

Interviewee: Cynthia Bizzaro
Interviewer: Lauren Wheeler
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Abstract: Cynthia Bizzaro was born in Worcester in 1956 and grew up in Auburn, just over the Worcester line. She lives in Holden with her husband and daughter, and has enjoyed a long career as a music teacher and pianist. In this interview, Cynthia shares her philosophical viewpoints on the declining state of the arts in Worcester, the challenges women face in today's society, and the importance of stepping back from the frantic pace of modern life to reflect upon one's place in the world. She speaks about the personal constraints she faced as a young woman in her education and career development, focusing on the limited choices that were available to women and the need to accommodate the responsibilities of motherhood. Cynthia also talks about the nostalgia she has for the Worcester of her childhood, before the construction of Interstate 290 and the decline of Main Street. She emphasizes the importance of constantly questioning and deconstructing the way things are in order to imagine alternative possibilities and live an authentic life. Cynthia gives advice to women who are struggling with these issues, and shares her hopes for her daughter's future.

LW: So we're basically interested in knowing about your life history and your activities in the community. And probably a good place to start is when and where you were born.

CB: Sure. I was brought up and born, I was born in Worcester in the hospital, in Memorial Hospital and then I was brought up in Auburn, which is kind of similar to where I live now actually, is a suburb. And I was brought up in a little neighborhood so it was very—like we knew all the neighbors and it was actually the home that my mom was born in. She was born in the hospital too but then she lived in the house. My grandfather had built the house. My mother had lived there all my life. And then we—she stayed when she married my dad and she took over the house and then stayed there.

LW: Do you have any siblings?

CB: I do. I have one sister. She still lives in Auburn. She lives in the same neighborhood with her family right down the road.

LW: What kind of work did your parents do?

CB: Oh, my mom was a—she just retired recently—she was a medical secretary. So she went to a two-year college. I think it was Becker, and then she started working for a doctor. So she was a medical secretary. And my dad was a fourth grade school teacher.

LW: How did your neighborhood differ from when you lived in Worcester?

CB: We lived in—actually right now, we live in Holden now. Right now we've lived here for seven years. We lived in Worcester for ten years. Do you mean how did our neighborhood in Auburn differ from the way it was now? Do you want me to speak more to Worcester or to Auburn, where I grew up...because it's right outside. We grew up right on the Worcester line. But it mostly changed a lot by development—like almost every place I guess. The Auburn Mall, which is there now, was never there. We lived right behind—and my parents still live there—right behind what's now an industrial park. It used to be a sandpit when we were growing up, and it ended up becoming an industrial park so... And the other thing that was huge, that I think changed was that 290, the interstate highway, went right through where the industrial park was right behind our house, pretty much... Maybe about—our street that we grew up on was a dead end so maybe like six more houses and then at the end of the road is right where the highway went through. There was a pond and I think you can kind of gauge the progress and what happened with the neighborhood a lot by the pond because when my mom grew up here, there was a dance hall and it was an active pond. People would come from all over the town to dance at the dance hall and have parties there, and so it was kind of like a resortish kind of place. And then as the pond got stagnant, and a lot of it I think had to do with the highway going in—with a lot of the development that went around the pond, that the dance hall went. We used to fish in it when we were kids, and now there's just nothing worth fishing for in it. So we kind of saw that go downhill. So it changed in that way I think a lot. It's still a community though. I still go, and everybody—the neighbors, their houses are very close together; a lot of the grandkids have taken over the houses.

LW: That's really cool.

CB: Yeah, so like my sister took over a house in the neighborhood that was somebody else's that my parents had known. And then like the kids that I grew up with mostly—several of them I think—two of them for sure that I played with, stayed in the neighborhood and are raising their kids there and their parents are still there. So it's very generational. There's some new people in, but a lot of it stayed within the families.

LW: So what did you and the neighborhood kids really like to do for fun?

CB: Oh. It's the classic thing if you talk to any boomers... Like what we did was we did sandlot ball. So now my daughter who's 11 has all these organized sports, and it's like the thing I think I notice so much about is that we didn't have any adults around then. It was perfect. It was like you got away from the adults. Nobody stood around. Nobody watched you play. You just go and whoever had the flattest yard and whatever street didn't have many cars on it. We'd just, you know, mostly play baseball usually, is what we'd play. And just, you know, hanging around. We had that land where the industrial park ended up being developed and we'd just run through the woods. And it was more like your parents would send you—like they'd send us out to play and they'd call us back

at supper and we hear all the whistles or screams for kids. And that's pretty much—it was really free. It wasn't like organized or supervised or anything like that.

LW: Yeah, very different from your daughter's world today.

CB: Totally. Yeah, in a lot of ways it was.

LW: Have you lived in other areas besides Holden and Worcester and Auburn?

CB: I haven't. Only when I went away to school and that was just to New Hampshire. So I was like—I lived in New Hampshire for four years and I pretty much lived on campus the whole time, so that was still within like two hours. So I've always stayed in New England.

LW: What college did you go to?

CB: It was UNH. So it was it was nice. It was very rural so it was very... um back to my... The chairman... I was in the music department and the chairman of the music department, before he'd come to we'd have an occasional meeting at eight o'clock. He'd milk his cows first and then come in, so it was very, very rural, very dairy and rural-oriented there. And in fact, it was an agricultural college first. So that was the atmosphere. It was nice. It was really low-key there, not like suburb living. And when I first grew up in Auburn, it wasn't really what we'd call a suburb today. It was more, it was more a town. It was more a little, maybe almost a village or a little town. Whereas I think now it's gotten more that really a suburban feel—the feel of being away from community.

