

Interviewee: Maryann Johnson  
Interviewers: Bridget Boyle and Megan Watts  
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Transcribers: Bridget Boyle and Megan Watts  
Overseen by Prof. Carl Robert Keyes and Prof. Caryl Nuñez, Assumption College



Maryann Johnson was born on September 11th, 1985 in Salisbury, England, but raised in the small town of Bath, Maine. Maryann grew up in a sailor's mansion with her parents, older brother and older sister. Following in her sister's shadow, Maryann idolized her older sister growing up, spending her school vacations visiting her sister at college in New York. In 2003, Maryann began college at Clark University, majoring in nonprofit management with a minor in women's studies. While at college, she met her now husband. Today they have young twin girls and are expecting their third child. She discusses how her husband opened her eyes to the many different parts of Worcester from the arts to the food. Maryann is currently living in Millbury, Massachusetts, and working at Oakhill Community Development Corporation in Worcester as the Chief Development Officer. Maryann finds her career both professionally and personally satisfying. In her free time, she is involved in tap dancing classes, and aspires to one day, establish a nonprofit theatre company for kids. In the interview, Maryann discusses her values of family and having an open mind, wanting "to be remembered well, to make a difference, and to create a good life for her family."

**Quotation I think I always knew that I would work. I never thought about not working. But my parents also gave back to the community, and my grandmother did too. I feel that kind of inspired me to...work in the nonprofit world. My dad worked in human services, my mother worked in education..I think we were just raised to give back and be there for people.**

**BB:** So, we first need permission with you just saying, your name and today's date. Just that you give us permission to record this.

**MJ:** Mm, Okay. I give you guys permission to record this. Maryann Johnson and it's October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

**BB:** Beautiful. So, tell us a little about your history, like when were you born and a little bit about your childhood.

**MJ:** So, I was born on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1985 in Salisbury, England. My parents had lived there for a few years. And they ended up moving back to their home town of Bath, Maine, which is where I grew up. So, I grew up in the really small town of Bath Maine. My high school was like 160 children for all the grades. And I had two older siblings, I was the youngest –well I am still the youngest by far. My sister is nine years older than me and my brother is six, so I was very much the baby and had the house to myself for quite awhile, and was probably more spoiled in

that way. But I also got ---I feel like when you take tests and you think about who raised you, I think my siblings also played a big role in that because they were so much older. So, I feel like I'm a mix of all four of my family. And they--- and then I--- we lived in the same town as my grandmother and my aunt, so I spent a lot of time with them as well.

**MW:** So, do you have two sisters? Or two brothers?

**MJ:** I have an older brother and an older sister. My brother is the middle child.

**MW:** So, you'd definitely say kind of, almost, that your siblings kind of mentored you growing up?

**MJ:** Yeah, definitely. My sister is always, was always my hero, in everything. My mom would get like jealous cause she'd always be like, "Who's your hero?" and I'd always be like "My sister..." all the time. And we were always really close, we have a lot of nicknames for each other. We still talk all the time on messenger and I talk to them, you know, them on the phone a lot and we're all ---we're very close. It's not normal I don't think [laughter]. We're all very close! And I just welcomed my first niece last year, Eleanor, my brother had a little girl so it's exciting. And I've got twin girls myself.

**MW:** Awe! Congratulations! That's exciting!

**MJ:** Thank you!

**MW:** So, you'd definitely say that your family is a big part of your life still? Childhood, adulthood, close?

**MJ:** Yeah. [laughter] We're really close. And I go up to Maine a lot and my family tries to see each other as much as possible, and talk, and we're always all in the loop about what's going on.

**MW:** So just a bit about your education, where did you attend elementary school or high school? Was it all up in Bath Maine?

**MJ:** Yeah, it was all up in Bath, Maine. I went to Dike Newell. I had amazing teachers. I'm actually still really pretty close with my second-grade teacher. Nope, first grade teacher, Mrs. Fullerton, she dances at the same dance studio I danced at and I still go back every year. I dance here, too, but I go back every year, and I'm in recital with my mom and now my kids. So, I still talk to her. I went to Bath Middle School and then Morris High School, which has the oldest alumni association in the country! And my grandma went there, graduated in, [whispered] I forget what year. Sorry, my grandma went there, my mom went there, my brother went there, my sister went there, and I went there. So, we had, we have a pretty strong alumni connection with that.

