Interviewee: Jozefina Lantz
Interviewers: Adam Liebell-McLean and Nicole Toedtli
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Transcriber: Adam Liebell-McLean

Overseen by Dr. Marchand, Clark University

Abstract: Jozefina Lantz was born in 1953 in Bar, Montenegro, but grew up in Ljubljana, Slovenia. She moved to Worcester in 1984 with her husband and infant daughter. Her son was born in Worcester. Jozefina worked in different social organizations, including as a manager for Friendly House Inc overseeing the operation of the homeless shelter and as the director of the Lutheran Social Services, where she was in charge of refugee resettlement. In this interview Jozefina discusses her life in Montenegro and Slovenia, including the arrest and imprisonment of her father as a political prisoner, meeting her husband and moving to the United States of America, and her career in Worcester. When Jozefina describes her work, she touches upon the first case of human trafficking she came across as well as people's motivations for helping. Jozefina also reflects upon her son's diagnosis with diabetes type one, her perceived lack of support and appreciation for mothers and children in America, and the consequences for her family life.

NT: This is Nicole Toedtli.

AM: I'm Adam Liebell-McLean.

NT: And we are recording an interview with Josefina Lantz on Thursday, March 23rd, 2023, at Clark University for the Worcester Women's Oral History Project. We are completing a citywide 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 Women's Rights Convention in Worcester. We're focusing on the areas of women's education, health, work and politics, and community involvement. Thank you so much for your help with this important project and agreeing to be interviewed.

JL: Sure

AM: So to start, can you tell us your full name and your maiden name, please?

JL: My full name is Josefina Anthony Lantz.

NT: And when were you born and where?

JL: I was born on March 12, 1953, in Bar, Montenegro. But I grew up in Slovenia, Ljubljana. My parents moved when I was 12 years old.

AM: So can you tell us a little bit about your parents, what they were like and what you remember from growing up?

JL: Okay. So my mom was born in Croatia and has met my dad at the end of the Second World War in Sarajevo from all places. My dad, however, was born in Bar, Montenegro and has traveled to Sarajevo for some businesses and they have met, married and at that point, three months after the marriage, my dad was arrested as a political prisoner and was imprisoned for five years. Have not seen my sister for her entire five years because she was born while he was in jail. He was since rehabilitated, unfortunately, after he has passed away. So he did not live to see that happen but he and the group of people who were accused, three people all together, accused by a Catholic priest for collaborating with Russians or something, all made up to let himself out and not be charged. He was a survivor of torture because he tried to escape from a prison and was then beaten to a pulp with consequences to his health later in life apparent. And so that's the family at that point. He came back from prison. I was born. The local community wasn't really good for him because of everything that happened to him. So having a brother already living in Ljubljana, Slovenia, my dad and my mom decided to move. He moved first. Four years later, we moved to meet him. In that time—by that time, my dad had his own business. He was a watchmaker and had his own business in Ljubljana. And that's when we joined him. I don't know.

NT: Perfect. So you have one sister and you—

JL: I have two sisters.

NT: Okay, two sisters

JL: My younger sister was born when we were already in Ljubljana. I was 13 years—I am 13 years older than she is.

AM: Got it. And so coming from Slovenia, why and how are you in Worcester now?

JL: Okay. Well, that's a nicer story. I was teaching in the high school, social sciences and the comparative economic systems, early in that I really wanted to travel and I took a leave of absence for just four months during the summer. So I took a little bit extra time and traveled to United States to travel the country. I had an aunt who lived in Chicago, so that was my, you know, starting point and I traveled around, had Ameripass at that point on Greyhound. You have to know that was 40 some years ago.

NT: So sorry. Can you just explain for us, young people, what was Ameripass?

JL: Ameripass was the pass that travelers would get. It's a bus pass. You buy the book—a coupons book —and you use that for your bus passes. So you buy it ahead of the time, it costs several hundred dollars, and then you use it whichever way you want to on a Greyhound bus.

NT: Okay. Thanks. Sorry.

JL: No, that's good to know. I mean, I don't know if they do that now but anyway...so during the travel, I stopped in Salt Lake City and met my husband who was on his leave of absence from banking job and was doing Appalachian Trail coming right out of Appalachian Trail. So we start talking. He was looking at my guidebook and was not the agreeing with what was there. So we were just talking and went for a walk waiting for the busses to come. And it turns out that we had a sort of part of the trip, kind of similar, same path, same busses. So we went with that and traveled for two months together, three months together we traveled. And then we got married. So... [laughs]

NT: Wow

JL: It was very romantic.