LW: While you were at college you studied music the whole time?

CB: I did. Yup. I started as just a liberal arts major and then I declared music so I was music education.

LW: Had you done any music prior to going to college? Was it always kind of a part of your life?

CB: Yes. Exactly. I grew up with it and my mom's a pianist. So I grew up with it in my home, and then like in high school we had a chorus and I played for that. So I think I always knew that I wanted to, you know, do something—I would never not do music. I think I was more steered into it then because I think like so many girls that were brought up—like now, I think maybe it's the same... Mine was maybe the first generation because I was born in 1956, so I kind of overlapped with that '50s kind of... Women's roles were pretty much like you could be a schoolteacher, you could be a nurse, you could be a secretary, and that was pretty much it. And my mom was a secretary. My dad was a schoolteacher, even as man he was a schoolteacher. So I think those were the things that were modeled. So I think as a music—or you could be a piano teacher, which was like another thing that fit. So even like when I went through school they were

starting to say girls could do what boys can do, but they weren't really—there was no real backing to it. There was no real cultural backbone that people would really encourage you. As you got older it still kind of seems to me that it went back. So I think if I—I haven't kept up with a lot of friends, but the ones I have kept up with from high school did pretty much go into traditional women's—you don't see too many of my friends at least having really broken through. My best friend who I went to high school with who ended up getting her Ph D, and she teaches at a college, is still a teacher. So it's still within that kind of umbrella of what's possible for you.

LW: Yeah, that's really interesting.

CB: I find it very interesting, though—and I think what's happening is like even with my daughter now. We're telling Gianna you can be whatever you want to be, but I don't think unless we make that a world of it so... I think she'll find the same cap. I think a lot of girls now, that like your age, that are in college are finding that it's enormously difficult. It sounds like everybody's going to be right behind you, and you can be a business woman and you can be an engineer and you can be, and you can be—but it's really not as easy as they make it sound. You really do have to push real hard still. And then there's the thing of motherhood where you want to be able to balance that. And people, the systems are not in place yet so that we can really say that we have affordable excellent care for children, so we can feel good about doing our work and raising our children. No matter what they say about equal men and women and raising them equally, I don't think it will ever be that way. I think that we could certainly work for it and we have, and there's been tremendous changes but... Oh my gosh, it's just women really have gone through all these—well as you know I'm sure—all these... We study all these evolutions of being trying to be supermoms and superwomen, and just giving up and just freaking out in your life and stuff because you can't do it all. The reason we can't do it all I don't think is because we can't do it all. It's because nobody is supporting us to do it all, so we're doing it *alone* all, and I think that's, you know... So in my case a music teacher did in the end, as I was advised at the time, it would be something you could do and have children. I have one child, but I think you can do it and have freedom of your own time. And I think you know in a way that's good for me, but in a way I think it's sad because like my friend Trish, who I was talking about before who does do—she's got a remarkable—she's a mother and she does have a remarkable schedule teaching at a college, but it's still smacks of giving up choices that you thought you had.

LW: So you have one daughter.

CB: Mmhmm.

LW: And her name's Gianna?

CB: Yup.

LW: And you're married?

CB: Indeed.

LW: How did you handle being a music teacher and raising a child?

CB: Right. I mean, yeah. Before Gianna was born I taught full-time at a private school. And that was—I taught at Bancroft in Worcester, so I was there for a few years and that was really full-time.

LW: A music teacher?

CB: Right, doing classroom music, right. And then about four years before she was born, I left the school and I started teaching full-time. When I first started teaching, I had—my first year, I think I had 28 students and then I kept it right between 20 and 28 students until Gianna—right until about the year before Gianna was born. And then during my pregnancy I kind of cut back on my students and kind of funneled them around. And then after Gianna was born, when I started teaching again, it was a significantly less amount of students. I was maybe teaching ten students. But what I found was that, you know, it worked for me. As a married person it worked having just, just Tony and I. It was easy because I could work really most of my students after school hours. So we worked a little bit like ships passing, but it was okay. And I thought, oh this will be great when Gianna gets in school, which it is now. But when she was a baby, it was difficult because even though Tony could get home it was really, it was much harder because he would take over, you know, taking care of Gianna when I was teaching. But that felt really hectic for me. I guess you have to make your own personal choices. So it effected it that way I think is that first of all... Even in a marriage it's hard when you're ships passing, and then when you have a child to consider, too. It just felt very—I felt disconnected. I felt like I was really putting on a new hat, like you're wearing a different hat to go out to teach and then come back. And that was my experience, so I think I really cut down to just a few students. But now that she's older, now it does work because I can teach some students actually while she's at school, and I do have some after school too. So... but it was an adjustment.

LW: So are you still teaching for Bancroft or...?

CB: I'm not. But what happened was when I left there, I did get a lot of private students. When they found out I was going to be, going to teach private, which was really nice. So that's why I could start off with a really full load of students. I left—I actually stayed for like six months just to fill in for a piano teacher that wasn't there after I left. But it was a great experience. I have to say it was really good. I enjoyed doing classroom. I don't know that it was having a child that stopped me from doing that, but I probably would not teach classroom. I like teaching piano and I'd probably stick with that.

LW: Do you teach only your own private students now or do you teach at any other local places?

