

Interviewee: Elizabeth Hamilton
Interviewers: Olivia Heaney and Sydney Morse
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Worcester Women's Oral History Project

Overseen by: Dr. Christian Williams, Assumption University

Abstract: Elizabeth Hamilton was born in 1968 in Hackensack, New Jersey. When she was the age of six, she moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma with her parents, brother and sister until the age of 18. Elizabeth went to college at Regis University in Denver, Colorado, and then earned her master's degree in social work at Boston University. Between her undergraduate and graduate study, she served two years of Jesuit Volunteer Corps, one in Great Falls, Montana, and then another in Worcester, Massachusetts, which is how she became familiar with Worcester. Elizabeth is married to Matthew and has two daughters. In this interview Elizabeth discusses what it was like growing up in Tulsa and how her religion impacted her life there. She discusses her mentors, such as her mother, her views of Worcester, and her experiences of being a woman. Elizabeth highlights her involvement within Worcester, whether in the Worcester Together group or her role as Executive Director of the Boys and Girls Club in Worcester where she is the first woman to lead that nonprofit organization. She also touches on her marriage and relationship with her husband and raising their children. *Worcester Business Journal* named her an Outstanding Woman in Business in 2020 and one of the Power 50 in 2021.

SM: So, we are completing a city-wide oral history of the lives of Worcester women, aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences. Based on the goals of the 1850 National Woman's Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on the areas of women's education, health, work, and politics/community involvement. Thank you for your help with this important project. And would you mind stating that we have permission from Liz Hamilton on February 23 to conduct this interview?

LH: Yes, you have permission.

SM: So, just general/family questions. What is your full name, including both maiden name and married name if applicable?

LH: My name is Elizabeth Howard Hamilton.

SM: When were you born?

LH: I was born in 1968.

SM: Have you ever been married?

LH: I have been married for almost 30 years.

SM: What is the name of your spouse?

LH: Matthew

SM: Do you have any children?

LH: I have two children.

SM: Do you have any grandchildren?

LH: I do not.

SM: What are the names of your children?

LH: Olivia and Erin.

SM: What cultures/ethnicities do you identify with?

OH: Your family background?

LH: So, I have both Irish, Scottish, European ethnicities. And my husband is Scottish and German.

SM: Would you mind telling me about your parents?

LH: My mother died on Christmas Day, five years ago. She was a wonderful mentor to me, and a wonderful mother. And she inspired me to, I think, give back to the community and be a leader. So, someone very important to me. And my father now lives with my husband and I and he is eighty-eight and a half years old. And he is an artist and still does a lot of photography.

SM: What does he like to take photos of?

LH: He can turn almost anything into art. I think that's a real gift. He enjoys taking photos of everyday activities to homes and landscapes. So his photography is very diverse.

SM: It's very pretty. I love photography as well. So where did you live during your life? Did you grow up in Worcester?

LH: I was born in Hackensack, New Jersey. And when I was six years old, my father who worked for Cities Service [Company], which is now called Citgo Gas. Their headquarters moved from New York City to Tulsa, Oklahoma. So, from the age of six to age 18, I lived in Tulsa, Oklahoma with my parents and brother and sister. And I went to college at Regis University in Denver, Colorado, and received my Master's in Social Work at Boston

University. And in between that I did two years of Jesuit Volunteer Corps, one in Great Falls, Montana, and then another in Worcester, Massachusetts which is how I got to know Worcester. And my husband and I, for a short time, not only lived in Boston, but in New Hampshire, then moved to Holden [MA] and settled in Worcester.

OH: Did you like growing up in Oklahoma?

LH: I did. It's very different. I would say it lacked the diversity that I think is really important. But certainly there was a very supportive community. I grew up Catholic, and there's not a lot of Catholics in Oklahoma. I went to Catholic school my entire life until actually Boston University. We had a community there because it was mostly evangelical or Southern Baptist. And, you know, sometimes we would get folks who would say that we seem like awfully nice people, but they wish we would convert to Southern Baptist, and that they were praying for us. I think my parents thought we might want to keep them in a community who also practices Catholicism because of that. And then when I've gotten older, I certainly think I've embraced a lot of different types of religions and I think I'm more spiritual than religious. But growing up, I grew up Catholic. And in Tulsa, it was a bit more of a challenge than other places.