NT: Yes. And you're still married?

JL: We are. We are still married 40 years this year.

AM: Wow

NT: Congratulations.

JL: I mean, last year. Yeah, last year.

NT: Do you have children?

JL: I have two children. My daughter, who is now—she was born in Ljubljana, but only for the first three months we stayed there. She's an American citizen, registered abroad. And I have a son, Michael, who is 34 years old. He was born in Worcester.

NT: Sorry. What's your daughter's name?

JL: Ana

NT: Ana, Okay

AM: And you said that your daughter was born in Ljubljana and then your son was born in Worcester, right?

JL: Yes

AM: So when—when did you come to Worcester from Slovenia?

JL: Oh, Ana was three months old.

AM: Got it

JL: At that time, the issues in Yugoslavia were starting to appear. My husband was denied visa, prolonged visa, they wouldn't prolong his visa. So there was details about that. So it was either get divorced or try to live here. So we came and stayed with his parents on Long Island. His parents lived on Long Island so we stayed there for a couple of months and then because he had a sister in Worcester, we thought that would be a good family connection. And it was. So we moved to Worcester and it seemed like a nice place to bring children kind of quiet. I wish it was more urban, but at that time, peace and quiet was very welcome.

NT: How long have you lived together—If I understand it right you had lived together in Ljubljana for three years.

JL: For two years.

NT: For two years, okay, and then?

JL: And then it was not possible for us to do that because of a political situation happening. Also, my husband is American from Long Island he didn't speak anything other than English in the smaller countries in Europe, you couldn't really get a job that way. Probably not now either. So he doesn't have any—he was working in the banking industry, so that's not so special that country has to prove that they needed that particular expertise. He didn't have that kind of expertise, so employment was really difficult to get. So he's working under the table here and there, but that's not how you can live your life. So there was not an option to stay.

AM: And you were still working as a teacher at the time?

JL: Yes. But maternity leave is European style over there not American style, which is nonexistent maternity leave, let's put it as it is. So I used my maternity leave to check out how you know how this place is. But check things out or not. It just was not possible for us to live together and move back.

NT: Sorry. How long was your maternity leave at the time?

JL: Nine months.

NT: Okay, wow, that's, that's decent.

JL: Well yeah now it's wonderful. If you look at Germany, if you look at European Union, if you look at that, that's a very standard maternity leave, right? [???] Switzerland too probably.

NT: Switzerland is a bit...

JL: Okay

NT: Not that modern yet but...[laughs] We were just wondering, what do you think of Worcester now? You were saying before sometimes you wish it was more urban.

JL: Urban

NT: How—how have you experienced living here, as a woman because we're talking about women?

JL: Well, because when I moved—when we moved—my daughter was little, obviously she was a baby. She was less than a year old. And I was struck how the lack of appreciation for the children, the lack of a new institutional approach to women, to children was really surprising to me. I wasn't used to that. There was really no—and I experienced that later on with my son. It just was not on par with what was going on in other countries in that at that time, Yugoslavia. But even now, throughout—throughout my life, I can observe that. It's unfortunate. It's unfortunate that American society doesn't value children, pregnancies, women, more than it does. And I don't think I'm saying anything that anybody's questioning. So that was really—that really struck me mostly because my perception was, you know, United States, it's a rich country, just like...they're all big democracy, everything else. But it turned out it wasn't so wonderful when it came to women and children.

AM: And when you say there is a lack of appreciation for children institutionally, are you talking about schools? Are you talking about maternity leave, which you mentioned before?

JL: Oh, matern—I'm talking about business part of the country. The approach to women. In that case, if you have a sick child, you can just stay at home. You got your two weeks of time off, which is either your sick time or your vacation. I mean, obviously, that's not good for men either. But if you have a baby, if you are a woman and you are pregnant and you having an issue, it's going to be more than two weeks let's face it. So that perpetuates an inequality, generally speaking between men and women cause it's a just biological fact and it shouldn't be taken as a—it shouldn't be even it should be taken in account. I mean, every person living on this earth now or ever has been born from a woman. Let's give them some credit there. And I don't feel that that is within the business community or, just generally speaking, or government. Those establishments, not personal, not people as persons, not peoples as citizens, not hospitals or

doctors. I can't say anything about that that was perfectly all fine. But support is not there on a higher level that it should be.