CB: Right. I do, I do a mix. I teach at Joy of Music, which is in Worcester, which is a fabulous music program. It started with my piano teacher. After college I had hooked up with a piano teacher here, and Wendy was teaching through another music school. And as I got to the place where I wanted to teach when I was thinking about... I had worked at a doctor's office for a while. I worked at for about five years after college. Because I just, I didn't really—I had started substitute teaching and it just didn't feel right, and I just didn't know what I wanted to do. I worked in a doctor's office for five years and that's when I was studying with Wendy. When she had started her own program, she had started just in her home and she had just started just doing a few music and movement classes for little kids. And then she had needed a recorder teacher. She had hired one person to teach recorder and they had been on maternity leave, so I ended up going to work with her just teaching recorder classes. And that was I think by that time... I had already started at Bancroft. It might have been like my first or second year at Bancroft that I was starting to teach also with her, just after school a class. And then when I left Bancroft and started music teaching, I would work with her. She'd need a recorder teacher to teach recorder, which is like flute. I would teach just one or two classes and then as I took less students on of my own—like after Gianna was born and stuff—it was an opportunity for her music school was growing and now is huge and established. So I can teach—so I teach now like one afternoon there for her and then I teach mostly at my home. Occasionally, I will still go to a house, for neighbors or somebody, but I used to drive farther.

LW: Do you still take lessons yourself?

CB: I do occasionally. I did for the longest time. I did—in fact, when I was pregnant with Gianna, I was still studying. What I do when I study now, is I just take a piece that I am working on and more bring it for coaching. And I do still study with Wendy when I do. She's wonderful. So yup, I try and keep my pieces fresh. I found that I got to a point when I just wanted to work on my own things and I didn't want to go through any kind of institutionalized education anymore because I just really—now my life, I know what I want to do and I want to be able to move through how I want to move through. So just to find somebody who can coach me through it, it seems to work for me better than signing up for a class or something.

LW: Have you been involved in any performances?

CB: Yup. What I try and do is say no now all the time. This is my policy this year. But up until this year, I was doing a lot of—I did faculty recitals for my friends at different music schools. So I played for those. And if they needed an accompanist... a lot of theater accompanying, so in the area—and I did that more maybe back in the '80s. I was doing a lot of theater accompanying. So that was a nice time in Worcester too. There was, the late '70s right into the '80s, there was a surge of—and I'm trying even to remember now, it seems so surreal—but there was like this time when they were trying to revive dinner theater, and they had, and it was kind of the same time when the old factories were being revived for, you know, like when they turned maybe Northworks in Worcester into a restaurant, kind of thing. So there was a lot of sense of trying to take

what we had and rework it. And I think when theater did that revival, was when I did a lot of my performing. I would just get the local, to local theater groups that were doing musicals, you know, play piano for that.

LW: Did you ever do any solo performances? Or was it mostly –

CB: Not as much. I was mostly—and that’s what I was in school too—I would much rather be a collaborative pianist. Now what I’m doing is working on my own pieces and I think I came late in my life into really embracing memorization and memorizing. I usually would work with a score. So I’d usually work with chamber music. So if it was classical music, it would be chamber music, and otherwise just working with theater or something you’d have connections for.

LW: Was any of this work volunteer work? Or have you done any type of volunteer work?

CB: Yes. I think it’s mixed. I try and—I mean it is pretty much how I earn my living so I usually do charge. But like anybody who earns their living, but can also use it to benefit. Like there was a huge AIDS benefit in Worcester about ten years back and I certainly donated my playing for that. And you can use—it’s wonderful when you feel you can connect your work to something that you know you’re doing to be helpful and not to be mercenary. I try to when I can. Or like for music schools that will certainly give me a stipend, but won’t pay if they’re doing a benefit. In fact, I’m playing for a benefit this coming winter for a music school that just does it yearly. And I try and do that when I can, you know.

LW: Is most of your volunteer work with accompaniment and involved with music?

CB: I did other things, you know, not in music. Like again, I think there’s that time right after college before I was married. I was single for a long time because we didn’t get married until I was 32. So I graduated from college when I was about 21. There’s like that ten-year period. And I worked for about six months—there used to be a crisis intervention line called the Crisis Center. I don’t even know if it still exists. But it was just for—it was a suicide line, and so I trained for that and worked on that for a while. I think you feel this need that you want to somehow connect in a way that’s volunteering and helping the community. So I did that for a while. And I was also thinking at that time that I may want to pursue something in counseling. I’ve always been attracted to psychology, perhaps psychiatry in high school, and it was my music teacher who said, "No, you need to be a musician. Just go to music school." And I think at that time you’re just floundering. You are looking for an expert. I know I was looking for an expert to say what should I do, because I have no clue what I should do. So I think that was, that volunteer work I think gave me a little different—outside of the music realm of what to do. And I also worked as a home health aid for a while. It was just when I was first married. It was paid work, but I was doing it more for the volunteer aspect of it. So I would get to, so I would just get certified and then I could go in and help the elderly a little. So I met some really cool older ladies that were still living in their home, and I was

just trying to help them stay in their home. So that was other volunteering. It was paid, but I would consider that I was doing that more in the spirit of volunteering.

LW: Have you ever played for nursing homes or anything?

CB: Oh yeah, definitely. We started when we were in high school actually doing that. And you know my friend Trish back then would organize it. We'd have all these kids and we'd meet with our cars after school. We'd rehearse and then we'd go to nursing homes. So we did that like at least once a week. We had a—the ongoing thing we had I think in high school was Godspell. So we'd all dress up like, that show has you all dressing up with things you had around your house, like clowns and face paint and stuff and we'd go in and do just the music for the show. Because we couldn't get the rights for it because it was actually still playing then. Yeah, so that was wicked fun. Patty and I still do that whenever we can. Trish and I will—we get together, and she always had a special thing for people in nursing homes, so we'd always go and she'd go and sing and I'd play for her. So I played for that troop and that was like my whole senior year, I think. We did that like at least once, sometimes twice, a week.