**MW:** That's great! Just a technical question for the transcription, how do you spell your elementary school's name?

**MJ:** D-i-k-e N-e-w-e-l-l.

**MW:** Okay, I just wanted to make sure, I spelled it correctly! Thank you!

**MJ:** Yeah!

**BB:** [whispered] Oh, what was I going to ask? What was your neighborhood like growing up?

**MJ:** So, we moved a little bit more than average. But I grew up--- everywhere in Bath it's just like a very small town. Everyone knows you. I spent a lot of time at my grandma's house when I was younger. And she lived just in a nice little neighborhood I knew. I walked to school with kids up and down the street. She was my --- they listed her as my primary care giver, so I could stay at the same elementary school every year, even if we lived on the other side of town. And then when I got out of elementary school, it didn't matter anymore and I went to the middle school. And we lived in actually a sea captain's mansion. And it was really awesome. It was a gorgeous house to live in, but it burned down when I was seven. So, half of the house burned down. And we lost--- my brother and my parents, they basically lost almost everything they had because it was their half of the house. My brother and my sister ---my brother and I were on the other half. It started with a fire in the walls because it was such --- it was like a 200-year-old house and there were brick connects to the wood, and all of a sudden that night it just started. So they, my parents ---my dad came in the room to check on me. I was sleeping on a couch in our parlor. He came in--- he was having a dinner party---came to check on me and the fire was in every wall around me, and I was sound asleep. So, needless to say, we all got out safe. Bunny got out safe, cats got out safe, actually the firemen saved all of our china. They were amazing, they used the cupola, which is like the square room, as a chimney!

**BB:** Okay...

**MJ:** And vented it out, so my parents' closet, and their room, and my sister's room, were pretty bad. And they lost a lot of stuff, especially to heat, smoke and heat damage. I can still smell the smell it's very weird, but I was about seven when that happened. So--- but we lived in that house and restored it for a while. And then my parents bought a house, I think I was just leaving middle school, like eighth grade, and we grew up there and it was right across the street to a convenience store. And I had friends on that street, and friends that walked by, so it was really small town.

**BB:** When did -- when did you move to Worcester?

**MJ:** When I was a freshman in college. So, it would have been 2003.

**BB:** Where did you go to college?

**MJ:** Clark!

**BB:** Oh okay! What was your major?

**MJ:** I didn't know what I wanted to do. I did law at first, and then I went to political science. So, my undergrad is in political science and women's studies. But I also danced 20 hours a week, I was the president of the [?] choir, I did a lot of other, a variety of things and I still didn't know what I wanted to do until my senior year when I did an internship at WCAC [Worcester Community Action Council], which is a nonprofit in Worcester. I figured out what I wanted to do, so I went to fifth-year but I did five-and-a-half-year because I didn't qualify--- I didn't apply in time. And, so, I got my Master's in Nonprofit Management from Clark in 2009.

**MW:** And when did you graduate? It was just four years for your undergraduate?

**MJ:** Yeah!

**MW:** Okay.

**BB:** Did, did you come right here after graduating?

**MJ:** So, I met my now husband my senior year in college in a class. He was taking sign language with me. And we flirted all year long, and I was dating someone else, [laughter] and as soon as I broke up with him, he asked me out. I had no idea he liked me. I was like ridiculously stupid. And our first date he took me to One Eleven. I had no idea where I was going, I wore like a short skirt, inappropriate clothes, and I walked into One Eleven, and it was very really weird. And he had food poisoning, so he didn't eat anything. And I didn't know what to order because I grew up not eating red meat. So, I ended up getting this huge piece of veal and I couldn't eat that because I didn't know what I was doing, and he didn't eat anything. And it was like, hilarious for a first date, but our second date was KFC [Kentucky Fried Chicken], I think.

[laughter]

**BB:** Much easier!

**MJ:** Much easier! And we've been together ever since, and he's probably the reason I stayed around here. So...

**BB:** Is he from the area?

**MJ:** He grew up in Brookfield!

**BB:** Okay!

**MJ:** Yeah. He went to Duke and then he finished up his degree at Clark. And then he just finished his master's, I think last year. His work paid for it, so he only did as many classes as his work would pay for. He was going to pay for it, if he had to.

