

**Interviewee:** Janet Shainheit

**Interviewers:** Joanna Kubiak and Jayme Pruitt

**Date of interview:** October 1, 2019

**Location:** Assumption College

**Transcribers:** Joanna Kubiak and Jayme Pruitt

**Overseen by:** Prof. Carl Robert Keyes and Prof. Lucia Knoles, Assumption College



Worcester Women's Oral History Project

**Abstract:** Janet Shainheit was born on July 4th, 1940, in Montague, Massachusetts. She attended high school in Turners Falls and graduated from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in English. Janet met her husband in college and moved with him to Worcester in 1974 where she began working as Worcester Academy's librarian. Before moving to Worcester, she joined the Peace Corps in Nigeria, which she loved. She lived in Nigeria for two years teaching English in a school in a small town. In Nigeria, she also worked with a church choir group and enjoyed interacting with the locals. In this interview, Janet discusses her life growing up and the relationships she has with her husband, parents, and sister. Janet does not have children. She describes her experience as a woman living in Worcester and she focuses on the character of the city, especially its diversity and cultural offerings.

**JK:** So, hello!

**JK, JS:** [Laugh]

**JK:** Okay so we're going to start off with.. your.. If you could tell us your full name including both maiden name and married name, if you were or are married.

**JS:** Okay, so I am married. So, my first name's Janet; middle name, Alice. My maiden name was Lizotte.

**JK:** Okay.

**JS:** And I married and my last name is now Shainheit.

**JK:** And could you tell us where you were born?

**JS:** I was born in Montague, Massachusetts... do you want me to spell that? Because people always wonder. M-O-N-T-A-G-U-E.

**JK:** Got it. Beautiful.

**JS:** And I was born July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1940.

**JK:** Oh my God, a Fourth of July baby!

**JS:** I know! I know! For a long time I thought I was the only person who should have that birthday. I knew of other people who did, but I didn't want to acknowledge them.

**JK, JS, SP:** [Laughing]

**JK:** Okay you said 1940...

**JS:** 1940.

**JK:** And what is the name of your spouse?

**JS:** Howard.

**JK:** Do you have children?

**JS:** No.

**JK:** No children, okay! [Pause] That just eliminates some of our questions as well, so if we're kind of looking..

**JS:** I have no children and they're doing very well! [laughs]

**JK:** [Laughs] Yeah the next question is 'do you have grandchildren' and that would be pretty funny!

**JK, JS, JP:** [Laughing]

**JK:** Alrighty so what cultures/ethnicities do you identify with, family background- wise?

**JS:** Yeah, my mother's family was old New England. My mother's first ancestors came to this country in 1630. Actually, I think someone came earlier than that, but we don't know. I think one

ancestor went to Jamestown and then moved north, but, anyway, most of my mother's ancestors came before the 1700's. I think maybe even before 1660. You know, they were here early. And they're very... It's a great family, but they were very... It was the Puritan, all that Congregational Church and so forth. My father's family were originally from France, but then through Canada and came down. My grandmother was half Abenaki Indian, and I don't know when she came to the U.S. My great-grandmother died when my grandmother was born, so my grandmother had nothing to do with that culture, she just knew she was part of it. She actually was brought up by her father and her father's family, some of whom were nuns and so forth, in Canada. Anyway, my grandmother, my father's mother, came down to the U.S. at some point. And my grandfather, my father's father, was also French Canadian. He was born, however, in Salem, Mass. His parents had just come down from Canada. So it's all French Canadian on that side. And New England, English, Scottish, Protestant on the other side.

**JK:** Okay. Did anybody speak French, or do you speak French?

**JS:** My father didn't learn English until... He was born in Fall River, but he was born in a French- Canadian ghetto. So, he never heard [English]. He was living with his grandmother and he never heard or saw or spoke a word of English until he was 10, because he lived in Fall River. So, everyone around him spoke French. And then, no I don't speak French. My father, when he moved back in with his parents, moved to a small town near Plymouth, spoke English once he started going to school. He, my father, and his sisters were very firm about the fact that they were going to speak English. So, they still spoke French at home to their mother, but my grandfather learned English, who grew up French speaking, learned English from British Cockney because he was working on the docks in Salem or Fall River, and then spent years working textile mills with a group of Italians. My grandfather had an accent like you wouldn't believe.

**JK:** [Laugh] Oh, I bet!

**JS:** Part Italian, part British Cockney, part French and he spoke very fast and so you either understood him or you didn't, because he was certainly not going to repeat himself. [Laughs]

**JK, JS, JP:** [Laughing]

**JK:** That makes sense! That's funny, that's a fun mix though, definitely unique!

**JS:** Well, my father said that my mother had to marry him to bring a little interest into the family!

**JK:** [Laughs] Okay well, our next question was to tell us a little bit about your parents, but that was perfect!

**JS:** My parents were terrific, I mean, they were good parents, they were nice to grow up with. I used to feel weird, especially when I got to college and heard about everyone else's terrible parents, felt it was a little strange that I didn't have anything to complain about with mine.

