valuable to me.

JB: How have you balanced the demands of life, between children, a career, a husband, a home?

BA: Well really when my children were younger I did not work full time. I think my husband and I wound up with our partnership deal that we made because his schedule is so demanding in terms of hours. I chose to give all my attention toward taking care of the kids. I would hire babysitters in the evenings to go out to committee meetings, volunteer events, boards and stuff like that. But it made me available during the day to volunteer at their schools to see what was going on, to meet their teachers and their classmates, see what kind of an education they were getting. So that was really my full-time job for many years.

JB: That's wonderful that you got to enjoy the flexibility of being able to work when you wanted and being able to watch after the children when they needed you. Do you think any of that would have been possible without your husband?

BA: Oh, definitely not. No, no, no.

JB: Sounds like a well-balanced relationship. Was your family life or any aspect of your life for that matter plagued by illness of any sort?

BA: I was actually very lucky. Never hospitalized, no surgeries.

JB: No disabilities within your immediate family at all?

BA: Hmm, no. No, in fact my parents were both in remarkable health until their late eighties. No, we've been very boring in that regard. *[Laughs.]*

JB: That's awesome. Has healthcare ever been a financial burden to your family?

BA: My husband has always been able to pay for healthcare. We pay what we think is an enormous amount of money for it but we've never gone without healthcare.

JB: Is there anything in particular that you do to stay active?

BA: You know, walking is, at this point, the thing that I do most regularly. With a friend, I intend to walk at least—well my objective is—to walk at least five mornings. I would say for about an hour at least five times a week. In the better weather, that's what we're more able to do. I play a little bit of golf but very badly. That's not particularly great exercise because I don't really do it very much. That's about it at this point.

JB: What were you taught about food and nutrition as a child?

BA: Partly because my parents were from this much older generation, we rarely ate out. We had that very basic three meals a day; we had that Sunday dinner every week. I think because of that we were really pretty healthy. I mean, we were very conscious of not eating lots of processed food; we almost never had soda. It was, I guess, very old-fashioned and basic.

JB: I do feel that it is harder in society today to learn such a healthy eating style, so it is wonderful that it is so engrained with you. How have and do you feel about your body and all the changes that a woman's figure endures through the years?

BA: You know it is impossible not to be a bit discouraged by all of the changes. I was always very slender, never had too worry too much about what I ate. Now as soon as I put something in my mouth I see it appear somewhere on my body. *[Laughs.]* Confidence comes with knowing who you are, however, not with how people see you at first glance. I just wish young girls could grasp the reality of that statement.

JB: Eating behaviors certainly have become a dangerous thing. Let's shift to a more uplifting topic that I know you express an interest in, politics. What was the role of politics in your family?

BA: Well I think that a combination of things added to my political upbringing. As I have said, my father was a lawyer. The man lived politics and of course his children were going to know a thing about the political world, too. Also, being of a generation that was more concerned about politics as a whole certainly influenced the interest that I have taken in them.

JB: I'm sure then that your entire family were voters and that you voted the year that you could.

BA: I sure did. Have stuck to my liberal guns since.

JB: Ok just a couple more. When you are not at home, where do you usually find yourself?

BA: Well I was at the Worcester Art Museum yesterday. [Laughs.] I do still work part-time, one day a week for my husband and his office happens to be right near the museum, so that is one of my favorite places. I like to try to visit Chicago whenever I can because my daughter lives there now. I took my younger daughter to New York for the day last Saturday. I am always with my children.

JB: Sounds very passionate. I know that you have been very involved in your children's lives. So how old were they when they were allowed to go out and do their own thing? Was this similar to your experience growing up?

BA: My children still aren't allowed to date. [Laughs.] No, I feel I've raised very responsible children who have stayed away from trouble for the most part. So I trust their intuition, and they've all had minds of their own for a while now. I think that I myself kind of snuck up on my parents. I'm sure I was about fourteen when I was invited to a couple of school dances.

JB: How was your father at letting you go? Has your husband had much reaction to your children getting older and more independent?

BA: I think that my father was just a little startled when this came on because my older sister did not date at all in high school, so I don't think that they had quite done any planning for this sort of thing. In the end, they were fine. My husband shows little emotion and plays well the intimidating father figure but I absolutely know deep down he wells up at the thought of letting his girls go out with strange boys. I've caught him teary-eyed. [Laughs.]