**BB:** Oh goodness no! When did you start working here? You said 2010?

**MJ:** Yes. So, in grad school, I actually applied for a job on Craigslist, which seems creepy now. [laughter] And went and got the interview, and it was for a startup nonprofit called Baby's Breath. And they were looking to create a home for kids, for infants who were in the foster system and didn't--- and the whole goal was to keep their attachment to their families. So, it was to create a safe place for a family to visit, and the goal was reunification. It was actually an Assumption professor's dream, Teresa Rafferty. She's amazing. Unfortunately, by the time she got it almost up and running, DCF [Department of Children and Families] had changed their laws, so that group care was no longer an option for infants. So, we ended up trying to figure out what to do with it. Long story short, we start, opened a crisis nursery there where if a family--- it was pretty cool actually. If a family was in crisis, like I took an intake with someone in labor and we would take their older children. Or if someone had to go into mental health facility, someone had to go away for a funeral, someone had post-partum depression, and needed respite with twins, we would take their kids for a set amount of time. We wouldn't take custody of them, we would keep them safe, we would keep them staffed, we'd keep them fed, in that safe environment until they could take them back. And, so, we were licensed through DCF for that care but unfortunately, between the original idea and that idea, it all got messed up. So, I started there as really a part-time grant writer, and then I ended up becoming like second in command into the board and doing like intakes, and organizing, and staffing, and a bunch of variety of things that now I'm like, "What did I do? How did I ever do that?" And it was a very small staff at all times. So, there was a director and me and then, like, caregivers. And I even did caregivers there. I remember taking care of twins, like Christmas Eve, and rocking them to sleep and they were so cute! And they're actually they're --- we do Toys for Tots here and there are still people that I know through that program that come in and see me every year. And we catch up about their kids. So, I started there, they unfortunately closed. We couldn't get the funding, we couldn't get the sustainability, there was no state funding. It was such a different program than what are open in other states, but it just didn't, it didn't work for a variety of reasons. And my boss right now was on the board of directors, and we've been working really, really close together writing grants. He's an excellent fundraiser, and when he found out they were closing, he actually created a position for me, which they really needed here as a fundraiser in marketing. And I was hired here and started here, so I already knew my boss.

**BB:** So, what exactly do you do here?

**MJ:** I am the chief development officer, so I am in charge of fundraising, and grant writing, marketing, programing, and planning, program development and event planning. So, I am always looking for new pots of money. I'm also, I guess, measurement as well which kind of isn't

planning. We did a huge data survey this summer in the neighborhood. We had six college interns that went door to door and got 230 surveys and 180 observations, and put that all together. So, we're a really small staff. We have our boss who oversees and is like the external person, and does a lot of awesome stuff in the community, and is always out and about.

[door bell ringing]

1: And Anita is the CEO [Chief Executive Officer]. And [door bell ringing again] she does all the finance and all the other stuff and all of the numbers and has been here 20 years, and is just amazing. We all kind of do community engagement and we run--- our program is the head of the homeownership center which is down on Green Street. And they do ---we do community development up here, they do more home ownership programming down there.

**MW:** If you want to go and get that we can pause?

**MJ:** No

**MW:** You sure? I just wanted to double check!

**BB:** What changes have you seen over the course of being in Worcester since you came here, in college to today?

**MJ:** Well, I feel like I was really naive in college about the good things in Worcester. I feel like I was really, really sheltered. I didn't have a car until my senior year. I didn't really get off campus. And my husband actually started showing me all the great food, all the great venues, all the different things to do in and around Worcester. And like the little community things like Davis Farmland which really isn't in Worcester, but is like an asset to Worcester.

**BB:** It is close yeah!

**MJ:** The botanical garden. I mean One Eleven, you know we always love – what is the name of my favorite Italian place? I haven't been there in so long!

**BB:** Via?

**MJ:** No... Sorry, it's on...

**BB:** I don't know many Italian restaurants in Worcester!

**MJ:** It's on Shrewsbury Street, but it's like lesser known and they're always empty but they're really good! We've been going there for years, and Baba, I had never had sushi until we started dating and now we've been going to Baba since they opened ten years ago. So, we're like

obsessed. We go whenever we have date night and I'm not pregnant! I wish I could go now. [laughter] And actually the first meal after I had my kids, my in-laws brought me sushi.

**BB:** That's a reward!

**MJ:** It was a reward! [laughter] So I think I just learned a lot about what the culture was more---- because I feel sometimes when you're in college, you're really isolated to wherever you go. I mean, I knew some of the self a lot. Wendy's, the pizza place right there, the coffee shop, the Price Chopper. Basically, that was all I knew! So, I think it just opened my eyes to a lot of different things.

**BB:** Have you seen a lot of change in women's rights in Worcester? Especially with your major being women's studies...

**MJ:** Yeah! I haven't. I actually thought Worcester has been pretty progressive when it comes to that. Ever since I got here, and I think Clark is a very progressive campus in that. We as an agency, we have a lot more females on staff. When I worked for Baby's Breath, most of the ward was females. All the staff was females. So, I feel like I have been put in a lot of situations where I don't know if I would even see if women weren't empowered, because there were just so many women empowered that I have encountered in Worcester. There aren't as many gender stereotypes like as I saw maybe being in Maine, or even as I go back there and people falling into the same goals [doorbell ringing and buzzer to open door].