NT: Have you seen any changes in that area or has it just—your experience stayed the same since you came to the United States?

JL: Oh, I've seen a lot of advocacy and possibly some improvements, people—well, there's a family leave act. Again, not paid. But [Josefina says something to herself] yes, there are incremental improvements, but they are really poor improvements not what they should be with this issue. We really are not as a country.

NT: Absolutely

AM: So this is a little bit of topic change, we want to ask you about your education. So where—where have you gone to school, both in the United States, but also in Slovenia

JL: In Slovenia, I finished—well there I finished my primary whatever high school and went to University of Ljubljana. I graduated science—sociology. And then I took my master's degree there for teaching. Master's degree is not required there for teaching because you could go into teaching college and then you do that. But I didn't do that so I had to do extra work to pass the state exams to be a licensed teacher. So I did that in Ljubljana. And here I went to Worcester State for my master's degree in nonprofit management. And that I think I graduated in 2000 or 2002. I do not—I don't really remember.

NT: Okay so but you were in the United States for quite a few years...

JL: Oh

NT: ...before you went back.

JL: Yes. To school? Yes.

NT: Yes

JL: Yes

NT: What made you decide to go back?

JL: Well, I always wanted to go further in school. And then I was working full time and I just felt it was the right time to visit school again, get some additional knowledge, especially about business and how businesses run here in this country, nonprofit business. It was very helpful to me. I learned some practical—I gained some practical knowledge, people usually don't say that

for master's degrees, but I appreciate what I have been able to learn there, which is, you know, financial and planning, strategic planning, a number of things that go into management.

AM: And you said that you were working full time here before going back to school. Were you teaching here or were you doing something else?

JL: At that time, I was already at Lutheran Social Services running a program for refugees and immigrants.

NT: Sorry. Just one sec—I'm going to take one step back. You were saying you did your bachelor's degree in sociology in Ljubljana when you came to the United States was this degree accepted, were you...

JL: Yes

NT: Okay

JL: Yes. Yes, yes. Yes fully.

NT: Because sometimes...

JL: I was able to—otherwise I would not have been able to enroll into the master's degree program.

NT: True. I didn't think that through.

JL: No, but I mean, the rules are different everywhere. So [???]

AM: And—and so when you were here was working at Lutheran Social Services, was that your first job?

JL: Oh no.

AM: Did you do anything before that?

JL: I—my first job was working in homeless—oh, no. I was actually started working as a home health aide as a part time while Ana, my daughter, was little. So there was a part time thing of just getting my sort of bearings around Worcester. Then I start—I worked full time at that point, with developmentally disabled individuals, as a case manager at first and then as a manager of a residential program. After that—through all that time, actually, I also worked with Friendly House as a—with their homeless unit overnight and then and then house manager for a homeless shelter for families. It's actually now on Sycamore Street here in Worcester. I spent—I was with Friendly House for quite a few years, like eight years.

[ambulance noises]

NT: Sorry, Friendly House is the name of the organization?

JL: Friendly House is an organization. It's-

NT: Okay

JL: It's well known in Worcester. They—they are one of those settlement houses move—a part of settlement house movement. It goes way back, very old.

[**AM** nodding]

NT: Sorry, what does that mean? I'm learning a lot as a partner myself.

JL: Yes. Settlement house movement help—started I think in New York City and there are several around the country, I don't know the details, how many or whatever, but they really are here to help people who arrive to United States settle. That's basically what they do. At this point, Friendly House is very strong in Hispanic community and it has been for a long time. They do not do resettlement. Resettlement is a completely different, I mean official refugee resettlement is a completely different animal here because you have to be licensed for that in a different way. You have to work with one of the national organizations called voluntary organizations. Anyway, so, I stayed with them and then at some point 1998 or 99, I don't really--don't quote me on that, I started working for a Lutheran Social Services. It was a very tiny, small program, that had about three employees. We were just three of us. Part time teacher, full time job developer. And the manager. Two part time teachers. Sorry, I was one of them. And then—and then I worked as a caseworker for refugees. This was just after Bosnian War and the first Bosnian refugees were starting to arrive and because I spoke language, and I really wanted to help and it's not like a lot of people spoke the language at that time at least. I didn't know anybody in Worcester who did, well I'm sure that people did, but I didn't know them. So I applied for that program and stayed with that program for the first year. Second year I became a manager of that program and stayed with that for 17 years.