**JK:** I mean that's a pretty good upbringing.

**JP:** Did you have any siblings growing up?

**JS:** I had a sister who died of cancer four and a half years ago.

**JK:** Oh, I'm so sorry.

**JS:** But four years younger than I am.

**JK:** Wow. We can circle back to family, but our next question is where have you lived during your life?

**JS:** [Laughs]

**JK:** Uh oh.

**JS:** Okay, my parents sometimes, I think were part gypsy but anyway I was... To make a long story short, mostly until I was 11, I mostly lived in and around the Turners Falls/ Montague area. I considered Turners Falls my hometown.

**JK:** What is it? Turners Falls?

**JS:** Turners Falls. And it's actually a village in the town of Montague, in the western part of the state.

**JK:** Oh, okay.

**JS:** Up by the Connecticut River and I lived in a couple different houses there, but I started school... And I stayed in school forever. [Laughs] When I was in the March or April of my sixth-grade year, we moved to North Carolina because my father worked in the textile mill. Textile mills closed. The mill he worked in was actually due to close in the '30's, but then the war in Europe started, and the mill that my father worked in made gauze. And originally it made

gauze for sanitary napkins, which they don't even exist anymore really, and, but, then they started making gauze for bandages. So, then we all went from being threatened with the close to being open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, which meant my parents had enough money to get married. But anyway, so we lived in Turners (Falls) and then in 1952, I guess it must've been... The mill was going to close, and my father was transferred to a mill in North Carolina. And, so we moved there, we lived there for two and a half years. Schools were terrible, was also not a particularly happy time to be living in the south. And my parents knew that my father was due for a promotion and was going to become manager of the next mill he went to. But that would have been in either Alabama or Mississippi. They didn't want to stay in the south, so my father quit his job and we moved back north. We lived for two years in Lunenburg, which is the town my mother was from, and then there were all kinds of job things that were happening with my dad. But he got another job, and we moved back to Turners Falls just before I was a junior in high school. So, I graduated from Turners Falls High School. Okay so, anyway, that was basically Turners Falls and North Carolina. Then I went to UMass, Amherst [University of Massachusetts, Amherst]. And after graduation, I taught for one year at East Pembroke, Mass. This is more than you need. I taught at this really weird school at East Pembroke Mass, then I got married. My husband started graduate school in Rochester, quit graduate school, and went into the Peace Corps. So, we went to Nigeria. So, we lived two years in Nigeria and came back. And then we went back to Amherst again because he did go to graduate school. Then we got a job teaching in Winchendon, then we got a job teaching in Cheshire, Connecticut. And then we got a job in Worcester.

**JK:** You say "we", were you and your husband both working at the same place the majority of the time?

**JS:** Yeah, yeah, we always taught at the same time.

**JK:** How did you like that?

**JS:** It was fine. It was prep school. We were doing two very different things. It was fine. And..

**JK:** Lunch break together or something!

**JS:** Actually, teaching in a prep school is almost a 24 hour day job. Especially because he was also dorm master. So, it was a good thing in some ways we were teaching in the same place. We did get to see each other occasionally. But anyway, then we get to Worcester, and we've been in Worcester. We came in '74, fall of '74 and have been in Worcester ever since.

**JK:** So you've been here for a long time. Wow that's awesome. So, you have traveled so many different places and lived in so many different places, how do you feel that this has shaped who you are? Are you thankful for moving around or does it feel like...

**JS:** Yeah, yeah! The hard time moving is when you're an adolescent. You know you get settled and you have these friends, and all of the sudden you're moving away from them and so forth. But other than that I always did make friends in the next place so it was, you know, it wasn't terrible. I did not like living in North Carolina. And that was not particularly a happy time for me. On the other hand, I moved down there in sixth grade so I went through middle school which I probably would have been miserable wherever I was. [Laughs] I mean I think it's a pretty miserable time of your life anyway. All sorts of terrible things are happening to your body, and your psyche, and so forth and so on. So, you if I probably would have stayed put, it wouldn't have been all that but being in North Carolina was where I really had, when I think about it, absolutely nothing in common with the other kids that I knew. I got along with them alright, but I mean we had no common interests, and so forth and so on. All of the girls I knew were interested in getting married. And this is when they were in seventh grade and that was their only real interest and the only thing they were interested in pursuing was marriage.

**JP:** It's crazy that it starts so young.

**JS:** Ugh, I thought it was awful. I mean you know it was just appalling if someone had just asked me. Oh, someday I'll get married. I was much more interested in what book I was going to read next. So, you know when they were still playing with paper dolls and I did have one friend who had a lot of movie magazines which I thought was interesting. No seriously, it was a real relief in some ways to get back. I came back and we moved into Lunenburg. We were supposed to come back during the summer and that's a long story, anyway we got delayed, and so I didn't get to Lunenburg. School had already started, it was in October.

**JK:** This was going into what year?

**JS:** This was going into my freshman year of high school. And I had an aunt who was a real sort of nosey [person] and she was the kind of person who listened on the party line. You don't understand about party lines [laughs], but anyway she would listen in on the party lines and she would know all these things. But she knew we were moving up and there were two girls who are my age who lived in her neighborhood. And, so, she talked to them and she said, "Oh my niece is moving up," and so forth and so on. And the day we moved, that afternoon after school, they came down to the house, and they said, 'Hi, do you want to come up and shoot some baskets with us?' And I said, "Sure!" So, I went up with them and I met some of their friends because Lunenburg is really tiny. It's a small town now but then it was really tiny, there was only 100 kids in the whole high school. And, so I met some kids, and so I came back home for supper that

night and I knew the name of six girls. And I have been playing basketball all afternoon and just went into school the next day and sat down and it had been like I had always been there. So that was really nice.

