

Interviewee: Mallory Mason Sakats
Interviewers: Hung Huu Nguyen and Nell Matheny
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Abstract: Mallory Mason Sakats is the co-owner of ENT Billing, a medical billing company in Worcester, MA. In this interview she describes mentors that assisted her along her educational and career path, the pros and cons of being a business owner, and how she navigates balancing work and motherhood as a new mother. She also shares her firsthand experience of being a marathon runner in the 2013 Boston Marathon, the year of the Boston Marathon Bombing. She describes the confusion of being stopped just around the corner from the explosion, the exhaustion of having to walk several miles home after running many miles, and the worry from not being in contact with her mother who viewed the explosion from the grandstands. She overcame any lingering fear by running the Boston Marathon the following year.

NM: Can you please state your full name and married name if applicable.

MMS: My name is Mallory Mason and my married name is Sakats.

NM: When were you born?

MMS: 1987

NM: Do you have any children?

MMS: I have one. She is 8 months old. She is a girl, Emerson Olivia Sakats.

NM: Aw! I love it.

NM: What cultures or ethnicities do you identify with?

MMS: Well, my background is mostly French Canadian and Irish. My husband is Eastern European. But we're white Caucasian.

NM: Oh, cool.

NM: Can you tell me anything about your parents?

MMS: My parents were both born in the '50s, they're in their early 60s. What would you like to know about them?

NM: Their level education, their professions when you were growing up?

MMS: Sure! So both of my parents went to college. My dad went to Worcester State [University] and my mom went to what was then called WITI [Worcester Industrial Technical Institute]. I don't know what they are part of now but my mom was a computer programmer and my dad worked for UPS [United Parcel Service]. He started doing—while working in college at Worcester State he was doing deliveries and eventually went into sales and did district and regional sales for them. My mom stopped doing computer programming when I was born because back then they were large mainframe computers and she was on call at night, most of the time at night, and it was very hard for her so then she went to work in the administration of a school in Southborough—a K to 12 type school, so secretarial administrative work.

NM: Where have you lived during your life? Did you grow up in Worcester?

MMS: Well, I would say Central Massachusetts. So I was born here in Worcester but my family, we all lived in Southborough and grew up there and most of my family is populated within Central Mass.

NM: What was the neighborhood you grew up in like?

MMS: Very suburban, you couldn't necessarily—I lived on the main road so it's not like I walked very much to play with other kids, but it was very suburban. I would say middle class.

NM: Where do you live in the city now?

MMS: I don't live here in Worcester, I live in Hopkinton but I do work here in this city near WPI [Worcester Polytechnic Institute], but Hopkinton again is Middlesex County but right outside Worcester County not too far east from here.

NM: So have you seen any changes in this area over your lifetime? In this area you grew up in, Central Massachusetts, any major ones?

MMS: I definitely think specifically here in Worcester that I have seen, I would say a resurgence or rebirth I would call it. Not that I grew up here that long ago, but even within 10 to 15 years I have seen a considerable change. We didn't really come this way much, we'd go more towards Boston because we were kind of halfway in between in Southborough. There's more to do there, but now I can see that there is definitely more of a food scene that is emerging here, definitely a lot more restaurants and chefs that have some notability are trying to come here. There are a lot of real estate and commercial contractors and agents are putting money and time into fixing up the old courthouse, the old Voke Lofts that has been redone and are now beautiful luxury loft apartments. I'm seeing that there is definitely a lot of time and investment going back into this city which is nice to see because I think there is a lot of potential here.

NM: Cool. Where did you attend school, like primary schooling?

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MMS: Primary schooling was in Southborough. So, Southborough you can go from K-8 in that town the primary school there and then for high school students Northborough and Southborough went to Algonquin which is a regional high school. So we went to that high school which is located in Northborough.

HHN: Did you attend college? What is the name of your college?

MMS: I went to college. After high school, I went to Union College in Schenectady, New York. They're a Liberty League school, they are a smaller liberal arts school.