JB: Refreshing to see a man cry! Now what was considered fashionable or trendy during your youth? Were you a follower of the trends?

BA: Mini skirts were very hot, and that was an issue for a lot of people. We wore a school uniform in high school and girls were famous for rolling their skirts at the waistband when they weren't in school and then rolling them down to meet regulation.

Bright colors were suddenly considered very shocking. I graduated from high school in '71 so everyone I knew wore their hair long down to their waist.

JB: My mother went to school around the same time and she refuses to call herself a hippie, but she'll refer to herself as a flower child. Would you say you fell into that category?

BA: [Laughs.] I'm sure your mother and I would get along well.

JB: Music was a huge influence during this time. Who was your favorite band?

BA: Had to be the Beatles. Yes, definitely the Beatles.

JB: What would you do for social amusement in Canton?

BA: In high school—Canton was a pretty small town, so there was a dance probably three weekends out of every month that I would go to. There would be one at a boy's high school in the next town, and then there were two church groups in my town that would each have a monthly dance. That was really the focus of social activity. That or going to the movies.

JB: Being a young adult I honestly think that I am going through the most difficult time mentally, physically, socially. What difficult transitions do you recall growing up?

BA: I think the biggest lesson I learned moving from teens into twenties would be learning to take responsibility for making all kinds of decisions for yourself instead of assuming someone would be there to rely on to direct you. I remember working a political campaign was really very important for me in that development of character—seeing other people who are adults as equals and expecting them to treat me that way.

JB: How do you personally get through tough times? What kinds of thoughts keep you going each day?

BA: Well I have a pretty strong religious faith. I would say that's a very significant part of it. That helps to put things in perspective.

JB: I feel like I need to know that there is something bigger out there than me.

BA: Absolutely.

JB: How have you come to define success in your life?

BA: I think success is feeling that I have—while projects or jobs or whatever that I work on may not be perfect in their final stage, if I feel that I have really met my potential, that I have given the effort required and used whatever talents I have to the best of my ability, I consider that successful.

JB: Speaking of all of the decisions there are to make as you get older do you feel positively about most of the ones that you've made thus far?

BA: I do. I think things have worked out remarkably well for me. I was on the board of Abby's House before I was offered this job, which had turned out to be a remarkable new phase in my life that I really didn't anticipate. I feel very fortunate in that regard. I think if I didn't have this opportunity I would, for the first time, be at a stage in my life where I was wondering if I was just spinning my wheels because I wasn't really using my intellect or my talents the way that I want to. This has been very fortunate for me.

JB: Things piece themselves together without you even noticing sometimes. Based on your life's experience, being a successful woman, what advice would you give to young women today?

BA: I would say that whatever decisions they make regarding their careers, I would hope they would also feel a tie, a commitment of some kind to whatever community they're living in—both to make it a better community and to enrich their lives. I think it is a much more satisfying lifestyle than concerning yourself with the paycheck at the end of the week and how you are going to spend it that weekend. I guess I'm concerned when I see people who have that motivation for their life. Not every job appears to be—and I have told my kids this—directly something that is going to improve society. For example, someone who works in retail would not be considered as enriching someone's life. But in any job you come into contact with other people and you may be responsible for the kind of day they ultimately have. You may be responsible for cheering their mood or changing their outlook or making them feel appreciated for what they've done. The way you interact with people supersedes what your job is in definition. I think I want to make sure that people are aware of that.

JB: That the relationships that are made throughout life are truly what life is all about.

BA: Right, right. I mean, waitressing or being an executive or whoever you are, you are interacting with people and you can validate what they've done by the appreciation that you show them and the kindness that you show them.

JB: Good advice. Is there anything else that you would like to share as the grand finale of this interview?

BA: I think what I have learned from myself, and also from my children and helping them with their lives, is just to try to ultimately be optimistic, to understand that whatever setbacks you have really are temporary, no matter how difficult things may seem at the time. Just keep your eye on the future and ultimately things really will work out for the best.

JB: Thank you very much for sharing your stories.

BA: You're very welcome. I appreciate you coming in.