NT: So what did that entail? What—what was your job there as a manager? What—what did you have to do?

JL: At the beginning?

NT: Both. At the beginning and later on.

JL: Well...

NT: Sorry, I'm just...

JL: No, that's fine. I'll tell you a little bit of progression of it. That's all I can...So when I first started, as I said, I was doing a part—first part time teacher for maybe six months, and then to that part time case manager so it was full time job, but it was two things. And the year after that the manager left so I became the manager of the program. So what I was doing is securing that first of all, all the refugees that arrived are well taken care of with the services that at that time Lutheran Social Services provided in this area, which is really employment and linguistic services. Nothing else will stand there. No settlement, no case management, no nothing. Case management at that time was Catholic Charities, very small program. I think they still do pretty much exactly the same amount of people, like around 40 people a year. And the Jewish Federation did also resettle prior to that and closed their—that portion of their services just as I came on board. So what I did through this program is trying to make sure that people are informed about the program, that the community is welcoming, and see how people are settled. I noticed that there were many people, many refugees and some immigrants, secondary migrants is an official name for refugees who move around from original place of arrival. So they had no support, no case management support. So I got the numbers and the names and ask for funding for that. So Case Manager was funded for a while. They were coming from Springfield because it's a bigger program at that time, but that did not work so we had a case manager, so I got money for the case manager and for resettlement. So then we started our own resettlement here in Worcester and I was in charge of that. So what I did is a lot of grants, a lot of grant writing. That was the process because I've never done that before and I didn't even know I needed the letters of support. But a colleague, another manager who we struck a frien—completely different services, but she said, "I'll give you a letter of support, Josefina." I said, "Okay, great." [Josefina laughs] So that's how the first grant from Greater Worcester Community Foundation came to Lutheran Social Services. They have funded every single year my programs for 17 years. Moved—so in 200...So, the program was growing, refugee resettlement was growing, bigger populations that were arriving at that time were Liberians and Nepalese and the Bhutanese coming from Nepal and others. But as far as the numbers, those were larger populations...there were people from Congo and so on. At some point I applied for educational grant from Department of Education to provide basic English language services and was awarded that grant which was great. That's still in operation, as far as I know, but I don't know. Anyhow, so you know, widening services and offering more services was really important. And that's about the time I graduated too from my master's degree, I think. So at some point through the classes, it was evident that they are some people coming to the classes, but they didn't have any kind of legal status. And then by talking to the clients, realizing what kind of dire need they are in they were describing situation like my dad had, you know, being politically prosecuted, being tortured. I mean, I've seen and heard horrible, horrible stories. So then with the help of an employee, we organized a pasta dinner at the church fundraising. We only got $1,500 at that time was a little more than now, but still not much. And I hired an attorney to come for a morning a week to provide and assess for political asylum services. Obviously, there were a lot of people, especially Congolese at that time, the Congolese people who...from Goma in this case. So that was the first—first clients that we had in a political asylum project, well, what within six months became Political Asylum Project, got a

volunteer attorney. She volunteered for six months and then became an employee—employee attorney as money, as you know we got money. The second part of funding came from (_____???), which is a fund for bar association funding that they give to legal assistance for those who can't who can't offer it otherwise. All right, So that's that's that. Then we started the political project, Political Asylum Project, which I supervise, but I'm not attorney. I have no interest in practicing law. I just wanted to make sure that people who need some services got it right. Also through English classes to my attention, year after establishment of that I think maybe, it was brought to my attention by a teacher that we had a young woman who seemed to have no freedom at all. I was like, "What?" So after interviews, that was our first case of human trafficking. And a Nigerian family has fraudulently brought in a young Nigerian girl who then they took the passport away and did all these, you know, standard stuff and kept her to clean and cook for them. She was not allowed to go to school. After five years in Worcester she has not been to movie, she has not been to a mall. She has not left the house alone ever. They brought her in because one of the—to learn English because one of their friends told them she must learn English. So she kind of tricked them in that way. So they brought her in and then (_____???). So that's how we established the Project for Assistance to Human Trafficking. Okay. So...

