

Interviewee: Ann McCarron
Interviewers: Katherine DeMarco and Meredith Morris
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ABSTRACT: Ann McCarron was born in Quincy, Massachusetts in 1963. Growing up in a very Irish Catholic family, Ann lived with her parents and three brothers in a part of Quincy called 'Houghs Neck'. Ann grew up in a loving home but when she was 7 years old she was diagnosed with rheumatic fever. While in the hospital, trying to get better, she was sexually abused by her pediatrician. Ann kept the abuse secret until she was thirty-five years old. Since then she has dedicated her life to making people aware of child sexual abuse. Ann always has had a passion for sports. Working at Assumption College as head sports director, dealing with the intramural sports and other activities on campus, has allowed Ann to be able to heal from the abuse. She says that sports have helped her be strong along with being a single mother. Ann has made sure that children have a voice and have the courage to speak out. She teaches her son this as well. She wanted to make sure that everyone is aware of what goes on and what we can do to stop it. In this interview, Ann describes her experiences of growing from a 'victim to a victor' in life.

K.M.: Yeah, alright I have to read this first... 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 are focusing on the areas of education, health, work, and politics involvement we want to focus today on your experiences, your education and career, thank you for your help with this important project.

K.M.: Alright, What is your maiden name and if applicable your married name?

A.M.: OK, my full name is Anne Marie McCarron.

K.M.: And when were you born?

A.M.: 1963

K.M.: Alright Do you have any children?

A.M.: I do, I have one son, his name is Quinn.

K.M.: That's a good name. What cultures or ethnicities do you identify with?

A.M.: Irish, my mother was actually born in Ireland.

K.M.: Did she move over here?

A.M.: Yeah, when she was 18.

K.M.: Ok, and is your father from Ireland too?

A.M.: No

K.M.: But is he of Irish descent?

A.M.: Yup he is.

K.M.: Have you ever married?

A.M.: No.

K.M.: OK, can you tell me about your parents?

A.M.: Um... Yes, my Mom just had her birthday but she passed away a couple years ago and my dad passed away five years ago. I grew up in Quincy, Massachusetts.

K.M.: That's where I'm from.

{Laughter}

A.M.: It is! You know Houghs Neck?

K.M.: That's where I'm from.

A.M.: Oh it is? Small world, where did you go to school?

K.M.: Um. I actually moved to Wollaston before I went to school so I went to Bernazziani then Central then Archbishop Williams for high school.

A.M.: Alright, and I went to Quincy High, home of the presidents {Laughter} So, I have three brothers, so about my parents they were both hard workers and um they were just hard workers, I don't know what else I can say.

K.M.: We'll spark up some more as we go on

A.M.: Yeah

K.M.: Um so where have you lived during your life?

A.M.: Um I lived in Quincy then for college I went up to New Hampshire and I lived in New Hampshire for about 10 to 12 years and then I moved to Worcester 15 years ago.

K.M.: Where did you go to school in New Hampshire?

A.M.: Plymouth State College, now it's called Plymouth University

K.M.: Oh Ok um growing up, what was your neighborhood like?

A.M.: It was a great neighborhood. Where kids were always out there playing we played street hockey, basketball we had a pond where we went skating, and um we also, I lived right on the ocean so we could go swimming yeah so it was a great neighborhood the whole neighborhood was the Sullivan's the McKenzie's the Callahan's so it was a lot of Irish families that lived in our neighborhood

K.M.: And so you moved to Worcester, you said about 15 years ago

A.M.: Yup

K.M.: Ok so, how old were you when you moved here?

A.M.: 35

K.M.: ok

A.M.: oh now you know my age {Laughter}

K.M.: And so you live in Worcester now?

A.M.: Yes

K.M.: Ok, have you lived in multiple areas or just pretty much just one particular area?

A.M.: When I first moved here, I rented a house from a professor and I rented an apartment then I moved out to Leicester for about a year then I bought a house in Worcester right around the corner from the college, so I bought the house 10 years ago. So the first five years I was kind of trying to figure out where to live in apartments and so forth but.

K.M.: Do you have family in the area?