LW: That sounds like a lot of fun.

CB: Yeah it was really, really fun.

LW: What impact has Worcester had on you as an individual and you on Worcester?

CB: That's a great question. Gosh, well I think, I think being a small city, I think it gave me a sense, and I still feel that way, of knowing my way around it. I know all the back roads because I grew up here nearby. I think I have a nostalgia for it that comes from a person who's always stayed near home. Since all my life I've lived in or near Worcester, I think I have a nostalgia for how it used to be when I was a kid. Most people do. I can remember instead of taking 290 from Auburn, we travel up Main Street because Main Street goes right into Webster Street right into Auburn. So I can remember the route, and like we'd go and my mom would shop at Denholms and we'd drop her off. I remember when there was a real downtown. I can still see that. Especially Christmas time, for the holidays when they'd have the displays and stuff and there was Filenes and there was Denholms. And I think if you talk to anybody my age—the group, like Tony my husband, who also grew up, he lived right in Worcester. He lived on Shrewsbury Street. So we can definitely reminisce together about the basic city experience. Saying when you went into town, you went into the city, and it was really this feeling near City Hall where there was a happening place and there were—it was just really nice. But it was a small city, and we knew even then we could get used to how to get to places, all the back roads. And then I lived with stories of my mother having grown up in the same city, talking about trolleys when they were there. So there was this connectiveness of the city. You almost find it was part of my life. And now my father-in-law who's 90 who grew up in the city—you know, Tony's dad will come and he'll talk about how the city was laid out and how it was. There's this sense that you're connected to how it used to be even as now I think we look at it, and go it feels so fragmented as a city right now. It's just going

through such tough times. And I think—so we have this kind of love-hate relationship with one another. Like we can put it down; I feel like I'm enough of a native where I can put down Worcester and go, 'oh yeah, it's so stupid,' but if anybody else puts it down, I tend to defend it. So I find myself having this kind of a, almost like you were when you were a kid or something. You have this familiarity with it that goes back more than just my life; I think it goes back generations. Both my sets of grandparents lived in Worcester for most of their life so we've stayed here.

LW: What kind of struggles do you think the city's really going through at this point?

CB: I think always with Worcester it seems to me that it's just been trying to find its identity. Just having some kind of a shape to it or something that you can... I just love when you drive in now from where you live, if you come down 290, if you've ever noticed, I think it says something like 'Worcester's cultural district next three exits.' And I'm like, what? Cultural district? It's like, we don't have such a thing. And I think if you know it like a native knows it, and if people come in, what I find myself saying is, 'well, you've got to go over to this side of the city to find this,' and then, 'you've got to check this part out...' But there isn't like, when you go to say Portland and there's the Old Port and there's shops and like one place to be. But I think that's kind of cool in a way about it too, so I just think it seems like... To me it just seems like it's growing pains. And then of course with the economy the way it is now and everything being cut. As an artist, I mean, I see it in terms of, you know, it's tragic because I think people don't know what they're losing until it's gone. You don't know what you've got until it's gone kind of thing. So having lived through seeing what was here, just having to struggle so hard—the music schools, just having to just struggle. There's no aid, and people just kind of, not seeing if we don't put more money into these things, and put more attention to them, we will disappear and life will not be. I mean I think it's just dehumanizing to not have the arts.

LW: So in terms of what you would improve, it would be more towards the arts?

CB: This is such a fabulous question because you know this is right where I'm at in my life is—I think I'm kind of coming out of my own little life going, where do... you look at it and you go, where do you begin? I think it's this overwhelming feeling even within own small city, or small town. Where do you even start to unravel it? There's so much wrong. I think if anything I'm starting to think maybe it's to advocate, to be an advocate for... Oh god, any of my friends who advocate for anything that isn't getting funding are saying that what's hard is that it comes down to a choice that you seem to have: do you want to be right or do you want to be effective? And I starting to think I want both. I want both. I want to be right and I want to be effective. I don't want to have to talk to people in board meetings to support an arts fund, in terms of how it's going to... It's the same crap basically when you hear the Mozart effect for piano students. People shouldn't be playing the piano because it's going to make their brains better, or because they're going to be more efficient workers, or because they're going to... For me they should do it because it's beautiful and because it's part of your love cause you're a human being. And it's creative and that's what we're born to do. Not because it's going

to make your IQ higher, or you test better on the SATs, or I mean... This is bullshit, and that's what we're getting I think all the time. We have to talk in their terms. We have to fit their institution or their machine. And I'm like I'm so sick of it. So I think that's where I'm at right now.

LW: Do you see an overflow of all of this with your daughter's education? And our generation?