[**NT** laughs]

JL: Program was growing and I was in charge of that program and then things were changing within organization and I became director for Massachusetts overall, including Springfield area, which is much larger—well—which was much larger resettlement program focusing on different populations like Russian, Jewish and Russian evangelical. At that point, Russian evangelical (_____???) project. Jesus I can't even remember. I remember all these weird...

[**NT** laughs]

JL: So yeah. So as I—when I left there I was the director of operations for Massachusetts. We had interim couple of years of four years of programing in Hartford, Connecticut, and small program for resettlement of Burmese—Burmese. And we had a program in Boston at some point, a very lovely, lovely project, how to teach, how to—not teach, maybe—but how to help young people gain self-confidence. It was geared toward high school dropouts or potential dropouts and is a wonderful idea. At that time, we would just buy new computers and then teachers would have students disassemble them completely and then assemble them back.

NT: Wow

JL: And so that was a teaching, not only teaching the skill, but also teaching a confidence. And it was wonderful project, but we couldn't keep it so....and I didn't want to drive so much all over the place.

NT: When we had the pre-interview, you told us about working with the Mandaean community.

JL: Oh, yeah, that's one of the—of the—that's one of the refuge communities that part of Iraqi community. Worcester—How much do you—of this do you want?

AM: As much as you want to tell us.

NT: Yeah. I mean-

JL: Oh, well, that was kind of neat thing because I was at a conference in...wherever...Utica. I'm pretty sure. And I got a call from somebody who I didn't know. And he introduced himself as Iraqi person who is here, who is Mandaean. And I said, "you are what?" So he explained that that is minority—Iraqi minority which is Christian in some ways because their beliefs starts in—they don't believe in Jesus they believe in John the Baptist as a beginner of...Very close...They are kind of in between, I would say, Catholics and Jewish because their priests are rabbis. they look like rabbis. You know, the strict adherence to food and other things is kind of like that as well. But they were highly persecuted by Saddam at that time and they were now coming—coming as refugees. And this gentleman was saying "there's only 60,000 of us left. Can you help me get them to Worcester to be like community—build the community?" And I said, "Yeah, sure, let's do that." And so, you know, I had to talk to my national organization, which is Lutheran Social Services...Very nice...I mean, I have the most—utmost respect for them and what they do. Very supportive. So we worked so that people who identified like Mandaeans could come here. Of course, not all of them could come to Worcester. So the other two places that into somewhere in Texas and the New York City. At some point Worcester became the largest concentration of Mandaeans out of Iraq anywhere. And Iraq was quickly becoming you know...nobody there. Mandaeans come from southern....southeastern part of Iraq where the marshes are close to Iranian border. They have some Mandaeans in Iraq—in Iran as well in that area. So worked with Mandaeans for quite a while. Very nice group of people had quite a few employees who were Mandaean...quite a few employees who graduated from Clark too.

[**JL**, **AM**, and **NT** laugh]

JL: A lot of students a lot of interns.

NT: Sorry I wanted to—I'm taking I'm always going like three steps back. You were saying before—you were comparing someone's experience to your father's experience?

JL: Yeah

NT: And so this made me wonder if your dad's experience and his history has had any influence on you being in that field of work.

JL: Well, I was griping one time at home to my husband. "I don't know why am I doing this? This is so frustrating." And he's looking at me. He said, "Aren't you thinking about your dad?" And it wasn't until that moment that I realized what effect that had actually on me. And yes, you