NM: What were your challenges in education?

MMS: So I went to Union, I chose a smaller liberal arts college because in high school I was very interested in academics and athletics. So I continued to play field hockey in college and I wanted to go to a school that had a liberal arts but also a business and math type of focus, so Union is one of the only schools that has both a liberal arts college and an engineering school, so I thought that—not that I ended up going into engineering or anything like that I just like that they have those different focuses. So I majored in both English and Managerial Economics there. So I graduated with two majors. I thought that this school allowed me to do all those things but I think that the biggest obstacle, as you worded it, that I had to overcome was probably learning time management. But now looking back I realize how much time I did have in college [laughs] now that I am post-college, but I think it did allow me to figure out time management and figure out who I was as an individual and what actually interested me.

NM: Upon finishing your formal education what did you see as your options?

MMS: So honestly, I graduated in a really hard time. In 2008-2009 was the financial collapse and 2008 I interned at Goldman Sachs and that was pretty tough. That was a pretty cool internship, we worked in their Jersey City location and I basically did operations for their fixed income securities desk so we kind of got to see the demise of what was happening. Because there was such a collapse of the economy around then that was really hard for my class and the subsequent classes to find a job after college so to be quite honest I felt like my options were limited because I had an English and Economics degree which I guess for all intents and purposes people that are in Economics look to either get their Master's or PhD or go into some sort of business-oriented job opportunity. So I felt a little bit pigeon-holed so I jumped on any opportunity that was given to me and I went to work for Price Waterhouse Coopers, right out of college. They're one of the Big Four accounting firms. Would I have chosen that? Looking back if I had more opportunities and I was not graduating into the climate that existed, I'm not sure I would have. I felt somewhat pigeon-holed and lucky to even have a job at graduation I guess.

NM: It was probably pretty interesting to have an economics degree and then watch that collapse so closely.

MMS: Yeah for sure, I mean you're taking all these classes that teach you about what happens on a macro and micro level and what can cause these types of things and to be honest not many—as a college student we learned about different types of I guess you would call them investment vehicles, but mortgage-backed securities, derivatives, these were terms that I wasn't even that familiar with because we were not talking about them, so much and I [don't] even think many people in the industry even knew what they were. So it was a very interesting time to kind of emerge into the quote unquote “real world.”

HHN: What support network and mentoring have been important to you?

MMS: I definitely think my biggest mentor coming out of college was my thesis advisor. To graduate with honors at Union you have to write a thesis. He was very instrumental in kind of trying to lead me to right direction and my Managerial Economics teacher, we had a class that was like a capstone class I guess is how you would refer to it. He was also pretty pivotal in pointing me to the right direction. I maintained close contact with them for the first couple of years because really when you graduate college, who is your network right? Your peers, your teachers, maybe who you work for on your internship. But as you work you get mentors at your job, within your company, and then maybe people that you are meeting in that professional setting. So I would not say I lost touch with them. I check in with them yearly, but they are not as focused as my support. But I met a few women and I'd say one old male boss who I keep in contact with. They are kind of very empowering and provide advice like how to manage others; if I have to give a presentation, tell me how to give a public speech. My own family have become mentors themselves. My uncle, Jim Martin, created his own business which now has been passed down within the family to me. He has been a big mentor of mine. My aunt who I think you know, Charlene Martin, is a professor so they have different feedback they help me professionally and personally on the way. I think all the people that I have encountered in my career and family have been support systems throughout.

NM: Do you think it is important to have mentors that were female?

MMS: Yeah, I do. Because I think that whether we want to admit it or not there are certain inherent—how do I want to word this—I think that in the workplace we are evolving and I think that we want to say things are as equal as possible, but they're not and women and men tend to face different obstacles sometimes in the workforce. So having a woman that you look at and you see that she is empowered and that everyone is supporting her that is something you want to see so you know that you're going to have those opportunities and that you know that you are going to be supported to get there. So I think that, yes, it is important.