OH: Thank you.

SM: So, when did you arrive in Worcester, for the first time?

LH: For the first time I was in my early 20s, after completing college and one year of Jesuit Volunteer Corps, and I had the opportunity of doing my Jesuit Volunteer Corps service at Rainbow Childhood Development Center which is still a wonderful organization. It's open and serving kids from childcare to after school programs. And it was a wonderful experience. And I had wonderful mentors who worked with me there.

SM: So the next question goes, where do you live in the city now? Have you lived in multiple areas?

LH: So, when I moved from Holden to Worcester, that was 20 years ago, and we've lived in the Burncoat area ever since.

SM: Do other family members of yours live in the same area?

LH: When we moved to Worcester, our daughters were very young and they lived with us until they went to college. And my youngest still lives in Worcester. She lives in the downtown area, and my oldest lives in New York City.

OH: Where did your children go to school?

LH: For a while they went to St. Bernadette Elementary School in Northborough. But they

mostly went to Worcester Public Schools attending the Burncoat quadrant. They loved the schools there because they were able to participate in the arts. And both of my daughters excelled in dance and theater.

SM: Yeah, I remember I played Burncoat in high school.

LH: Yes.

SM: We always lost. So, what challenges do you think the city still faces? And what would you change about the city?

LH: Well, I wouldn't call them challenges so much as there's opportunities for us to continue to grow and improve. I do think the [Covid] pandemic amplified areas where we can grow and improve. And some of it is on racism. I think the majority of the community members in Worcester, very much want equity and racial equity. We still have a long way to go. Institutions nationally, and in Worcester, are experiencing and continue to experience systemic racism, which impacts our community members. And in addition, I think, when a city's growing like ours is sometimes there's feelings that maybe some other people are being left behind. I'm not saying that's intentionally, I think, again, constantly working together to make sure that those who have more resources are able to either share those resources or ensure other people have resources. I think Worcester is a wonderful community or I wouldn't have lived here for so long. It's the longest I've ever lived anywhere—even longer than when I was in Tulsa growing up. So, I really believe in Worcester. I think how the city and the community came together during this pandemic really shows the strengths we have. And, for example, I've been involved with the Worcester Together group that meets every Thursday has met every Thursday since the beginning of pandemic where we talk about food inequity, where we address mental health, where we address parent issues, where we make sure we work together to ensure youth receive the programs and services they need. That seniors or those who are considered elderly, are getting the support they need. I love that we all came together. And we got out of our silos, for some of us who might have been in more specific areas really got out and we're all helping each other. I think that's beautiful. And I think that says so much that we are very willing to give and share and learn from each other. And I think if there's a silver lining out of this pandemic, that's something I've seen that we're really willing to work together to address these issues. And I'm very excited about the recent elections we've had in Worcester, both with the School Committee and with the City Council. It's one of the most diverse at least since I've been involved in Worcester. And I'm just very excited about our future. Yes, we have things we need to work on, for sure. But I'm very optimistic on not just our youth, I think really are wonderful advocating for our city and for their needs, but just our new leadership in the city.

SM: What distinct characteristics make Worcester the place that it is?

LH: That's a really good question. I think, you know, we're called the heart of the Commonwealth, right? And I think when you have that type of name, it I think inspires you to, then let's be the heart of the Commonwealth, let's take the lead when it comes to making sure we

have programs and services in place that will make a difference for all community members. Let's make sure that we are a gateway to refugees, to immigrants. And I think we're seeing that with the refugees that have come from Afghanistan, and how we've all come together for that, too. I think there's a real can-do attitude. Because I don't think we always get the resources that like a Boston gets. And yet, we always make it worse—better, not worse, always make it better. And we're able to use, I think, our ability to be creative for problem solving, because we don't necessarily have all of the resources that a Boston would have. I think that makes it really show that we're in this together. So, I want to clarify, I said that we make it work, not worse.