A.M.: I do. I have a brother who lives in Millbury, so not too far from here and he has three boys.

K.M.: Oh ok

A.M.: And my sister-in-law so which is nice

K.M.: So you said you went to school in Quincy and New Hampshire, lets see did you.

A.M.: I also got my masters in sports management from a school called United States Sports Academy in Mobile, Alabama

K.M.: Oh, wow

A.M.: So I did that for a couple summers and worked on my masters independently

K.M.: How was living down there?

A.M.: It was hot {Laughter} and it was busy because all you were doing, you were just, it was crammed course so it was intense, it was nice

K.M.: Was it a good change from the North

A.M.: Yeah and I would actually drive down there so it was a good way for me a travel and get my vacations in.

K.M.: Lets see-What were your challenges in education?

A.M.: My challenges in education um playing sports at the same time, trying to balance and I did have a steady job, trying to do it all and keep your grade up that was challenging but being an athlete helped.

K.M.: What sports did you play?

A.M.: I played basketball

K.M.: Ok, do you still play?

A.M.: Not as much, but I have a new sports though, its riding my bike, I cycle.

{Laughter}

K.M.: Upon finishing your formal education, what did you see as your options?

A.M.: My formal education, what were my options? I wanted to stay in higher education so I knew I had to go get my masters and I think that would make me more marketable I really did that as a goal I've been fortunate that I've been in the recreation field and I started in a year that there weren't the rec. centers they are building now at the colleges

and universities so I've been in a position where I've had the opportunity to grow and implement new positions and new rec. departments.

K.M.: What support networks and mentoring are important to you?

A.M.: Learn by doing, I think learn from your mistakes and not making the same mistakes again and I think those have been some of the challenges, in trying to figure out what works in relationships and um keeping the goal and the mission of what your doing is important.

K.M.: Did you have any specific role models that helped encourage that?

A.M.: I guess I had a coach in high school that really helped me believe in who I was as an athlete that's what when I was growing up those are the things helped me instill the desire to succeed and believe in me, do you have a list of questions your going to be asking me as we go along here?

K.M.: Yeah but you can go off on whatever you want.

A.M.: Alright, I just wanted to stay with your format.

K.M.: No honestly, we're supposed to be stay with what you're doing, this is just a guideline.

A.M.: Alright, well let me just, so can I tell you my story?

K.M.: Absolutely, that's what we want the most.

{Laughter}

A.M.: So we got the basic questions in and I guess I would love to tell you my story, it's a story that began when I was seven years old. I had a disease called rheumatic fever, and Saint Vitus Dance. And I was a little girl down the Cape with my Grandmother and I kept falling and this is what they ended up finding. I had this disease and it affects your nervous system. So then I my Grandmother took me to my parents and they rushed me into a hospital, in Boston, and they entrusted this person to take care of me and make me healthy. What they didn't know was that this pediatrician was a person that was going to sexually abuse me for the next five years. From there I ended up developing migraine headaches and I was hospitalized in private rooms and that's when I was sexually abused by this pediatrician. Back then my parents would put the doctor on a pedestal and because he helped me but they didn't know that and I was confused, I never said anything. I was numb and I was told by him that I would go to jail if I ever said anything and I never did until 25 years later. I went through years of therapy and figured out who I was and how I survived as a little girl. And I had a Dad and a Mom that were over protected and would have done anything to protect me but they didn't know. I also had