NM: You mentioned that things have changed for women in the workplace. How have they changed since you entered the workforce? In the ten-ish years you've been there.

MMS: So I think that the biggest thing that I have seen in Massachusetts it's continuing to evolve in supporting women who want to have families because before it was kind of—I have

seen it in my old workplace, women who want to take a maternity leave and then coming back it's like you get three months then you're supposed to hit the ground running. In theory, maybe that's great, but that's really not real life. Now going through that experience, it's hard and I think paternity leave is important too. I have seen that has really shifted since I entered the workforce. Employers are trying to see women want to be in the workforce they don't want to just leave because they have a child, but you need to empower families to have those abilities to do both. I think I have seen women—there were not many at my first job at PWC, there were a lot of women managers, but there were not a lot of women partners because the process to get there was so long and so laborious and you travelled all the time. You have to be away from your family, people weren't looking at it and it was like you know a man or a woman said they didn't want to do that it was like they couldn't get there. And I had one partner tell me that she had her husband to be a stay-at-home dad so that she could do it. So I think that the way that the workforce is approaching—not with just family but with personal life—and this work life balance has changed considerably even since I started in the workforce in 2009. I think it's also the millennials. I'm obviously a millennial too, but I think our age looks at work a little differently than say, our parents' generation did. You don't just have to work harder and drudge through every day. It's work smarter, not harder, and there's a way to approach things differently. So I don't know if that's a men vs. women or a generational thing.

NM: Currently you are in the workforce. What exactly is your title?

MMS: So I own a medical billing company with my uncle. We are both co-owners, presidents, however you want to—principals of the company.

NM: But you are also a mom, you said you had a baby about eight months ago? What was your maternity leave like? You talked about that earlier.

MMS: Since it was a little different, it was self-imposed by myself. Because I have this business and it is like another baby, live and breathe it to make sure it will be successful just like I want my child to be successful, I went back earlier than the most traditional maternity leave policies would. At six weeks I went back to the office one day a week and then I did a tiered process so when my daughter turned eight weeks I started two days a week. And then at three months I went in three days a week, and then by six months I went up to four days a week and I'm kind of staying around four days a week and I'm working the fifth day at home so that I can spend extra time at home with my daughter, but also feel like I'm giving 110% to my business. Because, again, I don't always think to be effective and efficient you have to work harder. You really need to start thinking about working smarter.

NM: What are your primary responsibilities in the household, in terms of housework and childcare? Do you share them with anyone?

MMS: Yes. In terms of household and childcare my husband and I, I would say, are pretty close to 50/50, actually I would say that my husband cooks the majority of the time. He's very hands on with our daughter. I would say we are very 50/50 and my parents also help with childcare.

They are helping take care of my daughter four of the days of the week when I'm at work. So I'd say family has been super key and my husband and I are close to 50/50 on everything.

HHN: What are the pros and cons of the path you have chosen?

MMS: The direction that I went? So I think the pros of being a small business owner are that I love not having a boss. I love that the labors that I put in I see the direct fruits of those labors, and that to me has been kind of why I chose this path, because if I'm putting all this effort in I want to see the output. The input justifies the output, I guess. When I was working at these large companies I didn't always feel that I got to see projects through to the end, that I got to see what I was putting in, the end result. So to me that is extremely rewarding. I love that no day is the same. I have a lot of responsibilities, but they vary. So I get to do human resources, I get to do marketing and I get to do sales, I get to do accounting. To me, having my hands in all of it is very interesting. I think that the pros are the cons. Because I get to have my hands in all of that I have to have my hands in all of that, so sometimes I can't delegate, or someone can't do some of the things. So it does fall on me at the end of the day. I think that there is always going to be cons, like, things you have to give up when you take something else.

HHN: How do you feel about your choices you have made in your life and do you have any regrets?