CB: Totally. Totally. I mean, it's beyond just the fact that she doesn't have art classes at her middle school or that they have like—everything's been cut down. It's an attitude; it so permeates it, that I think, especially as women who want to make it, who just want to bring sanity back to the system that's become so mechanized, you don't know where to start. I think that's where I'm at right now. I've kind of—and what I said to you before, I'm not doing anything right now, it's because I'm trying to sit still to find out where to go next. I feel like I've been moving in a frenzy for the past five years, because until you can sit still and get a focus, you can't be effective and you can... And I feel like I just need to gather my passions about me before you can start moving again. Otherwise, you start doing things in such a—things become so cliché and so routinized and they're not really doing what you want, which I think is to bring yourself and your passions into your work. I think in order to deal with my own daughter and how she is being brought up, I find myself just back and forth between this, you know, and it's not just... it's all the systems. It's the religious systems, it's the school systems... I think in a lot of us who have a radical tendency you know really need to go to the root of something to find what's the root problem here. Let's not just fix the glosses. Let's throw more money in the school system or throw more money at the arts. If you really want to say what's wrong with it, you're radical enough to lift it up and look underneath it at the monkey part that says what the heck is really wrong with this. You need time to do that and I think, you know, I think that's what's not happening. People are just running around with chickens with their heads cut off kind of, you know, just trying to apply aid to things without seeing the problem. So I'm still in that process is what I'm telling you, I guess. I wish I could speak more towards what I really think is wrong with Worcester or with the arts in Worcester more specifically, but I'm just looking at it now going, it's a mess and it's like I don't even know where to start.

LW: Yeah, it's hard to confront those issues.

CB: It really is. It really is. Because it's been so suddenly been turned into something that's been done for its own sake. And so now you have to defend it in terms of what other people can measure. You have to measure. You can't measure art. So it's like, it becomes impossible. It becomes an impossible dilemma to try and... It seems impossible. I'm an optimist enough to think that in my life I would like to be somebody who helps make bridges and maybe by deconstructing. I think my life is largely going to... I would think that in the next few years what I'm... I'll be... And what I tend to do anyways, is deconstruct, to pull apart things the way they are. You can't build on something that's foundation is crumbling. I think a lot of what needs to be done, and that would probably—I don't know much about Worcester's political structure, I'm not

involved with it, but I would guess that it probably mirrors that too. That a lot of what people are building on just isn't a good enough foundation. It really needs to be pulled apart a little more. But it's difficult because people want art to be nice and pretty, and art isn't that in so many cases. And I mean it is that too, but it also has a side of it that needs to speak to change, and speak to issues that other, many people would rather not look at. And I think that's what's hard as an artist of any kind is trying to work within your city and work within your structure, and to really do art and to feel like you have to be effective and not right. It's frustrating.

LW: Yeah. What kind of events, or big doings, have happened in Worcester during your time?

CB: Oh. If we're thinking like just the layout of it, I think the two biggest that I remember would be the Worcester Center, which was the Galleria when they built it, which I think really destroyed Main Street. So I think that was Worcester's, the Main Street that I remember. I think we remember that as Baby Boomers. We remember that so much because it was huge. I think that really impacted whatever... What happened to Main Street was it was just kind of really hideous. And so there was that structural thing and I think also the highway going through. I didn't, as much as my husband, appreciate the Water Street district. But like the people who lived in the city like Tony did, like on Sundays after church it was the big thing was to go up to Water Street, which was where the Orthodox temple was there—is still, what's left of is all crumbling is there. But the highway went right through that neighborhood. Two ninety went right through the middle of it. And I think just the idea of unlimited progress and how I've seen it change the city... It's a hands-on way to see that people that don't know limits, people that always forget that we can say no to something, or how to say no. We have these little factions, neighborhood groups, who help hold signs, like with the airport, trying to—the access route to the airport. And you see the little neighborhood in H—[name inaudible] Park trying to hold signs, but that should be something we're all looking at, not people... You know I think there's a sense that each provincial part of the city should take care of the road, and it's very isolated instead of feeling that sense that we should all be looking to say, how is this road going to impact our whole city? How is this Galleria—which is Worcester Common Outlets, which has gone through all kinds of things, which is now coming down again. If they had forced us to see what would happen to the whole city, that wouldn't have happened. People just go figuring I think that you have to just honor progress, and I think that's what's between the road and the city planning. I think that's what I've seen physically the most, is just not having the choice to say if you've had enough of this yet, can we stop. And now the medical facilities, just sprawling, and without people feeling they can say enough. How much biotech do we need? Where do we need it? People just giving up because it's overwhelming.

LW: Aside from your Joy of Music program that you're involved in, do you still go into Worcester for a lot of things, or do you find yourself mostly in Holden?

CB: I do go into Worcester. I'm trying to think for what things I go into Worcester. I think you know my take on it is that a suburb like Holden tends to try to stay... I mean, I

don't think it ever intended to be self-sustaining. I think it wants to not have businesses. I think there's been a—my sense for the town that it's been very, very cautious. And I have to say I think there's a lot of good to that. So we can't be self-sustaining. And I don't think we could. I mean, we have the plaza here right down the street so we can do our food shopping here. I think that many people in Holden are aligned though now, or even getting that way where we're saying but we don't want to shop. We want to go maybe to the health food store. But as people need things they'll bring them in. I do go into Worcester, but I think it will be interesting to see what happens. I think, it will turn into more of a like Auburn, where I was born—more of a sprawl of Worcester—where I think it's more of its own little town city. So right now I do, I do shop here. We do our grocery shopping here. Tony does most of the shopping and does do some of it at Worcester's priced big supermarkets. I go in mostly for the bookstores and for, you know, just to go to Tatnuck Booksellers' little café. I go there at least three times a week, and meet my sister because it's about half-way and she still lives in Auburn. So I'm always in that part of Worcester.

LW: Do you have any nieces or nephews?

CB: I do. I have a niece who just got married. My sister has two kids. And her brother, Tim, who's your age. He's 19. So they're still in Auburn. Kim just got married, and she's living in Auburn. Tim's still at home. So we try and meet each other at least once a week just to connect or at least talk on the phone and stuff.