**JP:** Um, I just have a question, before we move onto another category. You said you lived in Nigeria for two years, I just want to know how your experience was?

**JS:** I loved it. We were in the Peace Corps. We taught, we both were teaching. There were two schools, a little tiny town. It wasn't quite the middle of nowhere, it was the end of nowhere. There were no roads in the town. We had to get to our place from the nearest town that had a road to to get to a motorboat and it was about 2 1/2 hours into the small town that was kind of an administrative area for this community. So there were two schools in the town. One was a boys' Catholic high school. And the other was also a secondary school, but was for teacher training. So it had more adult students. My husband taught there. I taught at the Catholic school. Just loved it. I mean it was just a really happy experience. Nigeria has become a very tough country to live in now. But then it wasn't and it was fine. We both loved it. Once you got used to the weather, once you got used to the bugs, it was fine.

**JP:** A little different than New England.

**JK:** I'm sorry you said you arrived in Worcester what year? '74?

**JS:** Yeah. Summer of '74.

**JK:** Did you always live in one spot or did you move around?

**JS:** We worked at Worcester Academy. We first lived on the campus of Worcester Academy for 12 years. My husband was a house master. And he was also chairman of the English Department and he also coached women's soccer and tennis. And, so it was good that we were in the same place. And I was the librarian. Then we finally moved off campus, and we lived in the Tatnuck Square area (part of Worcester) in a Street off Salisbury Street, almost on the Holden line. And then about five and a half years ago, no seven and a half years ago, we moved to the Willows, up the street from here. I mean I can walk from my place to here.

**JK:** Did you walk today? [laughs]

**JS:** I didn't walk today! Because going home I have to walk entirely uphill and I just didn't feel like it.

**JK:** We have some questions about Worcester. What challenges do you think this city still faces and what would you change about the city if you could?

**JS:** [sigh] Worcester.. I really like Worcester and I like it because of its diversity, I like it because it's kind of gritty. I also like it because it's got so much to offer for culture. And I really... [sigh] I guess I wish that in general the attitude of Worcesterites towards Worcester was a little more positive, but that may be just the way I am. My husband and I argue about this all the time. But I think he tends to be not negative about everything but, you know, if there is a glass that is half empty or half full, I see the half full and he sees the half empty. I think there are too many half emptiers out there in Worcester. But maybe that's fine. I used to be very heavily involved in the League of Women Voters, but I don't really have that much of a handle on exactly what you can do to improve Worcester. I think Worcester is doing a pretty good job improving itself.

**JK:** What do you think women's experiences in Worcester have been generally?

**JS:** Have been what, generally? Oh.

**JK:** Yeah I know it's a very broad question.

**JS:** I suspect that women's experiences in all honesty, I suspect that women's experience in Worcester are the same as women in general experiences anywhere in the Northeast.

**JK:** I mean you have been here for quite some time.

**JS:** Yeah, I mean I don't think that, you know... I can see where my experiences would be different, perhaps from a woman who lives in... I think of people would've been who have always lived in South Carolina, for instance, but not who have the same sort of educational level that I did. Yeah, I would say Northeast, we're kind of similar.

**JK:** Yeah that's very fair!

**JP:** So now we're going to transition kind of into the education part. And I know we did kind of touch on some of this already. But the first question is where did you attend school? So, the name of the schools you've been to...

**JS:** Oh well, alright. I graduated from high school at Turner's Falls, public school, Turners Falls High School. But I also went to college, I went to UMass Amherst.

**JK:** What did you say your high school was? [typing]



**JS:** It was Turners Falls. But yeah, graduated from UMass Amherst. And I don't have any advanced degrees. I have taken graduate courses, but I did those at UMass too.

**JP:** What is your degree in?

**JS:** B.A. [Bachelor of Arts] in English.

**JP:** And then what were your challenges in education?

**JS:** [Laughs] No actually, all right. I sailed through elementary school and high school. No academic challenges really. Well, at all. I've never been good except I've never been good in languages. I have one, I think, almost learning disability. I have a terrible time memorizing. So, that is not a good thing if you're studying languages. Because I could forget vocabulary, I would forget grammatical forms, and so forth and so on. In college, French, I took French and I had a hell of a time. It was really, that was tough. I also had some very peculiar professors. I had one professor, I had him twice, he had a nervous breakdown both times I had him. And I really think that he blamed me.

**JK:** Blamed you specifically?

**JS:** Well the first time I had him, I think he would just get frustrated with me. You know, because I just wasn't learning things. I could understand, you know it was frustrating. I wasn't really learning things in the way he thought I should. If I had the words in front of me, I mean my pronunciation was better than everyone else's and so forth and so on, so I could do all of this. I had a French last name and but I couldn't memorize it and I did terrible and he would, he was bald...