MMS: No, I don't have any regrets. I think I really did want to go to business school right out of college, but financially that just didn't make sense for me, and I just couldn't grasp the idea of taking out student loans to do it. I thought maybe I'd work for an employer who would pay for me to go back. Then I just didn't end up going down that route. So that used to be a regret, but now I don't feel that I need it, a Master's in Business Management, to get where I want to go. So no, I wouldn't say I have any regrets.

NM: Do you consider yourself—moving on, do you consider yourself active politically?

MMS: No, I don't. I consider myself having some political viewpoints, but I wouldn't say that I'm—I could be more active, is how I would word it.

HHN: Have you been employed in some volunteer work?

MMS: Politically or just in general?

HHN: In general.

MMS: I haven't in the past two years because I was pregnant and now I have a daughter, but before I was very active for Dana Farber, so they do cancer research and they are a large hospital located in Boston, they are one of the premier cancer institutes. Since 2011, I've been very active with them and I would run the [Boston] Marathon for Dana Farber every year in addition to fundraising and helping put on charitable events like auctions, events, etc. with that group.

NM: Why that organization?

MMS: In 2008 one of my best friends from home, he ran the marathon for Dana Farber and we had a friend from high school's dad who passed away and was treated there, so he ran in his honor. And it was probably one of the most inspiring things I've ever seen, from running the marathon to fundraising...

NM: The marathon is the Boston Marathon?

MMS: Correct. I went and he had me meet him, because I ran a lot too, he had me meet him at mile eighteen, the Heartbreak Hill area, eighteen to twenty, and we ran the end together. And that was just—I was just so proud of him and I loved that literally 100% of the funds that you raised for that charity went to cancer research. Since then we've had so many friends and family members that we know have been treated there, that it just holds a special place in my heart. And I think that everyone knows someone that has been affected by cancer, that it just feels like I'm really giving back when I'm part of that.

NM: We were given information that you were running the marathon in, was it 2013 when the bombings happened? Can you tell us about that?

MMS: Yes. So that year I was actually pretty injured so we didn't know if I was actually going to be able to run that day, but I did. And thankfully, at mile twenty my boyfriend, who is now my husband, he jumped in along with my best friend, and thankfully they had their cell phones with them. So we were running along and in Boston there is Boylston Street where the finish line is on and right before Boylston Street there is Hereford Street. There is the famous saying, "Right on Hereford, left on Boylston." So I was right on Hereford when they pretty much stopped us; we didn't know what was going on. From my perspective it sounded like when you hear a large truck that backfires, that's kind of what it sounded like to us. They weren't telling us anything. We were just literally stopped there for, I would say, I don't know, time is hard to reflect on at this point, it seemed like twenty minutes. Who knows it could have been five minutes at the time, I'm not sure, it just seemed like eternity before murmurings started happening. And we were just being—people were being stopped there. You felt like you were cattle, stopped by the police, people continuing to back up behind you. At this point, we kind of heard murmurings, so I told my friend she had to go back, she needed to get out of there, she needed to kind of go back and tell our friends, and we heard that there might be a bombing, there might be suspects on the loose, we were hearing lots of different things. So then they told us to leave the scene. At this point my mother was in the—so there are grandstands that they set up by the finish line and so my mom and my two friends' parents who were also running the marathon were there. My friend Chris who is the one who inspired me to run in the first place had crossed the finish line already and they were waiting for me. Usually we would run together, but as I mentioned, I was injured. They actually were across the way from one of the sites where one of the bombs went off. As you can imagine, they jammed all the cell service, so no one could really get in contact with each other. We kept trying to call my mom. We walked all the way around, I'm not sure