**MJ:** [ to guest] I'm in an interview, so you can't stay in here, but you can use the bathroom if you really need to!

**MJ** Back to us: So, are you still taping?

**BB** and **MW:** Yeah!

**MJ:** Okay, so yes! I don't think I've been put in situations where I would see it, because I haven't seen it at all here

**BB:** What about growing up and your personal life back in Maine?

**MJ:** My personal life was always my family, was not conformed, or felt if anyone had to do anything or---we were raised to be really open-minded in what we wanted to do and where we went. All three of us went to college. My brother, and I was actually the closest that went anywhere to Worcester. My sister went to Hofstra in Long Island and then SUNY [State University of New York] Stonybrook and Wisconsin, whatever she's a professor now so she's been in school a long time! And my brother went to Chicago. My parents always kept every door open to us that we wanted, so I feel like I didn't see that. I saw it a lot in families when I was growing up that. We were a shipbuilding town, so there were a lot of primarily men workings at

the shipyard, and females staying home. There weren't ---I don't remember many of my friends' mothers having jobs when I was growing up, but my mom always worked and was in education.

**BB:** Did seeing your parents both work inspire you to have a career yourself? Or did you always want to work as a part of your personality?

**MJ:** Yeah, I think I always just knew that I would work. I never thought about not working. But my parents also just gave back a lot to the community and I think that kind of --- and my grandmother did, too. I feel that just kind of inspired me to do something that wasn't--- to work in the nonprofit world. I think they inspired me to do something that's not straight forward. My dad worked in human services, my mother worked in education, but they also always had. And my grandma, too, had people they were helping in different ways they were giving back to the community. It was just part of the norm. And we had a big Thanksgiving celebration and anyone that didn't have anywhere to go could come to our house, and you know, different things like that. So, I think we were just raised to give back and to be there for people.

**MW:** Do you think that made you different than a lot of people in Bath growing up? Or do you think that was just kind of the community?

**MJ:** I think it was. There were some that were more closed off, but I actually feel like Worcester or Massachusetts in general, is a little more closed off in general than Maine is in that way. And there's just more of a sense--- like my husband was ---we were in Bath. I mean he's been to Maine a bunch of times, but we usually just go to my parents and go to dinner. We don't go out and do stuff. And we went up once and I wanted to stay in the round hotel in Portland, Maine, which is funny. But I really wanted to stay there for years. So, we left the kids at my parents' house for a night and we spent a night in Portland. And he was taken by how talkative people were to him. And how like the cab driver was really interested in Worcester, and he had a connection to Worcester. And he wanted to know how we were connected to that. And I just feel like people in Massachusetts don't talk that much, and he has grown up here and I don't even think he sees it. But I think in the beginning he thought that I was crazy that I talked to everyone. And now I think he's more used to it, but I think that maybe I have even stopped talking to people as much. I mean I try to still be open and talk, but there's such a closed off culture here in a way. As much as there are many nonprofits and a lot of people that give back, I think that it's even ---I have this Queen of England over here in my window. Two people have ever asked me about it! And you can see it from the street. And I just think that stuff like that, that like people don't always communicate about that, but kind of see and keep moving. People don't ask what's going on or--- you know in Maine if I was on the side of the road, ten people would stop. If I was on the side of the road here, I don't even know if anyone would stop! So, it's just kind of a different culture, but there are so many more nonprofits and resources for people here, that's kind of funny to see the comparison. There's not a lot of resources in Maine for people, but here there are more, but in Maine maybe the people are more giving. Usually!

**MW:** So, was the plan to always kind of stay centered near Worcester after college or did it just kind of happen that way because of your future husband was based around it?

**MJ:** Kind of happened that way because of my future husband. I didn't know what I was going to do at all. And I think my job also contributed to it because we didn't get married right away. And we didn't move in together right away. I think finding a job here I was passionate about contributed to it, probably almost as much, if maybe a little less. But yeah, so it wasn't always the plan. If you had asked me in college, I probably would have said I never would have stayed here. I still stayed very connected when I went to school at Clark. [?] Maine did a lot of dance recitals and stuff in Maine, I mean it wasn't like I was left and didn't stay in touch with people. I still stayed in touch with people.

**BB:** How do you balance your family and your work life? Have you found that easy or...

**MJ:** Well I am, I am blessed working here, where I was able to work from home a few days a week for a long time with my kids, so that was good. But that also means that there's flexibility here, that I have to do nights and different things, and pull off deadlines that people should be able to. [laughter] So, I think I work for a really great company that supported me. I was like the only pregnant person I've known here, but supported me through my pregnancy. I worked from home on bed rest. My boss came over and worked with me on a project we were working on. It kept me sane. Afterwards, he came over when I was working from home, and we always seemed to --- we're a really great team, and a family almost. We get things done! So, I think fortunately I am allowed to have that work-life balance here. And my boss knows that when we're stressed out or tired about something going on at home, we're not going to do our best and so ---and then my husband knows the same things. So sometimes each has to give to make it work. But juggling two kids, and going to be three, and work is a struggle I think for anyone. I just try to get my sleep! And stay on top of things and I have a lot of "to do" lists on my phone, and a lot on my calendar, this calendar is like my bible! If it's not on here, I probably won't remember it!