OH: Thank you.

OH: And then the last question in this section is, what do you think women's experiences in Worcester have been generally?

LH: So, I think it's really hard again, to speak for one group, right. And certainly, as a woman of white privilege, my experience will be different from others. And I think that it's the truth that women everywhere get paid less than men with the very same job. Women of color get paid even less than white women so that's a concern. And that's not just in Worcester, for sure. And I think in some ways, perhaps in Worcester, there's more opportunities for women, but still not enough. I also can just share my experience. I was the first woman to become the executive director of the Boys and Girls Club. And that was for 127 years we have been a nonprofit.

OH: That's pretty special.

LH: So, for it to take 127 years for a woman to be an executive director of the Boys and Girls Club of Worcester, says that they're still sometimes what people would call an old boys' network. Again, not just in Worcester, it's everywhere. And I feel like for women, it can be challenging in general. Because I'll give you an example, when a woman looks at a potential job opportunity and she looks at the job description, she feels like she has to check off every single box of what they're looking for. And I feel like men, particularly men of white privilege, look at it and go, "Well, I have that one thing, I'm going to go for it." I feel like there's more pressure on women, to make sure that they have everything before they apply for that job. And then they feel like they have to prove themselves consistently and constantly.

OH: Yeah.

LH: And that could be exhausting. That being said, throughout my life, I've always had wonderful mentors, both female and male, who have really helped me get to my goals. And I do feel like in Worcester there is that network of women professionals who will support you, and people you can just call and say, "Hey, I'm going through this right now, have you ever gone through this? What would you do?" I think that's really incredible. And I'm fortunate because of being a nonprofit leader. There are several nonprofit women professionals, and leadership positions who I feel like we can really network and talk about and work together. I think that's really helpful. But we're not where we need to be. And I think for women of color it is even more

challenging.

OH: Okay, so the next part of the interview is education. So where did you attend schools? So starting as far back as you can think of the school names, and the programs, if there were any special programs.

LH: I'm kind of laughing only because they always say when people ask you all these questions, be careful how you answer them, because they can steal your identity based on opportunity.

OH & SM: [Laugh]

LH: You have all these questions to answer for you know credit cards and things like that. So my first school I went to, I believe, so I only was there for just kindergarten was Assumption School in Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey. And then I went to a small Catholic school in Tulsa, Oklahoma called St. Pius and that was from first grade through eighth grade. And then for high school, I attended Bishop Kelly in Tulsa, Oklahoma. And for college, I attended Regis University, which is a Jesuit school, in Denver, Colorado. And for my master's, I went to Boston University.

OH: Thank you. So, the next question was graduate programs, but you went to Boston University.

LH: Boston University

OH: Perfect. What were your challenges in education, if you had any.

LH: I think, again compared to what other people have gone through, particularly people of color, when it comes to education [they were] minor, certainly insignificant. But I remember looking at some of my report cards, a few years ago, when I was moving my father, to our home in Worcester from Tulsa, Oklahoma, and we were packing up things. And I saw a lot of these old report cards that were of mine, and my brothers and sisters might start looking at mine. And it was really interesting, that through like, fifth or sixth grade, and I had different teachers each year, was talking about how Liz talks too much.

OH: [Laughs]

LH: And I think that's really interesting because, I think again, there are certain ways that women or girls are supposed to behave. And so it's interesting, you know, I probably still talk too much, maybe?

OH: No

LH: I don't think, I don't know. I think that's very interesting to label someone that way. And the impact it could have on someone, yeah, it obviously didn't impact me. And I don't remember, I don't know if maybe my mom didn't show me that part or whatever. I don't remember seeing that. But it was really interesting. That said, otherwise I would say I think I was pretty fortunate. I was from a lower middle-class family. So, education was very important to my parents. Neither graduated from college themselves so they put, I think, a lot of emphasis on education, and really encouraged my brother, sister and I to not only graduate from high school, but to go to college. All three of us also have our master's degree. So I feel like that was really important to our parents, because they felt like it might have held them back sometimes in their career. And I think nothing was pressured on me, but I remember from a very early age that there was an expectation that I would go to college certainly and, you know, I think that it's important to have expectations, right.