**JK:** [Laughs]

**JS:** Well this is relevant because he would just break out in a sweat and he would pull his handkerchief out of his pocket and wipe his head. Which was kind of funny and I didn't laugh but other people in the class would kind of, you would hear this little ripple of chuckles. And he would say 'oh hdkfnsioddkb!'. And he did make it through the semester, but when we sat down to take the final exam, and at this point it wasn't like now when you can kind of go and do your own little spots to take exams. We all went to a big room and we sat down. And he wasn't there and it was explained that, you know, [name of professor] had gone to... was in the hospital and we found out [the professor] was in the mental hospital. [Laughs]

**JK:** Oh my God.

**JS:** He had had a nervous breakdown. So, okay fine, I took the test. I probably failed it. I kept failing French and I kept making it up, taking it. And, so, then sophomore year I don't know I made it up. I had to take two years, so I was still taking my second year of French actually once I became a junior. And I went into the first class, the second year French, and there was [the same professor], who had apparently recovered. But he didn't even make it through the first semester that time. He, you know, went into class one day and someone said [the professor] in the hospital again.

**JS, JP:** Oh my God!

**JS:** [Laughs] Yes, so language learning was really tough for me, but other than that I was not particularly... I didn't work very hard in courses I didn't like. My husband, I met my husband there.

**JK:** At UMass?

**JS:** Yes, at UMass... He was three years older, but had been in the service [United States Armed Services] between high school and college. And he was... He had done squat when he was in high school. He had just figured he was never going to go to college, so it didn't matter, and so forth and so on. He had just, you know, he had graduated. And then he went into the service. While he was in service, he became serious. So when he got to college, he was first of all, three years older than the others. He was a very serious student, and did very very well. And I was, eh... As I say, if I didn't like a class, I didn't really bother studying, evidently, I wouldn't even bother going. You know, I would show up for the exams. I do have a funny story how I met my husband. We were both taking, or I was taking this course, a Shakespeare course. I love Shakespeare. This was a fairly good-sized classroom. The class was given at eight o'clock in the morning. And it was given by a professor who was his first and only year at UMass. He was terrible. I mean he was really awful. He would come in, and it was a survey course of Shakespeare. So we were reading almost all the plays. And, but, he would come in and he would write on the board, um, the name of a couple critics or, you know. And then he would talk, sort of summarize what these critics had said about the plays. And he never really talked about the plays. So, after the first couple classes, I just decided this class is kind of a waste of time. But I had a 10 o'clock class, so I got up and went to the Shakespeare class and I either slept in the back row...

**JK:** During class? [Laughing]

**JS:** During class. Or I did homework, you know for something else, or I took out a book and read it. And he droned on up at the front and I, you know, I read the plays. I did you know, I did the

homework. But there would be someone who is sitting up at the front and who would ask these incredibly long questions, like, “Excuse me Professor Lang, but I was just wondering if perhaps Hamlet was thinking about blah blah blah...” You know, on and on and on... And Professor Lang would say, “Well yes that is certainly a very good point there.” And then the class would go on and then the voice would again say, and Professor Lang would say, “Well yes that is certainly a very good point there.” And then the class would go on and then the voice would again say, “Well, I was wondering...” Anyway, these long questions, they were like little mini lectures. So anyway, that went on for several weeks. And one day I was down on the Hatch which was, at UMass, kind of like Charlie’s [snack bar]. And I walked in and there were some people I knew, and I was sitting down, had a cup of coffee with them. There were some people there I didn’t know, too, at this big table so we were all introducing each other. And you know, what year, you know you sit down and you meet someone, “What are you majoring in and blah blah blah blah.” So, this guy was majoring in English, so you know the next question is well what are you taking? And he lists off the classes he’s taking and one of them is Shakespeare with Dr. Lang. So, and yes it was the eight o’clock class. And I said, being such a bright smart little girl, I said, “Do you know who that a\*\*hole is who sits in the front row?”

**JK:** Oh no.

**JS:** And I think he knew who I was talking about.

**JP:** Was it him?

**JK:** Was it him? IT WAS HIM?

[All laughing]

**JS:** Yeah!

**JK:** That’s so funny! You’re like ‘well now I’m in love with you!’

[More laughter]

**JS:** Ohhh, so anyway. And, you know the other kids at the table, were ‘pfffffftt’.

**JK:** Right, oh my God [laughing].

**JS:** So you know, so we all think this is terribly funny. And um...

**JK:** You stole his heart.

**JS:** Nooo! Not really!

[All laugh]

**JS:** So anyway he, he was getting lots of, lots of points for that because in the hallway after the class and so forth there were a bunch of girls who would go up to him and, you know, talk to him and yeah... Anyway, I ended up, the next semester, but you know we had just laughed and laughed about that. The next semester we ended up having a course together, too. We were in the same class and just accidentally the first day I sat beside him. And I was watching, and I was watching him take notes. You know we were talking about printing, first of all I write very very slowly... okaaayyy... He can print like a typewriter almost. I was just watching. He would take notes almost verbatim. And needless to say, my notes... I have always been crumby. First of all I would, I wrote so slowly that you know... [All laugh.] Anyway, so half the time I'd stopped taking notes in a lot of classes entirely, but I'm looking at his and I mean, wow. So, not right away, but I said, "Could I just..." After one particular lecture, I don't even remember what course this was in, "Could I copy your notes or just look through your notes?" And he said, "You know, sure." And I don't know, we were somewhere so he didn't have a class and I was writing or I took them back. I was working, too, and I took them to work and copied them. So I started, you know, borrowing his notes. Anyway, we ended up getting to talk. We ended up getting to know each other. We got married, he was a year behind me because he had been in the service. We got married right when he graduated.