my Dad, you know, at night when I would go to bed would say, "Goodnight princess, sweet dreams." I had loving parents and three brothers. I couldn't walk down the street without them watching me and knowing where I was all the time. And then from there, after going through years of therapy and figuring out how the child sexual abuse affected me I ended up realizing that it did affect me. There were times... and how I survived and I talk about the basketball coach, he was this basketball coach I had in junior high school, he looked at me and said, "McCarron, you could be the best basketball player you want to be." and I took that and that's when ran and I had the desire. Looking back those are the things, the tools I needed to survive um and it gave me my self-esteem, you know, that I was successful at something it didn't. This abuse wasn't putting me down, from there I started working recreation and that's probably why I love sports. And it's just something and its management. From there I ended up putting together a project, and that was after therapy and I did do some research after therapy to find out this pediatrician was and all I remember that when I was growing up that he was caught, and I thought he went to jail. So I did want to make him accountable and I hired a private investigator in New Hampshire. And I discovered he has fled the country and he was no longer practicing medicine. So that was good. And so I went to see some lawyers and that my case came to an end with the statute of limitations um but I still felt the effects of child abuse. So what I ended up doing was putting together a project ten years ago called Bike Across America -- Voices for Children, Bike Across America. I went to Assumption College, to our administrators, and I asked them to support me for this cause. And I wanted to cycle across the country to break the silence of child sexual abuse. So that's, they said you can have 50 days off, you can do this and that changed my life in the sense that I realized that this was things that. And I didn't own a bike before I did this so. {Laughter} I got everything donated. I asked for support, that support, Coca Cola gave me a van in San Diego to help me move my gear and I had the Reach Out center students help me during the journey, my Mom and Dad came with me and helped different times. People would fly in and out and help me ride um support me and get the TV interviews and newspapers because what we wanted to do. Ten years ago it wasn't on the front page of the paper, students, I mean people had a hard time listening to the stories or they didn't believe them. So a lot has happened since ten years ago. And when I got back, when I finished here at Assumption College, was one of the most memorable days of my life. I realized it wasn't a one-time event that the journey continues. And we have an annual bike ride except I'm not going across the country again. {Laughter} And I ask other people to join in and as a community to all of us to reach out but more importantly, I think my story changed and we know about it and now we know about it, what are we doing about it. And the difference is we can empower our children to speak up. I guess when I look back now, is that we all have different roles in our lives. What I mean by that is, I'm a recreation director I have a son. I'm a Mom um I have friends but the most important role is my role as a Mom. And it's one of the most challenging roles of raising a child, and I look at him and I think about you know how is he going to be safe when I drop him off, when I bring him to baseball, who's his coach, who's he working with, where, when he goes to camp? Even when I tuck him into bed at night, you wonder and you hope he's going to be safe. And now I think when I grew up we could play out in the streets but the difference now is we have parents that are out there. There are helicopter Moms, they

call them. You know, and everyone is trying to protect their kids. Like my parents did that but with child sexual abuse, it's usually someone you know and trust. It's usually someone you know and trust. It's very powerful how they manipulate, how they are but the difference is um is what I can do with Quinn. And when I look at him now, I flash back and I remember myself as. Quinn is almost going to be seven now, I look back at him and I flash back and I think about how when I was a little girl. The difference is I'm teaching him to speak up for himself. Not to be afraid to tell me something that is confusing or secret and to be able to say, "No" because it is on the front page. I think that's a good thing now, we need to get the message out there that kids need because we're not going to be with them 24/7. And we need to let them take and they need that independence. So I mean that's kind of where I've grown and learned and developed who I was and how it effected me. And also, other victims have come up to me for the first time and told me their story. People have called me and told me about you know 'my Grandfather just passed away and I've had this secret. And now I can finally say something'. You know, and I encourage victims to go from being a victim to a victor in life. And I hope to empower other women and children and parents to not be afraid to speak out about child sexual abuse and not be proactive. So that's kind of my story and who I am so I am a single Mom. And I had Quinn as an anonymous donor, I always knew I wanted to have a child and it was the best thing I've done in my life so.

K.M.: That's an amazing story, I think its great you came like out of all that as a child and did so much. You know, that's just incredible you were able to overcome all of that through your sports and education and being a Mom.