OH: Yeah.

LH: And it's important for people to care about you to let them know what your expectations are. But I kind of remember always, even when I was little knowing that I was going to go to college, and I think at the time I wanted to be a teacher.

OH: That was the next question. Upon finishing your formal education. What did you see as your options?

LH: Well, I remember when I was a kid, I wanted to be a teacher, nun, actress, and, you know, that didn't happen. So, when I got my college degree, I was thinking more journalism or teaching, but then I did two years a Jesuit Volunteer Corps. And the experiences taught me so much, I learned so much. And I think it was wonderful to work in Great Falls where I was introduced to many of the clients I was working with who were from the Blackfeet Nation. And so that was really wonderful to learn more about their culture. And then in Worcester working at Rainbow Child Development Center. It just made me think about maybe, that I could be doing more possibly, if I got a degree in social work. And so, I did change my path. And after I got my master's in social work, I worked at Department of Children and Families, but it was called Department of Social Services at the time, and then stayed home for a while with my kids, and then started doing consulting work because I wanted to be able to have flexible hours. And I was able to do fundraising and marketing because one of my degrees as a bachelor's was in communications, and got to where I was doing fundraising for capital campaigns, such as the Boys and Girls Club of Worcester new building, which is now 16 years old. I also helped out with the Hanover Theater capital campaign. And it was through my involvement, working at Foresight Partners that did those two capital campaigns that I was invited to consider being the director of development at the Boys and Girls Club. And since then, I've worked at the Boys and Girls Club. So, it was a really wonderful experience.

OH: Thank you. What support networks and mentors have been important to you? I know you talked about your mother. Are there any others?

LH: I've been very blessed. I've had a lot of different mentors. One of my earlier ones, besides my parents, was a music teacher I had, who didn't mind I was a talkative kid ...

OH: [Laughs]

LH: ...and helped me channel my energy, I think, into singing and acting and her name, her name is Mrs. Miller. And she took me to my first ballet; I saw the Nutcracker at the Tulsa Ballet. And it was beautiful. And she's always been very supportive, sends me a card every birthday. And then I've had some wonderful teachers, both through elementary through my master's program, who have been very supportive, and who've pushed me and said, "You know, I think you would even do better," or, "Have you have you thought about doing this?" I've been fortunate with having some excellent mentors that way and role models. And then professionally, I would say at Rainbow Child Development Center, rich artist zone, and Jonathan Blake, were really good about challenging me and getting me involved in the community. And I think that really helped me decide that I wanted to go the social work route. And then I worked at Foresight Partners, which was run by a very strong woman, Mary DiBara, and her believing in me even though I had taken a few years off to raise my two daughters really made a difference because she said, "You have great skills and I want you to work for me, or work with me." So I think I've been very fortunate. And then I would say Linda Cavaoli, the former executive director of YWCA of Central Mass who just retired last June, has been a wonderful mentor for me. But I have a lot there's almost too many to even talk about. But I really believe mentoring makes a difference for any individual. Which is why at the Boys and Girls Club, I make sure we have strong mentoring programs, because I want to make sure every kid has a Mrs. Miller. I think it's really important that you have someone who believes in you, who will challenge you, and sometimes will see things in you that you don't see. Mentoring is really important. I believe it can save lives.

SM: So now on to work. What was your first ever job?

LH: My first job was at Dunkin Donuts. I just turned 16 or close to it. I knew I had to get a work permit. So maybe I was a little bit younger than 16. And it was in Tulsa, Oklahoma. And it taught me a lot because you learned how the importance of being on time, the importance of customer service and even if people aren't treating you well that you still need to be respectful and also taught me how to make donuts. I remember that job because I also made a lot of friends there because a lot of them were around my age. It was great to also socialize afterwards and everything. And I remember the doughnut tree dress.