**JP:** Aw.

**JS:** But it was... so that's how I met him.

**JK:** That's really cute. I love hearing love stories.

**JS:** Well I was, yeah I was a little different.

[All laugh]

**JK:** That's really cool.

**JP:** So now we have... Upon finishing your formal education, what did you see as your options?

**JS:** I became a teacher. I didn't, I didn't know what I was going to do when I finished. And I had decided I was not going to be a teacher. My mother was a teacher, my mother was a very good teacher. She taught fifth and sixth grade. And she was kind of a master teacher. I mean,

when like UMass had an Education Department, they would send student teachers to her. So, people would say to me (in a high pitched voice) “Oh you going to be a teacher like your mother?” And at that time that was certainly, you know, and I always said no. My mother hated it when people said that because you know she didn’t want... So, when I graduated from college, I thought well I just really didn’t know except I wasn’t going to be a teacher. Except I liked teaching... I had taught Sunday school and I had taught... I had done some work at camps and things like that, and I liked it, but I wasn’t going to do it. And at one point my father said to me, “You’re perfectly welcome to stay at home, live at home, room and board will be...” [Laughs]. And, so I really thought I should have a job. And as the summer wore on, I decided well, I better start looking for something. I interviewed at a radio station. [laughs] I didn’t get the job. [All laugh.] I don’t remember what I was supposed to be doing and there was something else, too I was looking at, but I finally...My mother said, “Well there is a place in Boston...” That was an agency, teachers’ agency, and she had actually gotten a job through them way back when she had graduated from college. And so, I went down to Boston and I saw these people. Well, this is the beginning of August, maybe even in the middle of August, not a lot of teaching positions open, but there was one! In this weird little private school down in East Pembroke, MA, and I got the job there. But it turned out that I was teaching English, I was THE English teacher. It was high school so I taught freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior English.

**JK:** So you got them at all different levels, maturity?

**JS:** Yup, and everything else. The school was... they took anybody. They had no [laughs]...Oh they had standards, but you had to pay. And, so they took very, very rich kids who had failed every other option. They took kids who came from the state who had flunked out of their reform schools, and I am serious. I mean we had kids who were really bad kids, we had really stupid kids, we had the occasional really smart kids. We had one of everything. And I got through that year partly...There were two teachers at the school who really kind of adopted me. One taught---he taught all the middle school, all the classes in the middle school, and the other one taught French and German. And they just...The language teacher was gay and the other one wasn’t, but they were buddies. So they kind of adopted me and I became the third buddy. And I stayed there because of them, I didn’t get fired. The previous English teacher, the previous year, they had gone through four English teachers...

**JK & JP:** Oh wow.

**JK:** They just couldn’t handle it?

**JS:** They couldn’t handle it or the kids. In one case the kids, drove him out. It was reported to me that this guy left in the middle of the night with kids running behind him throwing snowballs at his car! [All laugh.] It was a boarding school, so you were...

**JP:** Yeah.

**JS:** It was, it was, wacky! It was a really wacky place. Someday I should just write about it, but you'd just be sued for life. [All laugh]

**JP:** You have to wait for it to close down or something.

**JS:** Oh it closed, it closed the year after I left. It was an owner-operated school, so in other words, there was no board of directors or anything like that. It was just this one guy who owned it, ran it, and owned it, and he made his money from it. I could--- far too many stories! Anyway, so what are my options? Really I didn't, I didn't, see that there were that many, but I didn't mind doing what I did. It was fine. And then I kind of ultimately fell into being a--- into library work, and that was kind of accidental, too, but I loved it.

**JK:** Did you feel like your options were limited? I know you just said...

**JS:** Yeah. I think they were. I mean there wasn't, there wasn't the career guidance process. I mean there wasn't any of that, as far as I know, when I was in college.

**JK:** Do you think it was because of your specific major or do you think it was because you were a woman and there were certain jobs...

**JS:** I don't think there were, as far as college guidance, I mean, career guidance... I don't think there was for anybody. Except maybe you were, especially maybe if you were in liberal arts... Probably, I am sure... Well, I know if you were in education, college education or business administration or... I have a cousin who was a business major at UMass, who graduated six years before I did. And I know he got, he had gotten advice, and so forth and so on. I had another cousin who was there probably 10 years after me who was in the hospitality [Department of Hospitality and Tourism], and he got a lot. My sister, who was four years behind me, actually she just knew all along she was going to be a teacher. So, I don't know what she got, but she, knowing my sister she probably thought she didn't need any anyway!