LW: That's nice.

CB: Yeah, oh it is. It's good. It's good.

LW: What does your husband, Tony, do for work?

CB: He works for Motorola. He's worked all the time that we've been married in um...in high tech. He's a writer, so he writes the technical—he's the technical writer. So he writes the books that go with the software for the product. He's worked for startup companies, pretty much, where the company is a new company. He goes in—they usually work really hard, long hours and then they get sold or bought by another company. So he's been doing that for a while, but I think this is the final buyout because the company is so big. So I think this will be it. So he's at Motorola. It's been Motorola for, I think, three years now.

LW: Cool.

CB: It is.

LW: So this is kind of a big question. Now that we're working to tell a fuller story of women and what's been recorded in the past, what do you think we should include today?

CB: Do you mean when you're telling the story of—I'm not sure I understand it.

LW: Umm...

CB: I saw that one on your sheet too and I'm like, ahh...

LW: Kind of like in today's society for what will be made history, what's important for the history that will be recorded?

CB: Oh... ok like what—

LW: What would be important today to include in the history?

CB: Of the city you mean or of woman that are—I'm trying to think of where we want to go with this.

LW: Kind of like...

CB: What's happening now that will be history?

LW: Yeah women's experiences today.

CB: Oh okay. Do you mean how woman right now will impact history? Like what will be historical? What's important to do historically?

LW: Yeah, yeah.

CB: That is a big question. Huh, I think one of the most important things that I've—where I'm at right now is that women need to remember where we've come from. I've just been reading a biography of Elizabeth Stanton. This is, we're talking early 1800s, you know, just women didn't have the vote. I mean we didn't. We are in so much peril of losing our rights to our own body again. That they could be easily—I mean we never really had them totally, because if we had had them totally, I believe that when it came down to the question of abortion for example, they would have said you have the right, period. No trimesters, or no measuring when we have the right and you have the right. You have right was never given to women. So I think for women to go anywhere historically, I think we need to know that this is not... I think what I'm coming to realize is that when you're looking for mercy you ask for it; when you're looking for your rights, you take them. It's your rights. Something that's rightfully yours needs to be taken. And I think women are still in a really hazy phase as a group. I think we just like to be lulled into a sense of everything's okay, I have enough rights. I have enough. What's wrong? What's the problem? You think unless we really call our consciousness forward I would say...to say, to really look at things clearly. And to not run around like chickens with our heads cut off. To take time first to really see things and to really think. To see our own lives and the people in it. I don't think unless we do that we can be effective. I don't think we will make history. I think we'll go back to being just frustrated. I think the anxiety that my friends and women even younger than I, younger than me are feeling

right now... This anxiety, this unspoken... I think has been talked to by other feminists. I think it has a name. The name is right... the thing that can't be spoken. This incredible feeling of frustration, of feeling trapped. And I think, I think woman can do amazing things. I think men can, I think people can do amazing things. But until we learn that we're all supporting each other—I think that goes back to the idea that Worcester kind of expects each little neighborhood to take care of itself now. Until we can connect back again... and I think woman are awesome connectors. As a rule, I think we've been taught to be and I think we are. I think we see big pictures well. I think we can bring that aspect of what we are into our culture by not just taking care of ours and our own. If I'm—and ours, I'm not just taking care of my area. If I'm a politician, I'm not just taking care of my particular sector. But just saying how do we think broader? How do we paint with bigger strokes? And at the same time how do we have the guts, how do we have the balls, as women—or how do we have the ovaries, maybe, to really speak what we see and know and not try and be effective all the time? Maybe we do need to be a little more right. I don't know if that's answering your question, but I think that's what it triggers in me, to see if we're going to do anything. I think we can make an impact against all boards. I think woman are—now we do at least have our foot in the door. At least people are giving lip-service as a culture to say you can do whatever you want. I don't think we're being supportive of it. I think unless we know that we're not being supported, we'll kind of maybe lose our minds at some point and think: oh god, I must have made a bad choice, instead of saying, I never had a choice. I never really had a supportive choice. The choice I had was always a tough one and it was to do it by myself. Kind of like the little red hen story, where I think you can do it, but I think there's a lot of duplicity, I think, out there, you know, in the idea that, oh yeah you can do anything, we're right there with you. But nobody really is with you yet. I mean there are those that are with you—your family, and I think the people that you've been asking me about, you know, my niece, my nephew, my family—but I don't want it to be... it can also get too clan-like, where it's all about me and my, you know. And it's like—I think that's so important to a city, or to what women need to do in the world is to extend that. It's not—and not think economic globalization but think globalization of humanity...and human... I think most important to me is humanity as a part of the rest of nature. Not above it, not boarding over, but how can we see our connection and work with the world? So I mean, I think there's a lot we have to do but I think we have to kind of get our bearings, at least that's where I'm at in my life so I'll speak to that. We have to get our bearings first. I don't think we can just run out thinking we know what we know. I think we have to take a good look at things. And there's a lot to see in Worcester. There's a lot of need, there's a lot of hurt, and I think no matter what field a woman is in now... I think—but I think also women need to learn, as this one writer said. to put on the brass brassiere. But if we put milk—if we extend all this nurturing milk of kindness out to everyone indiscriminately, we're not effective either. So trying to find our own personal focus, and then what's our passion, and then how do we connect that passion and our gifts together to—and to not be intimidated by other people saying, 'Oh, you can't do that, 'cause you made the choice that was wrong before.'

LW: Do you share a lot of the same interests and beliefs as your friends?