SM & OH: [Laughs]

LH: Thank goodness, they don't make them wear that anymore. But it was literally a dress that had different trees, but like a tree that had donuts growing on it. It was hideous.

OH: That's funny .

LH: But I remember, I'll never forget that dress. But you know, you learned so much with that first job, because it teaches you skills that you're going to need for any professional job.

SM: I know you've mentioned a few past jobs or places that you've worked up. But are there any more jobs that you've haven't mentioned? And like, what do you do now ?

LH: More so in college, I did work study and when I was there, I think I did a good job. But there were times when I would call out because of school or whatever. I also was a special event planner for the school for one year. And that was really fun. Planning everything from the dances to the ski trips. It was a lot of work, but it was really fun. And then I was the editor of the school paper my senior year. That taught me a lot about multitasking, writing the truth, and being willing to then take what the consequences may be if you write something that maybe the school didn't like or someone else didn't like that. If you're reporting, what you believe is factual and the truth that you still need to stand by it. So, I thought that was really important. I think certainly something my mom always talked about, you have to do what's right. And then sometimes there might be repercussions, but you need to do it anyway. And I feel like I learned a lot through that experience. And then I had to, for my master's program, I had to intern at Department of Children, Families, again, that was called DSS at the time, and the New England Home for Little Wanderers working at their family intervention program where we would go on site at a family's home and work with them to provide various services that they need. And I learned a lot there. Did some newspaper writing when I was home with the kids, then they called them stringers, when they just hire you to maybe cover a city council meeting or whatever. I did that for a while and did fundraising after that, and then have been here for 16 years at the Boys and Girls Club.

SM: What has this work meant to your current status?

LH: Well, I have to tell you, it's been an incredible honor, working at the Boys and Girls Club of Worcester, because I feel like this organization has done so much for so many years. We are 133 years old so way before I was ever involved, it was doing great work and I believe it's continuing to do great work. And what I like about Boys and Girls Clubs in general is they meet the needs of the community they serve. So, there's I think 4000, over 4000 Boys and Girls Clubs in the US. If you've been to one Boys and Girls Club, you've only been to one Boys and Girls Club. Every Boys and Girls Club is going to be different. And I love that I feel like our clubs in Great Brook Valley, Palmer Village, and in the Main South area, truly represent our kids and our community. And I'm really proud of the incredibly talented and diverse team members that do so much incredible work with our kids and families. But I also want to acknowledge how great our kids are. Unlike regular childcare, our kids decide every day to walk here to get here. So, they're making really good choices and they're showing great leadership. And I'm proud of the work that they're doing. We're providing some resources and support but ultimately, it's up to the kids and it's always a real privilege to see them when they first start with us they're age five and then graduate from high school and then go on to college and just see their transformation in their growth and everything that they've done for themselves. It's, it's amazing.

SM: What were/are your primary responsibilities in terms of housework and childcare.

LH: So, I'm very fortunate that I have a wonderful partner. Like I mentioned, I've been married to Matt for almost 30 years, and it's very shared. For a few years, I did stay home with our daughters, but I never felt alone, because he was so involved. And, you know, it always kills me when I hear someone say, "Oh, my husband's babysitting the kids." He's not babysitting, they're his kids. I never felt that way with Matt. Matt really has been very involved and a true partner when it comes to our kids. He has great relationships with them. And I think also, our daughters have learned what partnership is because of how he and I work together. And that's good to know, that's important to me, because I want them to hopefully also be in relationships where they feel like they have a partner. And to be honest, my husband does most of the cooking, he is a far better chef than I could ever be. But, you know, we shared a lot when it came to supporting our kids' education and the cleaning so I never felt like this was my role. We really worked together.

SM: Some additional questions are, do you share this with anyone?

LH: I'm not sure what you mean.

OH: You've already answered that. Sharing like the response.

LH: Oh, yes, absolutely.

OH: You can go to the next you can go to 20.

SM: Sorry, I thought I skipped the question. How have you balanced different priorities, responsibilities, roles and interests in your life?