**JK:** When you say got, do you mean advice?

**JS:** Yeah advice! I mean there was no, there was no office set up for that, for the best of my knowledge.

**JK:** So, it was kind of whatever was the best you could find on your own after you graduated?

**JS:** Well, for instance, we came back from the Peace Corps and my husband went to graduate school. His original purpose--- he was going to be--- he wanted to teach in college. And until... While he was in graduate school, however, he realized that if he became a college professor in English, probably, he was going to get stuck with...And he was thinking because he was watching the university and get caught in that publish or perish treadmill. And that he had no interest in doing at all. He really wanted to teach. And, so he was beginning to think, "I am going at this the wrong way, and so forth and so on." And so he actually ended up talking to one of his professors about this one day and this guy is, as it happened, a graduate from Deerfield Academy. And said to him, "You know, if you teach in a prep school, if you teach in a good prep school, you can end up teaching almost at the same level as I'm doing now, but you don't have to get all this." (publishing). And he says, "And I'll tell you what, I'll call the headmaster at the prep school. I'll call the headmaster at Deerfield Academy and see if he's got anything." That night Howard got a phone call from the head of the English Department at Deerfield and he said, "I'm really sorry we have no openings, but I have arranged an interview for you [All laugh.] at this other school." Which was run by a Deerfield graduate... So, we went up to the school which at that time was run by a Deerfield graduate, and Howard walked in. And, oh, the headmaster who called Howard and set up the appointment said, "And you have to bring your wife with you," because it was important the wife was someone they wanted at the school, too, not to teach not necessarily.

**JK:** Were you going to be living there?

**JS:** We were going to be living there. So we both came and I had been working at the, at this point, I had been working at the University library (University of Massachusetts Amherst). So, we went up for the interview and the headmaster said to Howard, we walked in and, "Oh you've got the job. Oh, because this other professor that was a Deerfield graduate had blah, blah, blah, and so you've got the job." And then he said to me, "I'm sorry we don't have another full time English position open, but I can do two things." He said, "I can give you a part -time teaching job in two classes." And he said, "We don't have a library and we'd like one." He said, "Would you like to start the library?" Ahhhh, I said yes! [laughs] So that's what I did.

**JK:** Do you feel like you had to kind of follow in Howard's footsteps or sacrifice more maybe from what you had as career plans to stay with him or...

**JS:** No! No actually with him it opened up things, it's just the reverse. If I had walked in off the street, I don't know that they would have said (cuts off)... And he, again, this headmaster, I think while I was sitting there, he got the idea too, it would be good if we had a library and I've got someone here who would do it. And I don't think he had advertised for it or anything of the

kind at that point. I just think oh, well, you know, we've got someone here with.... (imitating headmaster) "She worked in a library, she knows what to do".

**JK:** That's exciting though.

**JS:** Oh, it was very exciting!

**JP:** And what school was that at?

**JS:** This was the place called the Winchendon School. It's still there. And what it was, it was a boys' ... Now I think it's coed, most, well, majority of prep schools at this time, this would have been the mid-sixties, were still single sex. And so, Winchendon was an all-boys' school, it was a small school, and it had a five to one student- teacher ratio. So, a lot of the students there were maybe very bright. But there were a lot of--- there were kids that had some learning disabilities. And before all these things had been as well diagnosed as they are now... So, you kept, because there was such a small student -teacher (ratio), you had five kids in a class, every teacher was pretty aware of what each one of his kids was doing or couldn't do, and so forth. And, as I say, I taught there, too, and it was really interesting, I got to know students very, very well. And know what they could do and couldn't do and without having a formal... I mean, I know some of my kids needed more time to do a test for instance, so I just gave them extra time. There wasn't anything formal about it. I'll just sit here until you're finished, Billy. And then that was...But uh yeah, it was a funny, funky world. Certainly, at that time, as a woman, I wouldn't have been teaching in an all-boys' school walking in off the street. But there was no problem because you know I came in, that way. It was, no, I've never felt that kind of pressure or that kind of problem, not then, but I had to also think I was lucky.

**JP:** Yeah, it was probably good timing.

**JS:** It was good timing, it was, and a lot of it was just plain luck. I walked into one school where they wanted to start a library. Same thing happened at, sort of, at Worcester (Worcester Academy). When we moved to Worcester Academy...Now Worcester Academy had been around since 1834, so they weren't new, but Howard was hired as the chairman of the English Department. And so that was fine, we got to, again, went to the interview, you know this time it was 1974, and so the world had changed. Worcester Academy, this was the first year they had gone coed, they had a brand -new headmaster. There had been some ruckus about the old one, and so forth and so on, and so the school was at a little bit of turmoil. And, uh, the new headmaster had very, very decided ideas about how he wanted things to go, and he was fairly, relatively young, he was not quite 40. And, so he hired Howard and he said then, he said, "I don't have anything for you." And I had been the librarian at the school I had come from in Connecticut. He said, "But I'll will tell you what, I'll help you so there are a couple of book



stores in town you might be interested in. Or we can see what we can do, and I will also tell you that the librarian that we have now has had a very, very difficult time here.” And well it turned out she was an alcoholic, and had been drinking on the job, and so forth and so on. And the students hadn’t been particularly kind to her, understandably. He didn’t tell me all of these details, he just had said she had been having a tough time. He said, “I told her I would support her this year and I would give her a good year, but she has however, has to, he didn’t say the words ‘shape up’ but... And that is what he had done. I guess he had told her frankly if she had sobered up, and could get herself into AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) or something like that and she was a middle- aged lady, she was older than I was at the time, so she was probably in her late forties, even early fifties. Anyway, so he had told me what he had said to her, roughly what he had said to her, and he said, “So there is a possibility that there might be a job for you next year. I just don’t know, I can’t promise anything.” And, so I said fine, I would hunt for a job in Worcester or you know I could, I wasn’t particularly worried about it, partly because even though Worcester Academy didn’t think it paid that much, it paid. Howard would be getting more working in Worcester than the two of us would have been getting if we had stayed in Connecticut so, that was why I wasn’t worried about the money. Anyway, by the mid-year at Worcester it had become very clear that this lady wasn’t quite going to work. So, I knew within a couple of months of getting to Worcester that I had the job for the following year.