**MW:** You would definitely say that if you were at another job maybe the business or establishment wouldn't be as supportive or as kind of that whole accommodation?

**MJ:** I doubt it! Yeah. But then I hear --- I was in 40 under 40, and I heard other girls my age talking about also working from home with their kids. So, I don't --- I felt like I was alone in that and I have friends that do it in other places, but I feel like it is actually more common and people just don't talk about it as much. The flexibility, I mean you have to with a family! If my, my kids get out of school now at 2:45 p.m. and they go to school at --- they're in pre-K [kindergarten] still and they go to school at 8:30 a.m. and get out at 2:45.p.m., and so every day of the week they literally do something different after school. We have my mother-in-law helping, my husband helping, me helping, they stay extra one day, actually today! I mean it's just like a constant juggle to try to make it work and we've been fortunate enough to be able to juggle it through the years.

**MW:** Would you say that your plan has always been to have a family and a career? Like in tandem?

**MJ:** I don't know if I've ever thought about it. But probably, yes. I mean I don't think--- it's just what I thought would happen. I don't--- I didn't really plan for ---I didn't know what I wanted to be, I mean I wanted to be lawyer, I wanted to be a dancer, I wanted to be an actress. I mean, I went through so many different phases just in high school. I wanted to be a politician, God I could never do that! [laughter] And, I think that I just, I kind of always knew that's what my family--- that's what I saw in my life and in my family's life, and my friends' lives ---that I would probably just be doing that.

**BB:** You mentioned growing up that your role models were, well your role model was your sister, right? Could you tell me a little bit more about her?

**MJ:** So being nine years older, you always think someone is a superstar above you. She is --- has always been there for me, and we've always been really close. I think we've gotten closer as I got older. She went to college when I was in second grade, and I would go at like 12 and 13, starting at 12 and 13 and I would go and visit her, and take the bus by myself to New York City. And she would meet me in Penn [Pennsylvania] Station. I would spend a week or two with her. I would go to school with her, I would go to work with her, I was like her...

**BB:** Her shadow!

**MJ:** Her shadow! Her job let her do it, her work let her do it. I stayed in her dorm room. So, I would do that two or three times a year. So, we were always really close, but she's always been really determined. You know, she went to school to be a lighting designer, to begin with, which isn't like a known. Actually, my brother is a professional line designer now, but my sister started majoring in it at Hofstra, and she dropped out. And she struggled to find her way a little bit, I think. And she got into sociology, and she now has the PhD in Sociology. She went to A.S.S. Madison for that, and really found her way. But she's always been --- my sister has just always been-- just known, I think, herself, her design, her people, and she's just inspired me to just be who I am and not struggle with it, you know what I mean? I mean now she has her PhD. She just got her first book contract, I mean she's the smartest one by far, let's be real! And she's an absent-minded professor and she's awesome! I think that I just --- she was always moving forward in her life, and I think that just made me always want to keep going. And she's probably why I have a women's studies minor in school because she would always --- she still does gender studies and stuff like that with her career.

**BB:** Have you done anything with your women's studies major – or minor?

**MJ:** I haven't! I wish, I really haven't. I mean I think it's helped me along the way, understand some different power struggles externally that I've seen in places and in funding and in different groups that I'm involved with in Worcester, and understanding the political climate and what

goes on in culture, and reflecting on how people react and post things on Facebook. Honestly, and like, looking at someone posting something and being --- me being able to be like, okay but they also have x, y and z going on in their life and where they're coming from. I'm more sympathetic to things, although I may hate things, I'm much more likely to defriend someone from high school than I am from college by the way! And I just feel like that gave me a perspective – and those classes gave me a perspective on reflecting back on where people were in their lives and where they came from, and what their views were growing up.

**BB:** Would you say that you ever experienced discrimination in college, and in finding a job and even today here?

**MJ:** I think that I had a lot of discrimination growing up because I did pageants. And those aren't necessarily seen as something that is empowering for women. But I really found them amazing for me and I think I did just --- just saying I was a pageant girl was probably the last thing I'd told you about myself when I was growing up. But I loved them, I had so much fun with my mom growing up. We did tons of weeks together at hotels. We thought up little outfits and did little scenes and talents. I really liked the talent part and the interview part of it, I think it forced me to be well- rounded. But I think when people hear pageant, I think that was probably something ...