A.M.: Well I'll tell you, I did have my dark days, and those dark days I know why I had them. And I'll give you an example; in junior high school, at the last day of school I went to a friend's house and I took a little Absolut, you know, the vodka, and it was in a little Styrofoam cup. I remember this like it was yesterday. And I drank it straight and I staggered home and I passed out in front of my Mom and Dad and right after, before I passed out I told them that a guy put me in a car and took me away. And they rushed me to the hospital in Quincy, Quincy City Hospital. I had the rape test done and then the next morning the Quincy police came and a woman came. It was a women detective and she asked me what was the car, who was the guy? And I told her there was no guy, there was no car, and it was a lie. And I was grounded for the summer. I was trying to tell my parents that something was happening but I didn't know what it was. I didn't know what to tell them and I was told I would go to jail. So if anything, I can have that loud voice and I ask people to help me go across the country and support me in this cause. And that has been incredible. And so you know I look at the little girls and boys that might be suffering silently now and I just want to encourage people speak to their children. And so I learned a lot and I also have some victims that I know that aren't where I am, or where I've come. You know, there's a lot of victims that are struggling. And I'll tell you I have a cousin that was one of the first people that were sexually abused by the priests back. And he took the settlement back then, to remain silent. And I didn't realize this until years later. He was 31 years old and he was found five, five, no four years ago dead in a hotel. He had a lot of struggles. You know his name was Peter Joyce. But he was

sexually abused by a Catholic priest in Jamaica plain so any who.

K.M.: Do you, I feel that that is not something you can completely heal from, but do you feel you have made a lot of progress in healing from the experience?

A.M.: I do, absolutely and I think you need to speak out about it and um helping other people, every year we do the bike ride. And every year I say it's a lot of work, should we continue to do it, but we do raise money for two agencies in Worcester that deal with child abuse; CASC, Court Appointed Specialists for Child, and the YWCA, CAP program which is Child Assault Prevention. And they're a great program, and before I went across the country, I went to them about what they do. And one of the things that CAP does is they go into elementary schools and they empower children to be safe and strong and free. And I sat in the back of one of these classrooms and they did some role-playing for the children to speak up and to have a voice. And as I sat back in that classroom, I thought about WOW, what if I was a little girl in that elementary school and had these tools to help me, help myself. I probably would not have had these dark days. Now, I know why I had migraine headaches. You know [Yeah] I know why I lied to my parents about, you know, so I kind of found out who I am and how I became who I am. And I'm just grateful that I have survived. I like to tell people that I don't consider myself, that victim but a victor in life. And I hope I can encourage other victims to make the choices and continue to work but you need to ask for that support and help.

K.M.: Are there any other programs or other ideas that you want to start to further the knowledge of child abuse?

A.M.: Well I'll tell you; I do go out and speak about it. And I don't consider myself an expert but I also consider myself a person somebody can put a face to a victim. As that little girl, you can hear it in my voice, and it doesn't take a lot for me to get that emotion back. I also think of my parents, I never want anyone to go through what my parents have gone through ever since I told them about the abuse. Because they would have done anything to protect me but they didn't know. So the bike ride is our tenth anniversary this year, it's on September 7th. I want to make it a big, the biggest event. I want to make anyone that rides and supports to feel the same as I did as I road into Assumption College. And I'm hoping we raise a lot more money. We raised 50,000 when I went across the country and every year at the bike ride we rise over 10,000. This year I would like to, I'm hoping that we raise 50,000. And I am going to have a website but now we are going to be able to do online donations; it's called www.voicesforchildrenbikeride.org. So we're hoping to get more riders and get more donations. And that part of that website will be some resources and educational components, so the Internet has changed over the years. And the stories are out there and now the knowledge of how we protect our children and empower them and communicate. Back there we were as a little girl, you respected your elders and you didn't speak up. You know you were, and now I'm teaching Quinn to stand up and have a voice. So my parents we didn't have that open, we were Irish Catholics things were left unsaid, don't talk about it. So society and culture has changed now. We're encouraging

our children to speak up. And you know, I think we trusted a lot more people and my parents did put you know the doctor on a pedestal. Just like we trusted our priests, I think our coaches, the CORI checks they are doing now, the sex offender registry the laws changed. We are doing a better job when we prosecute. You know, we know some of the warning signs. If they are dealing with a difficulty there's something going on. And I think back then when I did that Absolut thing with that vodka, my parents should have seen that as a warning sign, I think now we would. I was grounded for that whole summer after that lie, so it's been; I think it's a continual on going. The Internet, there's perpetrators now searching for their victims on the Internet; we didn't have that when I was growing up. There's a lot more tools out there for us to educate and help support victims. And the other thing I noticed about child sexual abuse is when my parents it happened to me, it wasn't until I was in my thirties when I told them and how it effected not just me but everyone that loved me.