**JK:** That’s exciting, Unfortunate for her but...

**JS:** The odd part of it was it actually did have a happy ending. She was fired and I knew someone who knew her family, knew her and apparently a couple years after she left, she actually did manage to sober up and so it worked out for her, too.

**JK:** This question, okay... How have you balanced different priorities, responsibilities, roles, and interests in your life? I feel like that’s like very broad [laughs]. Let’s say, did you feel like you had...It sounds, and I don’t want to assume that you and your husband had a very, and still do have a very good marriage where you both lift each other up and you both support each other...I know some people aren’t always as lucky and they may feel they have certain roles because they were a female in the home, the male did not have to have because he was working or something like that. Did you ever feel that kind of pressure?

**JS:** We don’t have that kind of pressure because of... I mean this is not why we don’t have any children, but because that is one factor, that is certainly one factor, that plays into marriages. The other, you know, I have been in lots of groups, okay backtrack. I said we were in the Peace Corps, our training group has had six different reunions at various times. And, so we’ve been together and there have been a lot of couples in our training group who got married, and there were a couple couples that went in married, as we did, but there other single people who went in and ended up getting married while they were still in Nigeria. And, so there was probably a total

of maybe a dozen married couples who, you know, in the course of some of these reunions some of these marriages have fallen apart. And it was kind of interesting because in some of those couples they both still came to the reunion, separately and seemed to get along well, and came separately with a new spouse. And other cases we would have spouse A would say, "I will not come to the reunion if spouse B is there," and so forth. So occasionally, especially sitting around after dinner with a few drinks and so forth we get to talking and ask why did this marriage last and this one not? And those of us with marriages still in one piece usually said dumb luck. And I think it is to a sense it's true, but the other thing that happened is that people change and if you're lucky you kind of change in tandem and so forth and so you don't go this way. Well, I have this interest that I never had before, well I've got this interest that I've never had before, but somehow it still manages to somehow... Like I married a real scholar who could give a damn about any of that. His main interest is fishing, and he does bonzai and he still reads, but that's not really what... if you told him, he couldn't read anymore he'd be sad, but it wouldn't be the end of the world. But if you told him he could never fish again, he would probably say, "Well just then shoot me now." [all laugh] But you know it is a lot, get back to your question, absolutely.

**JK:** No! You're totally fine, I am very, very interested, we love hearing you, whatever you have to say. I'm trying to think, I want to ask you questions that I feel like you haven't answered, because you're really giving us a lot of good stuff.

**JS:** [laughs]

**JK:** If we had more time, I would ask a million more questions.

**JS:** Well what kind of report do you have to do, I mean do you write an essay or how is it?

**JP:** Well, we transcribe this afterwards and I'm honestly not sure what happens after that [All laugh]. But we have a skeleton of questions to ask and we just want to get a life story, pretty much, so anything you have to share is great. [All laugh]

**JK:** It's not like we have to stick to this, these are just guideline questions in case...

**JS:** I was just thinking, Oh, how would I put all this together? [All laugh]

**JK:** This has been awesome, I have been loving it. This is a very heavy question, I could save it to the end, but I think I might have to save it to the end, it's this one right here.

**JP:** Oh yeah.

**JK:** It's, I am going to... [laughs] We're going to ask about how you feel about the choices you have made in life and if you have any regrets? Which is like a crazy...

**JS:** No, I really don't have any regrets. And first of all I am not a regretful kind of person. And I can get depressed about things, but even when I get really black depressed, it only lasts a few hours. And I sort of...

**JK:** That's the glass half full in you.

**JS:** It's just so, I, so do I have any regrets? No, no nothing.

**JK:** That's a good answer, I'm happy that you don't.

**JS:** [Laughs]

**JK:** If you don't mind me asking, and please feel free to... Don't answer the question if you don't feel comfortable, but is there a reason why you did not have children?

**JS:** Um, it just didn't happen.

**JK:** It just didn't happen, okay.

**JS:** It wasn't a decision not to have children, it just didn't happen.

**JK:** Alright, fair.

**JS:** And at one point we vaguely thought about adoption, but we just weren't... Howard I don't think was terribly interested because I think if he had been passionately interested in it, I would have said okay, we'll start, but he wasn't and I wasn't passionately interested either, so it just didn't happen.

**JK & JP:** [Quietly discuss questions]

**JP:** We have a few questions about, like, if you ever involved in volunteer/community work...

**JK:** Or politics.

**JS:** Mhm, let's see. I was when I was involved in League of Women Voters for a long, quite a while, and just stopped because I got interested in doing other things in part, and also because I got a little annoyed with League of Women Voters. And so that was, the local chapter of it, kind

of lost its power, lost its zip, at one point and I just, I was tired. It seemed, it felt like not single-handed, but it seemed like a couple of us had been doing everything and I had just thought that it wasn't worthwhile. I think they've revived slightly since but ...