LH: I think it's impossible to completely balance. I think sometimes it may be harder for a woman. It's, it's a lot to juggle, right? And I think you have to be gentle with yourself and know there's times when you just can't do it all. I do believe women definitely can have an outside job on top of working and taking care of their children. Absolutely. We can handle it all that way. But what I mean by you can't do it all is there's sometimes gonna be times when maybe work is a little bit of the short end of the stick. Or maybe the house looks like a wreck sometimes, right? Because obviously your priority probably if you have children would be your children first. But I think what often happens is you do so much at your workplace, you do so much with your family, that really what gets the short end of the stick is your own self care. I think the older I've gotten, the more I've understood that, that I probably wasn't doing anyone any favors when sometimes I was so sleep deprived or didn't really focus on my health at all. Because ultimately at the end, right, if you're not taking care of yourself, how are you gonna be able to do as well as you want when it comes to taking care of your job or other responsibilities or your kids when they're young. So, you know, I think it is hard to balance. And I think there are unfair expectations with women, especially regarding that. I think just like we were talking about how someone will say, "Oh, isn't that wonderful? He's babysitting his children." Do we get accolades

if we're, I don't know, bringing our kids to the park and helping them on the swing? No, but if a man does it's, "Oh, isn't that so sweet?" I think there's still definitely sexism and unfair gender roles, expectations that I think really impact women and their ability to thrive sometimes. And yet we always seem to conquer it and figure it out. But it does seem unfair.

SM: And then, what do you think, are the pros and cons of the path you have chosen?

LH: Well, I mean, I don't know if I'd do it any other way. You know, I don't believe in having regrets. There's times when I said, "Oh, I could learn from that, I could have done it differently." And so that's great, you know, you're going to make mistakes. And I often tell people that I'm working with that are younger than me, "I've made mistakes so you won't have to." Let me share some of mine. [laughs]. But I wouldn't change it any way. I feel like I've been very blessed to have a lot of different opportunities to learn, whether it be education wise, or living in several different states. I have loved that I've had the opportunity to travel out of the states and learn that way. And I don't think I'd change a thing. Certainly there's opportunities for me to continue to grow and learn. But that's part of my path. That's how I see it at least. And I think I'm getting better at being more patient with myself. But that takes time.

OH: Thank you. So the next section is politics and community involvement. So do you consider yourself active politically?

LH: I believe that my role at the Boys and Girls Club is to advocate for what is in the best interest of the youth I serve. So, in that way, yes, I think I am very involved. I've never sought a political office or anything like that. But I really believe it's very important that whether you have my job, or whether you live in a community, it's very important to be aware of what's going on in your community and advocating for things that are important to you, that will hopefully also impact other people's lives.

OH: So I know you've touched on this, but have you been involved in volunteer community work?

LH: Yes. When my children were young, I did Girl Scouts, where I was the Girl Scout leader for about, I don't seven or eight years. I've always volunteered in the classroom, for them, with them throughout, I think throughout elementary, and then once they're in middle school, they don't really want you involved, which I understand. But you know, that was a wonderful opportunity. But I had those opportunities because I had flexible jobs. And so I realized that also that I was very blessed to have that. And not every parent is able to do that. And then volunteered at my church for many years, teaching CCD. I serve on boards right now, a couple of them are 2Gether We Eat which is a food equity program that focuses on hydroponic gardens and fruit farms, and food deserts. I'm also involved with the Main South CDC, I recently resigned from their board, but I'm still very much involved with them and support their work here. Continue to work on making Main South even stronger. It's a great neighborhood here and a lot of great individuals. And I also serve on a local credit union board. I think it's very important to be involved in your community.

OH: I know you talked about CCD but what role has religion played in your life?