are completely right. I think that was a big part of my desire to work with people who need assistance like that, that nobody's really looking after or helping. But...one thing, if I can add that this is a little off that, but one thing that I learned through working with so many volunteers, interns, and other people is to be careful about motivation of people who help you or volunteer to help you. Not everything is just so altruistic. There are many, many times strings attached and desires for people. People have motivation behind their actions, obviously, and helping people is no different than that. People help people, but not always only because they just want to help. I had volun—I had some volunteering experience with people coming and volunteering that weren't very savory. You know, "can I get a nice young woman to help me clean my house?" It's like she can live here. It's like, "We are not resettling refugees so they can be shut in your house to clean your house." I mean. And I mean literally that's what it was meant. I had a volunteer talking about women. I had a volunteer, a woman who I did not know at that time, was one of those deeply involved in the pro-life movement, the anti-abortion movement. And she was a wonderful volunteer. She really helped for about a month. But then she came to the program with the big box full of fliers, anti-abortion fliers, and wanted me to post them everywhere. And I said, "No, I'm not doing that." Women that come in, especially in some communities where a rape was perpetrated often as a war situation or just because it was possible in refugee camps, huge camps. And I said "No." And I never saw her after. So, you know, we had a—we had pastors come in whose only motivation is to build their own constituency, like Liberians were Lutheran. But it's kind of little different brand of Lutheranism. And we had a pastor in Worcester who was determined that she will have all these all these Liberians come to her church. And she said to me point blank, "Why do you think we are into this business?" and I'm like "You're a pastor. You should be in this business to help people, not to fill your church." But I'm just—it's aside.

AM: And you've talked a lot about—about work, and it's clear that you've done a lot. I'm just I'm I'm curious, how would you balance doing all of that with—with your own life? And and, you know, like, what else were you doing at the time I guess.

[**JL** and **NT** laugh]

JL: Okay. So. Well, you know, having children obviously got to do other things. All of us, actually, my husband and I, we really loved nature so we went camping yearly. And when I went camping. I got rid of my cell phone and everything else and no technology for a week or two unless I maybe sneaked it.

[**JL** laughs]

JL: But tried to just, you know, step away from my work and do that. And now my son was diagnosed with type one diabetes when he was four years old. That brought a lot of stress and inability for most of us to work full time because at 3:00 you got to be at home when the child comes home from school and you cannot do anything. What full time do you know that you can be at home at that time? You don't. So I did the overnights for a little while and I couldn't do that.

So my husband did different type of jobs and stayed at home. And I started working full time days and that's when I started working at Friendly House...well actually before that. But anyway, I love to go to the museums. We went to Boston for walks and so on. I traveled some...luckily later on in my job with Lutheran Social Services there was a lot of travel involved because it's a federal program so federal programs have, you know, you have to—everything is on that level so you have to go and do that. I love gardening. My house is surrounded by huge trees, so there's not much gardening because no not much sun. And I don't—We don't want to cut the trees. Neighborhoods are being deforested as we speak all the time. So at this point there's bunnies, the birds, there are chipmunks and squirrels and what not, but a lot of birds. And that's really lovely. I love that. I love that.

NT: Sounds like a Disney movie.

AM: Yeah. I'm just curious, what do you plant in your garden? Because I know some people plant vegetables or stuff like that, and then some people go for flowers, some people do a mix.

JL: Well, I do both. Flowers...You know, there are flowers that will grow in shade. Not too many vegetables will grow in the shade, unfortunately. So my driveway becomes a container garden You know, plant peppers and eggplants and tomatoes and of course, herbs, you know, different herbs, dills and parsley and whatnot, hot peppers and so on. And I have a lot of flower beds that I maintain for that. Not much grass at all. We don't use any poisons, no spraying, anything I think that's awful that people do these lawns. For what? I'm sorry. [laughs] I mean yeah, okay, fine. But killing every single violet is ridiculous. And the flowers I mean or—or dandelions they are gorgeous. I mean, the people do that, but they have probably never seen a field of dandelions. I'm sure you've seen it in Switzerland.

NT: I'm not sure...

JL: The yellow flower that you can blow.

NT: Oh, I don't think I've seen an entire field.

JL: Okay, but...

NT: But, yes, I know what you mean.

JL: You've seen them.

NT: Yeah. Yeah. Of course.

JL: So I don't, you know, I love nature. I want it. (_____???) that as is. I don't know. I'm missing something.

AM: No

JL: Luckily, we were all otherwise healthy. With my son it is what it is and that took a lot of care and a lot of work. So. But you do what you can, right?

NT: So this—was this the biggest health issue that was influencing your family or impacting...

JL: Oh

NT: Or nothing...

JL: Very much so. At some point, maybe my son was about ten...Or maybe I don't know...we used to go to UMass Medical School over there. And so the parent support groups and so on. So we were sitting there. It was a big auditorium these parents with children. And the nurse was asking and she said, "Now please tell me how many of you parents, both of you have full time jobs?" Two. Two. Two families only from all these people sitting there. And it turns out they are able to do that because their parents lived with them. Their grandparents were there at home...