CB: I think if anything I may be a little more intense than they are, so I find myself in this point in my life feeling like I have to bite my tongue a lot. I feel like my tongue is very well bitten. A tongue sandwich these days. Because I think so many of my friends are too are scared and I think, I think the kind of looking that I'm trying to do at these things is a little too frightening for a lot of people. I would put myself in the category of really seeing that all my life I have felt strongly about being again willing and ready to deconstruct things. To take them apart. And to not worry that they're not going to go back together. I think I really have an enormous faith that they will go back together, so I can do that and I think a lot of my friends don't have that faith and, I think, need to keep things all pasted together the way things are and just pull little pieces apart. So I think the dynamic that I'm in with a lot of my friends when we talk about things that are important—certainly these things are important to me—is that I feel like they get afraid and I get frustrated. So I think there's that element. But I think that's what bridge-making is about, is keeping your intensity if you have it, and then saying how can I bridge that into a way that... All I can think of is the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, where it's a bank run scene where they're all at the bank and he's like, 'but your house is worth this one's house...' and being a little bit more George Bailey-like and saying you can have your passion but you've also—show people and your friends too, it isn't going to all fall apart; we can still do this. To retain that optimism, as you're pulling gingerly apart these things that have become so sacred. And I feel as sometimes in order to affect change as women we have to know we are walking around a lot of taboo stuff. You know, we're messing with things that culturally are very scary for people. But I think women again—and men, I think men too, and I don't mean to be divisive about that—we have a capacity as humans to hold and seat an enormous amount, more than we think we do. I think we're afraid that somehow by seeing the ugliness or sadness or danger in things that somehow it will hurt us or that self-destructors won't be able to handle it. I think we can handle it. So I try to I think with my friends as we're talking about things that are deep, I try and bring that message to them too that I wouldn't bring this up if I didn't think I could make it. I'm not—I'm not a nihilist in any sense. I mean I think it's not gonna end. I think we have a lot of potential. But I think you're catching me with an interview here in the middle of a part of my life where I don't know what that is yet, I can't see it clearly, but I'm not frustrated by that. I think it comes apparent to us if you just sit and wait for it. I'm in my waiting phase now. I'm kind of... I'm trying to just pull into myself to find out what is it that, how can I affect change? And I think, you know, probably most of us need to do that periodically anyway, or maybe constantly. Maybe it's just a constant thing that we need to keep in balance of always giving yourself time to say—to check yourself—to say how does that feel to me, especially people who are activists that are out there doing things in their community.

LW: How do these struggles do you think damper your life the most as a woman?

CB: Whose struggles are we talking—my personal one or woman's struggles?

LW: Just women's struggles in society.

CB: And how do they damper life, or how do they hold you back?

LW: Hold you back at all in your own life.

CB: Wow, these are great questions. Yeah, it's funny; about a year ago—maybe longer, maybe two years ago—I went back and found the words to that old... Helen Reddy used to sing a song “I am woman” and I had never paid attention to it back in the ‘70s when it was playing... You know, I was in a different place in my life. I went back and pulled all the words out and I love reading the beginning of it. She says, “I know too much to go back and pretend.” And I think that is a turning point in every woman’s life—every human’s life, I think, but, especially for women—where you just, I think... where you say once you know that you know too much and you can’t go back. Once you give up saying I just want everything to be the way it was. I just want it—I want Worcester to have its Main Street again. I want that evil highway to go away so that like that little Jewish neighborhood could like be the way it was. Once you know that you can’t do that, then you can move forward. So I think it doesn’t damper you, except if you think that you have to push back. I think, what I think of myself now, I would have to call a neo-luddite. I believe the luddites did that; I think that you can say no to things, that you can say no to technology. And I think an example of that in my life is that I’ve had e-mail for a year; I’m giving it up. I’m stopping e-mail. You make your own choices. You say, ‘I don’t want to use the electric eggbeater anymore. I’ll use my old eggbeater.’ It’s not that you’re doing it on principle, that new things are bad, it’s that you’re doing it because we need to give ourselves time to try the new things out and then go, ‘What did I lose from this? I took this, but what did I lose?’ What puts a damper on it is when we forget that we have a voice, that we can say no. And that we can say yes. That it’s our own voice. When we forget our own sovereignty, I think, Lauren, I think that’s what it is. When we forget—it’s just a forgetting... When we forget that, then it all becomes... then we’re hindered, then we feel bound, then we feel constrained, then we feel alone really. I don’t think we are ever alone. I think we have to remind people and I think we have to have our voice. We have to as women individually and collectively, I think we need to remember that this is an ongoing thing. It isn’t like women did this for us. It’s not like those brave that died for us so that we might have freedom. It’s ongoing. Every generation has to die again. Every generation has to live in a way that speaks to what’s human, and I think women especially. As traditionally—no matter how we do it, whether we do it as engineers, as astronauts, as housewives—we’re keepers of the hearth. I think women, maybe because of tradition, maybe... whatever reasons, I think we are. I think we’re the keepers of the hearth. We’re the ones who keep our humanity. We’re the ones who keep the records. We’re the ones who tell the histories. We’re the ones who want to know where you came from, where you’re going. I think as that, in doing that, I think we really need to trust that voice, to trust the voice of humanity. And I think right now what it comes up against culturally—as a mom for me, as a woman—is really making sure, even when I’m not heard... There’s a wonderful poet, Audrey Lorde, who has died now, but in one of her poems in the end of it, she talks about—the poem is called, what I’m thinking of is called *A Litany for Survival*. And she talks about being afraid and she says, “When the sun rises we speak, we’re afraid our words will not be heard, nor be welcomed. But when we are silent, we are still afraid.” And she ends saying it is better to speak remembering that we were never meant to survive. And I think once you can get