LH: I think it's changed a lot throughout my life. When I was a child, all I knew was Catholicism. Once I went to college, I learned more about other religions, about independent and individual spirituality. And so, I think I've definitely changed throughout my life and I really love learning and hearing from other people about their religions, but also about people who just have this higher power or spirituality that's not organized. I don't, I don't think you have to be involved in organized religion to be spiritual at all. I think whatever works for you is meaningful, for you is important. And I also think you do not have to believe in any type of power, higher power, if that's not for you. That's also okay. I think, you know, ultimately, it's about being good people, right, and doing our very best. And I don't think that has necessarily anything to do with religion.

OH: Thank you.

SM: So, the next topic is health. So if at any point you're like, uncomfortable with answering your question, that's all right. So how have health issues impacted your life or those in your family?

LH: So, you know, I think, just like maybe education or other components of your life, there's a journey. And I think many of us have health journeys. Seven years ago, I was diagnosed with breast cancer, and I'm in remission. It's been seven years, I went through radiation and other treatments. But I think it makes you, [pauses] one, realize how you can't take anything for granted, including your health. Two, it really helped me focus on what is really important to me and often, it reaffirms what's really important to you. Like family, no matter what, is going to be my top priority. And, three, I think it makes you look at your own mortality, right? And know that you may not be here, no one's here forever, none of us get out of this alive, right? And so just making sure that you really do everything you can to live a good life. To make a difference. And to share your story with people. So "Hey, I just want to let you know I'm here. If you have any questions, I've been through it." Everyone's dreams are different, certainly. And that would be the same thing with breast cancer, just because you've had it doesn't mean it's going to be the same for them. But I think it's really important to support people if you have that opportunity. And so I have made that something that's important to me is to be able to reach out to folks if they're struggling with cancer, or breast cancer, and let them know that I'm here if they would like to talk about it. But it definitely makes you see life and living in a different way. And I think in that way, I feel that it was a gift for me to—it makes you really appreciate things even more.

SM: What are your experiences in accessing quality, affordable health care?

LH: Well, I'm very fortunate in that I have been able to access health care through my workplace. Health care should not be a privilege, it should be something that everyone should be able to have access to. Good health care should be able to be happening everywhere in your community, not just in areas that have more resources. So certainly, health care is something that I think needs to continue to be addressed. There's so many inequities, particularly impacting people of color. They do not always have the same resources and opportunities when it comes to

access to health. And that's very concerning. You know, I think the pandemic also did show the inequities. People of color were more impacted with the COVID-19 virus than those who were white. And, you know, I think until we address the cost of medical insurance, the cost of health care, and address the racial inequities, we're not going to have a strong community because again, health impacts every component of our lives.

SM: And then whose health care are you responsible for besides your own?

LH: Well, my oldest now is no longer on our health care as she has graduated from college and once you hit 26. But she has access to health care through her workplace. My husband is under mine just because we were looking to see which one had the better health care, insurance, and also with him working in, in Rhode Island. We wanted to have it where it will be easier for access, because sometimes doctors won't, it won't be covered. And then my youngest daughter is under 26, so she's still with us. So, yes. But I'm also responsible for the well being of my father, who's 88 and a half, he's not under my health insurance, but I make sure he gets to all his doctor appointments and services, health proxy and advocate.

SM: Thank you.

OH: Do you take him to his doctor's appointments?

LH: I do, I take him to his doctor's appointments. And he is a very, very strong and healthy. But it's, it's nice, I think, for him to be able to bounce off any concerns or questions he has, and for me to listen and advocate for him. But it's his health, so therefore, I'm only there really more to support. And he has a very good doctor that he trusts. So that's really important, too.

OH: So, we have some wrap up questions. How do you get through tough times? What kinds of thoughts keep you going?