K.M.: What was it that made you decide to tell them?

A.M.: The bike ride, well no it was a secret that I needed to tell them. [it was built up for too long] Yeah, it was eating away at me. And one thing I didn't want to do was have that control he had in me, that power in me. I needed to let them know that this had happened so yeah I did tell them. And then even you know, how sad they were; why didn't we know, why didn't you say anything. I didn't know, I didn't know what was going on back then. I didn't know and I was confused and I thought I was going to jail if I said anything. I wanted to tell him I knew I wasn't going to jail. So that's why I wanted to do the bike ride, to bring the awareness about child sexual abuse. You got to understand I did this before the priests [before the scandal] yup, and so even when I told people they turned their head or they weren't sure. And I had a reporter come up to me one time and say, "you know, you're thirty-five years old and you're biking across the country. You know, how do we know this happened?" And what I said to the reporter is that, "the doubt you are expressing to me as a thirty-five year old woman, all I can think about is the little girl that's seven years old that's trying to have their own voice, that's why I'm doing it, to have a voice because there are kids out there that suffer inside and you need to believe them" and I ended that interview.

K.M.: Was there ever a time, especially when you told your family that you regretted telling them?

A.M.: No, you know what? The bike ride brought my family closer together. My brothers all road different journeys with me: my brother George met me in San Diego, we went through the desert together; Patrick met me in New Mexico; my brother Peter met me in Washington. Sorry {Pauses} so and my parents each drove in the van. That helped them heal when they didn't know this was happening. So yeah it was a great thing and now I speak out about it all the time.

K.M.: Do you think it still helps you with your healing process to talk about it

A.M.: Yeah it brings up still a lot of emotion for me, as you can see {Laughter} But yeah, it's something that I believe in, it's who I am, it's something that I believe that if I can help one other kid. And when I do the bike ride every year I think 'God it's a lot of work can we keep doing this?' Well we're making money, we're empowering children, we're riding, it's a fun event. Then I say 'is it worth it?' and then I have that one, you know, person that comes up to me with their... It was a mother and a daughter that came from Maine, "I'm helping my daughter heal from her abuse because my boyfriend sexually abused her" or I have that audience that I have this one connection with this woman that would look at me and I know she has a story. So that's what makes it worth it to me, is that um we all have stories and that's a big part of the healing process, is speaking out.

K.M.: I feel none of these questions are like good enough anymore. {Laughter}

A.M.: I think you're doing a great job, so thank you.

K.M.: Oh you too, I appreciate this, I know how hard it must be to like bring it all back up. I'm trying to think if there's anything that we have here that would be helpful at all. How do you get through your tough times, what kind of thoughts keep you going?

A.M.: I guess riding my bike. If you remember I said that how I survived was being a basketball player; biking across the country was a new sports challenge. And I've said that that was the easy part sharing a story that, I never thought I would tell a single person, has been the hard part. Every time I've told that story, I heard another story but for me personally, going outside and riding my bike and using sports to help. That's my healthy way of healing or feeling strong. My son, you know, being a mom, you know trying to do the best you can try to figure what works with him and how to discipline him. Just and having a career and doing the best you can but, you know, my son we have our own little things, and when I tuck him in bed at night I don't say goodnight princess, I do say sweet dreams but I always say, "you're the best" and he says, "we're both the best." {awe} We say that every night so um he keeps me going.

K.M.: And well your career obviously is focused around sports, so you think your career helps you going too? Basketball was always the thing for you that kept you strong, do you think this does also?