to that point in your life when you say, I'm gonna be afraid anyway, I might as well speak to it. I think that's when women will rise personally and collectively over the sense of: I think we've got enough rights now, let's not rock the boat anymore. We've got enough; we've got what we need. We won't be as satisfied. We won't just sit back. I think we'll take more action and move towards... I think we have to have a clear focus of what we're moving towards. And I think women traditionally and I think beautifully can have it, a place within them—I think we still have it—where we know that what we're working for is to keep our humanity. That's what I want to keep for my daughter. I want to keep her sense that she doesn't have to go by the clock. That the clock is a construct that we made... That she can go by what she feels like doing next. I think that's why so many kids when they get to be—when kids grow up and they get to be your age, and we say, 'Now what do you want to do?' I find so many like my niece and nephew going—and I was there too—going, 'Well, I don't know; you've always told me what I'm gonna do. What do I want to do?' And I think a lot of that women know—men too—but I think my friends who are women, we know, if we go back, we can trace back that place where we thought it was better to listen to somebody else. There was somebody knew better than we did what was good for us. And I think we have to—in order to be effective in the world, effective as mothers, and as wives and just as women and as people, as selves—I think we have to find our own thread back to that place where we know that we know what's best for us and how to find that. So that's what I would like -- to be able to pave that way for my daughter. I'd like to—what I find myself doing instead of... I feel like I'm the clearer of the way for her just making space for her in this crazy world. It's become so crazy in terms of just running around all the time. To just have space to do what we're doing now—sitting right on this couch looking out this window after school when she comes home. Just to stare at the sun, and to go out there and walk through the woods, and kick some leaves, and be with herself with the rest of nature. That's just so—you have to make that happen now. And then in the same process I'm trying to make choices in our lives like dropping the e-mail... Like, do I need a cell phone? Do I have to carry it all the time? Personal choices that speak to this. To speak to how do we, how have we fit the machine, and how do we lose that balance where we use machines to help us and how do we start getting conditioned so much by these machines. And when I mean machines, I mean all institutions. I mean school systems, prisons, hospitals, marriage, anything that's an institution. I mean how can we...? And I think women best keep that thread because—especially when we become mothers, something happens to us where we see that life is so much bigger than the systems we've created. And I think that that can be so helpful. So I think as women, I think what we need to bring into the world is our humanity. And we need to bring that humanity into everything we do, as people, as individuals. And then I think it becomes a collective. I think, as you said with my friends, I think I look for people now, I bypass or I'll just—not that I'll be mean to them—but I'll just tend to bypass deep relationships with people who I know can't understand this ideology. And I will, I will seek out people who do, who say they're looking for the bigger picture. Kind of like in the movie the Matrix—you know where you're going; you can take the blue pill or the red pill.

LW: (laughs) Yeah.

CB: Once you see it, you can't go back. It's the Helen Reddy song, 'Too much to go back.' I think that's the state of women that I see right now. Women my age, at least that's how I see it, from where I am. I think it's very, very positive because I think any of us who tend to be radical rise to the occasion. It's like we're given all kinds of stuff. I think I wouldn't be so happy in a place where everything was utopian. I mean we have a lot to do here. It gives us purpose and meaning and we can find meanings. We can fuse everything we do. Anything—a speech therapist, a music teacher. Everything you do with people has this kind of fusion of meaning if you look for a bigger picture. I would hope for women that's what we're doing, you know, in Worcester, and just in our own families, and in our houses, in our homes. Just creating a place that really smacks of our own authenticity, that says, this is my passion, this is who I am. This is not who anybody else told me I have to be. This isn't what—you know, I think as women age—it becomes a whole other tape, Lauren, that you don't have to put in—but as women age, I think as we come into age, we also have cultural things to fight too, in terms of wow, how can I age without decline. That's a huge issue for women I think, especially to deal with.

LW: I love like everything you just said.

CB: (laughs) Well good, good.

LW: Is there anything else you would like to add before we end the interview?

CB: You know, just only that I think what you're doing is great. I think that classes that get out of the classroom and get interactive with real people are going to help you guys when you're going into the world. You're not going into the world. This is what's so stupid. My sister just said this. My sister just took a job as a coordinator in her church of her Sunday school. And what she found was people were always saying, 'these children are our future.' And she was going, 'these children are now.' They're not the future. They are the church now. I think that's what I'm thinking of like my daughter, you are women now. She is a woman at 11. We were women at five. We're women becoming and people and humans we are. So I think to just get the sense that whatever it takes to put down some of these walls that divide us into subject matter. To say that this is math and this is English. And this is women's studies and this is urban studies. And to say, you know, 'oh my gosh, get your tape recorder out... get those stories going.' And at the same time as you're doing—sometimes with my father-in-law we'll put the tape...Gianna will get the tape recorder when he's telling the old stories and she'll put it around the corner. But you know, I don't think we've ever listened to them. I think what we'll remember is the tape recorder in our heads. It's like the one—it's like people say, the camera in your mind. But you don't need the recording devices. You need it for your project. But what you need is—it's the time that you're actually having that interaction. That you're asking questions. That you're thinking; that I'm thinking; that we're doing it. This is changing us profoundly. And that can only happen with people. You have to get out and do it. So awesome. So that's what I have to say is what you're doing is a great project.

LW: Thank you. Thank you so much for participating.