LH: I think just acknowledging that everyone goes through tough times and that this too shall pass, right? I don't tend to wallow. I'm sure there's been times when I have probably for a day or two might have been like, oh, woe is me about something. But I think, again, the older I've gotten, the more I can put it in perspective, probably because of just my experiences that we've had a hard time and everyone does have some challenges, you realize that this too shall soon pass. And it always does. And sometimes a challenge actually can make you stronger. But I'm also fortunate that I have a great family, great friends. I'm able to talk about my issues if I want to. And I think not everyone always has that for sure. And so, I think that's helpful. But I think really just I've always been in the mindset that something good will come out of it. Maybe I'll learn something, maybe I'll be able to make a change that I need a change. Because sometimes it's something that you have to kind of look at yourself and go, "What am I contributing to this?" I think sometimes it's hard to look in yourself and say, "How did I contribute? What could I have done differently," but I think you grow more when you're able to do that. And sometimes you're not ready to do it right away, but then looking back and

going, “Wow, I could probably handled this situation better and maybe it wouldn’t have so impacted my life had I maybe addressed it in a different way.” So it's just a learning experience and obviously when you're going through it, it's sometimes harder to say, “Oh, it's gonna get better.” But the truth is, it typically will get better.

OH: Yeah. How do you define success in your life? Has this definition changed over time?

LH: Yes. Well, I mean, when I was a kid, I wanted to be a nun, teacher, actress. I think money has never been the predominant reason why I've ever taken a job for sure. I mean, not social work or nonprofit leader, we don't get paid as well as others. So, I think success for me is whether I'm making a difference.

OH: Yeah.

LH: I don't mean that in that kumbaya way like, look at me. I don't mean it that way. But more like have I been able to work with great people who are doing great work and contributing to the community in the way that to me, it feels successful. Also just seeing my kids growing and happy. That makes me happy. And whenever I'm having a bad day at work, I go downstairs to our youth development program areas, and see kids learning and laughing and doing everything from swimming to using a recording studio to dance. And I think it makes me think about how you're making that difference, you're not alone. And that because of you and your team's commitment, there's some really good things going on that hopefully will continue to support and transform the community.

OH: So based on your life experience, what advice would you give to women of today and future generations?

LH: The advice we give to women is to find a mentor, if you don't have one, and find different types of mentors. There might be one more that you want to use to kind of bounce off professional things that are going on. And then there's other type of mentors that might be more like life coaches, or that type of scenario where you're able to maybe share personal struggles. I think it's really important to, even when you're older, to feel like there's people that you can talk to, who maybe have had more experiences or knowledge in a certain area. And never be afraid to ask for help. I think that's so important. But also believe in yourself, because there can be times when you're going to feel like someone's trying to limit you because you're a woman. And that one person's opinion of you is just one person's opinion of you. And not to let that prevent you from going for your goals and dreams. And if you don't have anyone in your life that can support that, I would say look for people who can. And then challenge yourself and recognize that, even if you don't check off every box, for example, in a job description, still go for it, still go for it. And just be gentle with yourself and knowing you need to take a break, know when you need to say no, that's something I'm still working on [laughs]. And knowing you need to ask for help. And celebrate the little things too, not just these big achievements. Celebrate the small ones, too, and recognize how far you've gone. But also make sure you also mentor others and that you support others. I think that's really important to be able to do that, too, and help the next

person in line. It needs to be I think mutual. Right? We need to help each other too.

OH: So, we are working to tell a fuller story of the history of women than has been recorded in the past, what should we be, sorry... What should we be sure to include? Like any specifics, you think that needs to be told?

LH: I think during this time, probably even asking some questions about the pandemic might be interesting. I mean, I think I probably talked a little bit about the pandemic, but I didn't talk a whole lot about it, because that wasn't asked. I think, again, recognizing the many different paths to success and making sure that we don't just interview women who have titles that indicate leadership, because I can tell you have a lot of different women who are leaders and may not have that title that really make that impact. I think that's really important too.

OH: Is there anyone else you would suggest we talked to?

LH: I don't know who you have so it's kind of hard for me to make that suggestion. I think, you know, making sure that you talk to a diverse group of women, whether it be different industries, different backgrounds and cultures, that would be really important because I think with Worcester, we had that diversity. So, it'd be important if we're going to be covering women's history that we make sure we definitely interview folks who represent diversity.

OH: So that's the end of our questions. Was there anything you wanted to be sure to include or anything you want us to record while we're still recording? Anything you want to?

LH: [nods her head no].

SM: Thank you.

OH: Thank you.