AM: Okay

JL: So the children. So there is—that is a financial and emotional effect on a child and on the family without—without a doubt. It's a big, big effect.

NT: You were working full time. Your husband as well, or was he working part time?

JL: At that point, he was working part time.

NT: Okay

JL: But I couldn't—I—I was working nights before and I couldn't. I didn't want to do that anymore. It was just too much for the homeless shelter.

NT: Yep

AM: And how were your experiences with UMass and healthcare in the United States in general?

JL: Well, the care we had for our son was good, it was really good. Doctors were wonderful. There's a lot of research professors doing the research. He was part of some recent study as well and so on. So I can't—I really can't say anything. But when I had Michael, when he was born, really I mean, nurses were very nice but doctors, even though I've seen him, it just something was just missing. It just wasn't as warm and personal as I would've liked it to be.

NT: Sorry, I'm...

JL: No, go go.

NT: Going to slightly change the topic once more. You were mentioning that a Catholic priest had accused your father, I think was that...

JL: Oh, yes.

NT: And then you were mentioning a pastor at your work like...

JL: [laughing] Yes.

NT: So I'm just wondering, like, are you religious in general? Has religion played a role in your life?

JL: Well, I grew up in a very much Catholic community. Slovenia in itself is 96% Catholic, or maybe more, I don't know, 99, probably. Very much so. In Montenegro, where I was a child, it was actually three communities, the Orthodox Christian, the Catholics, and Muslims, and it probably just split in even three, in thirds. And that particular city town area prided themselves on being peaceful and tolerant and accepting. And they're very proud that they have not been any religious or ethnic animosity ever that anybody was remembering. During the Bosnian war, Montenegro stayed out of it. Stayed out of it because people were refusing to participate in—in ethnic discourse. There was (_____???). These are our neighbors. You're not coming across the border. I mean, I have just the accounts by people who I knew. I don't know. I did not research that but apparently there were people standing by the borders and you're not coming across from a Serbian side. So I grew up as a child in that kind of environment, when the community was proud of being accepting. And that was really influence me. I grew up in the—I mean I was living in a—at that time—in a duplex to parsonage with a nunnery right behind our house and the church right there. And because it was a steep hill, the only place that was flat was a churchyard. So I played a lot up there and spend a lot of time with nuns because they also had another girl that they were fostering. You know so...It was my friend and we were playing around and going there and eating hosts as they were cutting them out before consecration.

[laughter]

JL: So very much Catholic environment. However, later in life, as I was studying various things, including history and justice, I just couldn't accept that these all potent entity of God is allowing atrocities that were happening, including my dad...situation. Why? Why would one child be allocated torture and killing and suffering and death? But another one is going to grow wonderfully with all the amenity. Who's making this and why? I just couldn't accept that. I—So I broke away from religion, and I'm not religious. I just think things happen. They happen to human beings who are doing this, not entities, not Gods, not anything, we doing this to ourselves

and I wish we would stop [laughs]. As a human race. So I'm not participating and I don't declare myself in any religion. I do respect people's opinions, that's for sure I'm not trying to change anybody's opinion, but my opinion is I am not a religious person at all. It was not an easy process. I broke from religion when I was about 15, 16, and it was very tough. I have—from then already had all the sacraments, you know. But...

AM: So...

JL: It was not for me.

AM: When you say it wasn't an easy process, what do you mean? Because one of—one of my good friends here is—he was brought up Catholic and now he's broken from it. But it seems like from his stories, there was a pretty easy process where the priest just said, "yes, I don't care." What do you mean? When—when you say it was really tough, was that about, was it pressure from your parents, was it pressure from a church, was it something else?

JL: No, there was no pressure from anybody. I just—I just, you know, changing your deep faith—I had the faith in Chr—in in in God. I had faith you know...was baptized, I had communion, all of that stuff. And then I started thinking about that. And my dad never went to church, but he was a religious man in some ways. My mom a little more so. And I just felt terrible that all, you know, I believed one thing and now I was changing my philosophy and my outlook on life and—and that process. I think it wasn't a difficult decision not to be religious, but the process was took a while and I struggled with it. I struggled with it I gave it a lot of thought as a young person, of course, no doubt now.

[laughs]

JL: But at that time, it was—it was difficult and everybody around me was Catholic. So, you know you just now decided, no, I'm not going to church, I'm not Catholic, I'm not believing. So that was in that sense was difficult process.