**MW and BB:** Mhmm

**MJ :** Fortunately, when my first job heard that, they saw it as a positive. Because they saw I could talk to other people and talk about myself and be open to that.

**BB:** Hmm.

**MJ:** And that's how I got that job, actually. I think it was one of the reasons why. I had been Miss Teaman, and I ran for Miss Maine. And I had that on my resume and a bunch of information. And they saw that as a plus. So, I think perhaps ---even thought it was something I was discriminated against when I was in college and when I was younger, because Clark [University] probably doesn't have many pageant girls. It became a plus once I got my job, you know. And then that job got me this job.

**BB:** So, it kind of dominoed together?

**MJ:** Yep, yeah.

**BB:** What about being a woman in general? Not about being in pageants, but just being a woman in today's world. Have you faced any discrimination?

**MJ:** I feel like there is less than there used to be, but when it happens, I'm even more affected by it. And I worry more about my daughters now. Like the boys are starting to chase them, chase

the girls on the playground and they're five. And, actually some little boy--- my girl started calling him her boyfriend, at five. And my husband was like, what is going on? But then we found out he wasn't a nice little boy and he was like doing mean things to my daughter. And my husband, I was sick at the time, sick or pregnant, or something. I heard him give this huge lecture about how like, you are not friends, or anything, with someone who treats you badly. I guess the more roundabout answer is that I see it more in kids, then I see it in myself. That people still see these gender stereotypes, of what little kids should be and how they should act. And boyfriends and girlfriends and the boys tease the girls. And that's okay, and I just feel like, we just try to raise our girls like you're nice to everyone and that is your friend. And even if they are not your friend, you're still nice to them. And it's all about respect. And I think, you know, there have been, times I've been catcalled here. And, you know, it just depends on the neighborhood and who you are dealing with. In my professional role, I have a really amazing boss, who doesn't stand for any of that. So, perhaps, I am a little protected from others who would do that to me, since I'm under him, and not out in the real world. And that's kind of a roundabout answer, but I don't see it in my professional life very much.

**MW:** Do you think you don't see it in your professional life because you're in the generation that you are? Like your mother's generation, do you think if you had been born then, you would've seen more of it? Do you think it evolved?

**MJ:** Oh yeah, I think it's definitely evolved. I think, my mom has also told me when she went to college and in the workforce, workforce either in education or as a nurse. And that was all that was seen. And all of my mom's friends from Maine were either education or, nurse. And I know a lot of people who are that age, are around the same thing. And I think that our generation and perhaps my sister's generation was the start of it. And started to see more opportunities for women in the workplace. That has evolved over time. And I also think that women balancing a career, being able to have both a life and family, kids, and having a career and not having it frowned upon as much as when I was a kid. When I was growing up and when my mom first started working, I think people were surprised she was going to work after having kids. I mean I was even told today, when I went to CVS, I mentioned that I went to see my OB [obstetrician] today and she gave me all these medicines that could try to help stabilize my life. And she--- I said, "Oh I'm pregnant, and I hope these help." I just left my OB and she helped me find something. And she's like, "Oh I thought everyone who got pregnant, quit their job and didn't work anymore." And I was like...

**BB:** That was today?

**MJ:** Just today.

**BB:** Wow.

**MJ:** And I was like, "No this is my third, I'm still going to be working." So, I think, just people, it's out there, it's just not as prevalent as it used to be.

**MW:** So, would you say if you were a man, and were like, “Oh I have a career and I’m expecting my third child,” no one would say anything? But because you are a woman, they expect you to take a step back.

**MJ:** Yeah. My husband has some flexibility in his career as well, and does some working from home with the kids, occasionally and may even--- his paternal leave, his paternity leave... Yeah, he will be having with this child, he will definitely be taken. And, I think that we are in a relationship where we really balance everything. And now he's doing more because I'm pregnant.

**BB:** That balances out.

**MJ:** Which balances out--- but I think, my family and my work life... I don't see it as much as a balance. But there are those glimpses. But even in Toys for Tots, which we do here, it's always the mother coming in to register the kids, we rarely see the father. And like registration wise, we check the mother to see if it matched the mother on the birth certificate. So, I think there is this assumption that they are more involved with their children's lives than the males are.

**MW:** This is kind of a general question as well, but when you were a kid, compared to when you became an adult did you see a shift in how women were portrayed in the media at all? Or, like, how the ideal woman was portrayed?