A.M.: Yeah, I provide an environment that's founded in enjoyment, that people like so it; yeah that's probably why I'm in sports and or in recreation and sports management. But the job is very challenging too it's become a business and there's a lot going on. I was fortunate to get this job when I was thirty years old and it was brand new. And I walked in they said, "Here you go" you know manage it, run it and I've been here for fourteen years now. So it's been a challenging but great. And having a son, that has been so rewarding, but between balancing your career and your job career and being a single mom, trying to do both well and trying to figure out how to manage that, can sometimes be very challenging. But I feel blessed. Again I look back and where I was

and where I come from. I guess one of the things, I believe when I had Quinn, I told you I had him as a, and I'm very open about that I don't hide that I wanted to be a mom. And it was my choice and I went with an anonymous donor and the first time I tried to get pregnant, I got pregnant. And that was a miracle. And I have a healthy son, which I'm grateful for. And there's a lot of great things and that I bought a house ten years ago when the market was rock bottom. I bought a house around the corner for 90,000 from here; it's unheard of now. And I now look at the things I have in my life, I'm healthy I have a great career, a nice little home, and I have a beautiful son and we're going to Disneyland, Sunday.

K.M.: Oh really? In California or Florida?

A.M.: California.

K.M.: Oh that's exciting.

A.M.: Yeah and we're going to the San Diego zoo, so

K.M.: Is he really excited?

A.M.: Oh he's off the wall.

K.M.: Has he slept in the last week?

A.M.: I want to video tape his, whole, he's just beaming. Which makes me, think what time it is?

K.M.: Its 2:09. Oh good so lets see, we can just do a few concluding questions, How do you define success in your life and has this definition changed over time

A.M.: Success in my life, I guess being yourself and being true and honest and being able to tell people who I am and tell them my stories or you know a story. Share, be open, and honest with people. And I guess work hard to be respectful and learn from your mistakes. I guess those are some of the things. And understand who you are and um care for people. I mean and work together and do the right things. And if I could say that my parents instilled something in me as growing up, they always had a strong work ethic, you know, nothing was handed to you, you couldn't just get anything you wanted, you had to work for it. I started working when I was sixteen years old and I worked through high school and college and did sports and stuff. But also and be respectful; please and thank you, to be respectful I gained that from my parents too your not disrespectful, your not disrespectful to people, you know, be respectful that's what I learned from them.

K.M.: Based on your life experience, what advice would you give to women today and in future generations?

A.M.: You can do anything you want to. If you have the desire and to never give up, and ask for help when you need it, and don't be afraid to ask for that help. You know, I have a supportive friends and family, as a single Mom, I need lots of help so I think asking for help when you need it not being afraid to ask for that help. You know this project and this bike ride you know I biked across the country in fifty days but I didn't do it alone. I had a lot of people pulling together rooting for me and helping me. So I think when you want to do something, you can do anything you want and you put your mind to it and ask for peoples help.

K.M.: And do you feel you have a legacy?

A.M.: Legacy? Ha, you know I have to say someone asked me one time if I considered myself a hero or have said, "Ann you're a hero", and I say I don't consider myself a hero but I consider myself as -- I took a tragedy and turned it into something positive. And that's what I've liked to empower people to do; take your tragedy or whatever you have and turn it into something positive. And that's what I was going to say -- that what I feel like I have been able to do and continue to live my life that way.

K.M.: I think that's about all we have. Were you involved with Quincy Rec. when you were growing up?

A.M.: I was, I was a little rec. supervisor and district supervisor.

K.M.: I work for Quincy Rec.

A.M.: You do?

K.M.: Yeah, I'm a lifeguard at the Lincoln Hancock.

A.M.: You must know Barry?

K.M.: Yeah, he's my boss. {Laughter}

A.M.: Well tell him you know Anne McCarron, he'll say "oh I hired her one year, couple years," yea he's been there a long time.

K.M.: I love him.

A.M.: Yup, yup, see it's a small world, so you're not at Wollaston beach?

K.M.: No that's like the state, I work for the city.

A.M.: Ok alright, cool, nice What year are you at Assumption?

K.M.: A junior.

A.M.: Did you have work-study? Did you ever apply for a life-guarding job?

K.M.: Yeah, I did but it didn't work with my schedule.

A.M.: Alright, well maybe next year.

K.M.: I'm a WSI as well

A.M.: We teach swimming lessons, where have you been? {Laughter}

K.M.: I'll help out

A.M.: Come the first week of school next year. You might have gotten a job off this interview. How -- Are we done you think?

K.M.: Yeah its 2:15.