NT: Has this ever, when you got married or now with your children, have they, your husband or your children, had any connection to any religion?

JL: Oh, my husband is the same situation that I was.

NT: Okay. So that makes it easy.

JL: He broke away from being Catholic as well. And...

NT: Before you met or afterwards?

JL: Oh, before, before, before. I mean, you know, before. And that was you know, we were talking about that is one thing that we were kind of the same. "Hey, look at that." But my children, no, they're not participating in any religious thing. We did try to teach them various religious options. My son read quite a bit of his Bible and Koran and attended Jewish—his wife is Jewish—attended Jewish things and so on, but he's pretty much like I am and my husband and my kids are not religious in that way. But they were exposed to various religions—If they would decide that one of them suits them, we are perfectly fine with that. I'm not—again, I'm not against religion, but it's not for me, to believe in that.

AM: This is sort of a bigger question overall, but do you have any regrets from your life, from your work, anything at all?

JL: Jeez...

[laughs]

JL: Where should I start? Well, professionally, no. Professionally, I don't have any regrets. I think I did what I could. I wish I could have done even more. But, you know, that's...I don't know, that wasn't...Personally, the only regret possibly, is that due to this whole Yugoslavia falling apart and so on, you really restrict—and also financial restrictions especially, after my son was diagnosed, was that I couldn't travel more often and visited more often with my family at that time. Now it's easier. Now I go every year you know. And my mom came while she was alive several times. My sister came to visit and so on. So we were not like not—but you got to think at that time there was no internet, you know, I couldn't just call them for free on WhatsApp, or Telegram, or (_____????) that I use...whatever. So that option was not there so the closeness is not there. It's a different type of thing. And I—that would be if I could have done more of that, I would have done more of that and especially for children, they unfortunately didn't get to know their grandparents that well—as well as I would like that. That part of family life was just not there for them.

NT: Based also on your life experience...What advice would you give like a woman today or like a young woman? Like, quite a few years younger than you.

JL: Well, what advice? Take care of yourself. I mean, it's partners in life are wonderful and should support you. But don't give that completely to anybody. Take care of yourself and fight for you—for what you want and go to school and learn [laughs] as you are. But I think education is very important and respect to education is very important. You know, we in the United States unfortunately now we see this trend that whatever you make copies now a truth, it's ridiculous. But I feel that part of that—part of the reason for people to behave that way is that they are not educated. It's just not educated. They just don't have a history knowledge. They don't understand certain things. Or they are taught to just blindly believe whatever they were told and that is the some of the religious orthodoxy in a way. "Don't question, just believe." What do you mean "don't question, just believe?" So for women specifically is really dangerous to just put

themselves in that kind of position, I think. I think the woman need to be very much aware of her own life and where she wants to go and what she wants to do and go for it.

AM: And sort of a—this is more looking towards the future, but what are your plans now that you're retired? Are you traveling more? Are you going out into nature more?

JL: Well... [laughs]

AM: What would you like to be doing?

JL: Well, given that we just had that pandemic and everybody was shuttered in, and I have only been retired since October, so there's not that much. I'm looking forward to going and visiting my daughter when she has a baby, which is in July. I just went and spent some time with my friend in Florida and so on, so I'm planning on going and visiting my sisters and so on. So yes, traveling is definitely in my plans more...I hope, though, I'm a little bit concerned about, you know, climate change and all of that. You know, everything contributes to that. I think I'm going to take a—sort of—audit a course. Several universities here in Worcester have free classes for seniors. And I'm senior.

[**NT** laughs]

JL: I'm a senior officially. So I think I would like to take like a pottery class or one of those things that I never had time for. So that basically spending time with my friends and just not having—not having to do anything that I don't want to do, I think that's a kind of important thing for me.

NT: That makes sense. I think we have ask—well we have asked you a lot of questions. Is there anything we haven't asked you that you have in your head as like, "I really need to talk about this in this interview" or you really want to add anything?

JL: No, I don't think so. Nothing comes to mind. But if you do remember something and you want to ask just call me. It's no problem.

AM: All right, well, thank you. Thank you so much. This has been really, really excellent.

JL: Really?

NT: Yeah, thank you.

AM: Yes.

NT: It was a pleasure talking to you.