**MJ:** I've seen a shift in the past five years. There are a lot more variety of genders and races and body types in the media. I took classes in college about that. And I don't think that shift was starting until the last five years. I think in my childhood, there were a lot more female leads and stuff, but I don't think they were portrayed any differently. When I think about the last five years, in the media and how they perceive women, and in politics... I mean reading what happened with Hillary Clinton, it talks a lot about, you know, how women are treated in the media and politics. And you know it has come a long way. But, but , there's still a long way to go. But in the last five years there has been a shift trying to represent all women, represent mother's bodies and trying to represent women's bodies that aren't like anybody else's, and representing them in the media.

**BB:** In your dancing career, as long as you've been doing it, have you noticed like a leaning toward a certain body type? Or any discrimination toward a certain body type? Or even men being in like the dance studio?

**MJ:** Yeah, like when I was growing up, there was like two kids, two kids in the studio, two boys in my whole dance studio. They were my age, so my age was boys and girls, but now the dance studio that my kids dance at, has a huge population of males in it. They have so many little boys themselves which brings their friends in. But I think the stereotype of that has really changed. I also did a lot of theater when I was younger. And, in Maine having guys in theater was a little weird, but in Mass., it was totally fine and there were tons of them. And there were just as many of them in the theater company as girls. You know I think it is a cultural thing. Through the past

couple years, people have been flexible to be in different roles.

**MW:** I just have a general question. How long did you dance, like how many years?

**MJ:** I still tap dance. I've done it since I was three. I do tap dance, but I did a lot of different types when I was younger. But now all I do is an adult tap class.

**BB:** Is that your favorite?

**MJ:** Yes.

**BB:** Where do you do it?

**MJ:** H and H in Millbury.

**BB:** Okay.

**MJ:** It's actually run by identical twins, and who--- my girls are identical twins, so it's kind of cool.

**BB:** They dance there, too?

**MJ:** Yeah, I've found them, when I was--- before I got pregnant with them, and I danced all the way through my pregnancy, almost, all the way to the recital. And then, took two years off when I had them. Just because first I was pregnant, then for the second year, I went back to it. And they started.

**MW:** So, would you say growing up, that pageants and dancing gave you more confidence? Just as a kid, to do things and be okay with yourself?

**MJ:** Yeah. I mean I had to go on stage, and there were two things. One, was I had to go on stage and be comfortable in my body in whatever I was wearing. And that definitely gave me a lot of confidence. But, I had to be able to ask for money, and ask for things, and talk about my opinion on the spot. And, I think, that gave me more confidence interacting with people, talking with people, job interviews. And performing, there's an art of performance in everything you do. And putting on a happy face is unfortunately part of the world. And I think that I can, if people don't know me, I'm pretty good at hiding my emotions. But if people know me, I'm kind of an open book. So, there's that and there's the other side of it, but I definitely think it gave me strengths going into the career world. And it just gives me an outlet, tap dancing does, it just gives me an outlet.

**BB:** Mhmm.

**MJ:** It gets me in a different zone, and I'm just happy I found a place that has an adult tap class. Because it's not just toe, toe, tap, tap, it's actually a real class, an occasion that challenges me.

**BB:** Would, would you consider yourself a feminist?

**MJ:** Yeah.

**BB:** And why is that?

**MJ:** I just think I was grown up as one. I just think we never--- I mean my dad did all the cooking and the cleaning in my house. He still does all the cooking, he is the chef, and my mom can't cook anything, we had to teach her how to cook scrambled eggs for my kids. And, I think that just my grandma was the first woman to go to college, at Gordon College in Boston.

**BB:** My grandmother went there actually.

**MJ:** Really? That's so cool. I actually looked there, it's such a beautiful campus. But like I couldn't deal with announcing the male when he entered your dorm room and floor. And I went with my really good friend, and then we were like ----we looked at Simmons too. And we were like, our grandmothers were like, "Oh isn't this so wonderful?" And we were like, "Yeah,,"(laughs)... But we played along, Gordon's like such a gorgeous campus. And so she went there, and she was the first manager of Woolis, in my whole town. And then she managed the whole lunch department for my hometown, for many, many years. And I think starting with her, and she studied religion, and I think she had his open mind about everyone and everything. And I think that created my ability that I never thought about the gender norms. Or that people had to do certain things growing up because of my grandmother, because of my mom and father. It just wasn't part of it--- it just--- I just think that women are just as equal as men. And we all have our own strengths, just as females and males do. But I think they can blend across border and not have to do with a gender thing.