**JP:** And then we have what role has religion played in your life, if any?

**JS:** As a kid, I was heavily involved in church youth groups.

**JK:** You said you taught Sunday school?

**JS:** I taught Sunday school. I taught these adorable little fourth grade boys. [All laugh.] And, but as I grew up, and in college I was still involved. I just haven't...My husband's Jewish, but not practicing, and has not as well. He got bar mitzvahed and apparently he's never been back.[Laughs]. And I just haven't been involved at all really since, since college. Although, I taught in a boys' Catholic school in Nigeria and I'm not Catholic, but I started going to mass every Sunday because there wasn't a whole lot else to do. And, so I did that and at one point the priest, who was also the principal of the school, decided that I could instruct the choir. Well don't get excited. [All laugh.] I could instruct the choir, well this was before Easter and I could teach the choir. Well African music is quite different from the liturgical Latin music and there was this sort of pump organ that could be used to accompany us, but it didn't really work, it didn't play a lot of notes [Laughs]. So that was kind of a handicap and I taught them, and of course I wasn't Catholic so I haven't ever really heard any of this music anyway, I can pick it up fast so he would hum a few bars to me and I tried to teach these, the choir, the choir was four women, who ya know, if you listen to African chant it's nothing like, alright have you ever seen the movie, okay backtrack, have you ever seen the movie African Queen?

**JK & JP:** No, I don't think so

**JS:** Well, at the very beginning of the movie it takes place in East Africa in supposedly, around World War I, and the heroine of the movie is the sister of a missionary, an English missionary, and he's terrible and at the very very beginning of the movie he's preaching to, to an audience of--- in his church and there's goats walking in and out and chickens running around and little children with you know, which is kind wasn't unusual and they're singing in this drone, like (sings) "*jesus dadada*" but with not even that much of a tune, like (sings) "*jesus dadada*", and that's what my women wanted to do, too. [All laugh]. So we did (song name) and a couple of other things but it was, I wouldn't say it was one of my greatest triumphs, although I had fun and they did too!

**JK:** That's all that matters. [All laugh]

**JK:** Okay, so I guess we just have a couple closing questions. So how would you define success in your life and has this definition changed over time?

**JS:** I never, hopefully, never even thought about, I never said to myself, ever, I don't think, "Am I going to be a successful life?"

**JK:** I guess that's a good way to look at it.

**JS:** I just have never thought of it that way. Am I satisfied with my life? Putting, you know, flip it. Yeah, yeah I am. I like the people I know, I'm lucky, I've been able to do something, I write poetry, I've been able to do that successfully you know with help. I have people that I admire who helped me with it. I, yeah, it's been a pretty good life.

**JK:** It's good to hear that.

**JP:** Good.

**JK:** Based on your life experience, what advice would you give women of today and future generations?

**JS:** [High pitched sigh], [long pause]. I guess, well it's hard, people aren't the same. Yes anything else I'd say... Try as hard as you can anyway to really enjoy the moment, at the same time and obviously think about the future, and maybe now more than ever. I can get pretty depressed when I think about the future, but try to at least enjoy the day or at least be the best you can in the day. And I'm not very good at giving advice. [Laughs]

**JK:** No, I think it's really great advice, I am about to get emotional. It's really important, that's special. It really is so...

**JS:** I was just thinking when I was at Worcester Academy I had an advisee and that was fine. One girl I had was the daughter, only child, of older parents and she was really their miracle baby. And when she was born, she was a tiny premie (prematurely born) and so forth and so on. She was one of the smallest preemies to ever survive at Memorial (UMass Memorial Hospital in Worcester). So, then I had her. At first, she was a seventh grader and she was fine, and her parents were professional people. Her father was a doctor and her mother was a lawyer and they were lovely people, they were really nice. They were both Holocaust survivors and they had grown up in Romania, but they came to this country and were a great success and had this miracle baby. Ellen was a character, this little girl, she was. She would come in and she would tell me stories. I mean just tell me all, tell me what was said over the dinner table the night before, and so forth and so on, and so I would hear. Well one day she came in and she was really

upset, and she said every time, she said, “My parents want to talk in front of me and they don’t want me to know they talk in whatever, Romanian.” And I said, “Yeah it can be tough,” and so forth and so on. Well, what will I do and she was really upset. And I said, “Well what you should do is tell them that they are really hurting your feelings.” And so she did! [Laughs] She went home that night and said, “Ohh mommy and daddy you are making me feel so bad,” And, of course, these poor people, they felt awful! [Laughs] I mean really! So after, she told me and actually her mother actually said something to me, “I’m really sorry we made Ellen feel so bad.” And I was like, “Oh my God.” And, so I don’t give advice anymore! [All laugh.] And I still, you know, Ellen has moved away, but I see her parents quite frequently and they always tell me how Ellen is doing, and so forth and so on. [Laughs] But every time I see them, I feel a little guilty [All laugh] They’re such nice people!

**JK:** Well I guess that is the end!