how familiar you are with Boston, but around the Charles River there's all these paths, so we tried to cut over away from the road along the Charles to then cut back in past the finish line to find my mom because Dana Farber had a meeting spot at the Boston Marriot Hotel. In my delusional mind, I figured we would meet there. Well, obviously we couldn't get in there. It's been an hour, I've already been running for four hours, limping beyond belief, so injured, so cold in my sweat, they basically told me to route back and walk back to my apartment which was on the Brookline-Boston line, about two miles back. So we walked back. Finally, my mom—she was okay, she ended up being with my friend and his parents. They got routed through Jamaica Plain and back around to Brookline so they had to walk so far, and again, still none of us know the facts. So we all finally get back to my apartment. My mom is clearly shaken up. I'm not understanding the severity or the enormity of the situation because I didn't see anything. All I have is what I heard. It took her a long time after that to be in a crowd because of the chaos and the horrific sights that she saw that day. It was, it still is, a very surreal thing to talk about, it doesn't seem like it happened. I think the brevity and the severity of it fell more on her than me because I was there and I heard things, but I was sheltered from having to see it except what I saw on television. It was a very, very weird time, and running in the subsequent year was both cathartic and very nerve wracking, but I think that's something that I needed to do to move past that day.

HHN: How do you define success over your life? Has this definition changed over time?

MMS: Definitely, I think if you asked me what success was in college I would have measured success monetarily, because growing up I think I had a more narrow-minded view of what success was because the people that I saw as successful, had made it in their industry, they had made so much money and I thought that was kind of the benchmark for success. But then entering the workforce, sometimes you realize that the people who end up having this quote-unquote "success" seem quite miserable. They're working all the time. Are they making a lucrative living, yes. But they look like something's missing. So I think over time I've learned that to me success is—obviously I don't want to want for something, like I don't want to go hungry. I want to feel like I can go out and go to Chipotle and get extra guacamole, you know what I mean [laughs]. Like not have to think about that, but I also feel like I don't need to be extremely wealthy, but contentment, I think is success. I think we all want to be happy and successful, but I think it's figuring out that it's not really a destination, it's finding contentment in the path that you are taking has become my benchmark for success. Have I figured out how to do that yet? No, I think that it's really hard every day to find contentment, but I found that as a benchmark to help me feel successful.

NM: Well, we are working to tell a fuller history of women than has been recorded in the past. What should we be sure to include?

MMS: Can you reword that?

NM: Oral history is about telling the stories of everyday people and it doesn't often get written down. And when we are telling the stories that don't often get written down, these oral histories,

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in general, or just in your life, or anything that is important to women, what do you think is important to include or mention when we tell these stories?

MMS: So the women who are often times unheard?

NM: Yes, the people who don't get their stories biographed, or who you don't get to watch documentaries about, the people whose legacies are going to be much smaller than that.

MMS: I think you kind of summed it up nicely there. I think that sometimes you don't need to look at someone who is extremely famous or had such a life-altering moment. We are all humans and what other women want to look at is that you are relatable. "OK, she made it, I can see part of myself in her. If she can do it I can do it." I think it's looking at these women's stories and humanizing them and realizing at the end of the day we are all human beings and we are all relatable. Finding some sort of inspiration can empower someone else, I think that's it. We just all want to see a little bit of ourselves in someone and that can empower us to do more.

NM: Is there anyone else you think we should talk to? There is no criteria anyone who might have an interesting story to tell, or even one that isn't interesting.

MMS: I'm sure I can think of someone, but off the top of my head, do they have to be local?

NM: Well, it is the Worcester Women's History Project, I don't know.

MMS: I would have to get back to you if that's OK.

NM: That's OK.

HHN: Do you have any advice on your life experience that you would like to give to women today and the next generation?

MMS: That's a loaded question. I think—wow, that is a very loaded question. I think that my only advice is to reiterate what I said before about defining success. I think the best thing is to obviously follow your passion, but do things that bring you contentment, so that at the end of the day that's what will fill up your cup. Right? And if you feel like you are making a difference or you feel like you are helping make yourself whole, you will be a better person. Whether that's by empowering yourself or empowering other people, whatever fills your cup up is, I think, my advice to other people.

NM: Thank you so much.

MMS: Thank you.