**BB:** You said your grandmother was big on religion, what role has religion played in your life?

**MJ:** It hasn't, oh my brother's texting me pictures of my niece. And I don't need to get that either. Religion hasn't played a ton of role in my life. My grandmother studied all religions and types of religion. My family has just always been open to other people's beliefs. And I think in my life, I think that, I just.... My kids are in Catholic school right now and I just think there are a lot of positive things to learn from every type of religion. And if you're taking the food from it, that's what really matters to me. Un, and so, my husband grew up Catholic and I grew up Episcopalian, so I did go to church. But, my husband has more of a Catholic background than I have an Episcopalian background. So, I am seeing the things that they are learning in this school are really basic, treating people with respect and love and honoring people and being kind to one another. And I think that whatever religion you look at, this is how I was raised, you should take the good from it. And that's what matters.

**MW:** So, is being open to other people and religions, kind of something you want to pass down to your kids?

**MJ:** Definitely, yeah. And we are already trying as much as you can with five year -olds(laughs). But they have their own opinions on everything already, so we just try to be open minded. But they will talk to anyone and anything. And my husband looks at me, like they got this from you obviously. Yeah now, they go up to the guy playing musical instruments in the park. And you know they ---one of them has to always talk to someone, like she's running for campaign, wherever they go. She has to go meet a friend, it doesn't matter. I love it when it's old ladies. But sometimes it's random people. Like this one time we went to a hibachi place and there were like these two guys, probably in college. They were going out to hibachi and they are sitting with my family, my parents, my kids. And I'm sitting here going this is probably going to go really bad. They were so nice to them. They were such nice kids, guys, whatever they were. But, they just--- my kids, they talk to everyone and everything, and are really open about hearing about stuff.

**BB:** Would you say your success in raising your kids, in the way that you were brought up, has to do with the success in your life?

**MJ:** Oh, definitely yeah. Because I know a lot of people who are like, "I'm never going to raise my kids the way I was raised." And me and my husband ---both,we--- both look back to how we were raised. And things have changed somewhat. And we talk about stuff, and where we were sending them to school. And what we're doing, and what we were looking for. We really try to plan ahead. Honestly, right now we are trying to figure out whether they are going to stay where they are right now, or go to public school next year. We are really torn, because the community at this small Catholic school is really great, and we don't even have to debate if they are going to be in the same class, which we were really torn about. And that they have that---but then public school is great in Millbury. So, like what are we going to do? So, I think we always, I think we always go back to what we had as kids. We both have really good ties to our families. But I was at lunch with a woman who grew up at Worcester and she was like, "We don't talk to my family." Like completely independently... She doesn't talk to her mother. I don't deal with his mother- in -law, we just do it all ourselves. And I think we are really lucky we had great upbringings and families that still support us, and who watch our kids and are in our kids' lives, and stuff like that.

**BB:** Mhmm. So how would you define success in your life?

**MJ:** I think to be remembered well. To make a difference. To be remembered as someone who like, not ohh rolling your eyes about them, just to make a good impression, changed things in little ways, and have people have good memories of me.

**BB:** Has that definition changed over time, or has it stayed the same?

**MJ:** No, I think that it hasn't changed. I think I was asked that question in middle school, and I said the same thing, kind of been that. And I saw some movie with my kids that ... When you have kids, your life becomes about having good memories. In a way I never thought, and I try to do that with my kids and with my work.

**BB:** And kind of like, a final wrap up question...Based on your experiences, what advice would you give to women of today and to future generations?

**MJ:** Try not to panic when you don't know what to do with your life. I panicked in college. All my friends had all their careers lined up. I had a friend who wanted to be a supreme court judge. And like I had everyone around me know what they want to do, kids younger than me. And I feel like when you find what you're supposed to be doing easier. Even with dating, when it's the right thing, it's easier. I think you struggle when a woman is like, "Am I doing this right? Am I doing a right thing? Am I going to be judged for what I'm doing? Am I going to be judged for dating this person? Am I going to be judged for changing my major? Or am I going to be judged for doing pageants?" And I feel like, what you need to do, it becomes easier, you become yourself. I saw my mom do that when I was growing up, I saw my sister... not struggling and just seeing what was going on in their lives. And as a female I just struggled in college, and that was like my breaking point. And I was like, I don't know what I'm going to do. I don't know where I'm going to go, I don't know if I am going to be staying in Worcester. I met this guy, I don't know. It was all just this stuff, and when it fell into place, a lot of time it just falls and becomes not so much of a struggle. So, try not to get caught up in the struggle and let things happen.

**MW:** Would you also say, that kind of mindset helped you in your career in general? Just choosing where you want to work and what you really wanted to invest your time into? You know, taking your time to think about it, and not be pressured into making a quick decision?

**MJ:** Definitely. Although, my long- term goal is to run a theater company for kids. So, I've always had that, since I wanted to be in nonprofits, as a long- time goal. So, I think that it ...When I was trying to figure out what to do with my life, I struggled. I feel like on one side, community figured into that.

**BB:** Alright I think that's about it. We're at a little under an hour. Thank you.