Interviewee: Margaret Watson
Interviewer: Rashif Al-Mahmood and Casey Arruda
Date: March 17, 2019
Place: Worcester, Massachusetts
Transcriber: Casey Arruda and Rashif Al-Mahmood

Overseen by: Prof. Melinda Marchand, Clark University

Abstract: Margaret J.K. Watson was born in Kalamazoo, Michigan in 1936 and raised on a farm in Southern Michigan. Upon completion of high school, she attended the University of Michigan where she received her bachelor's and master's degree in Education. She continued her graduate study at Ohio State University despite the limited opportunities that were provided to women at college level education at the time. She spent the next 36 years at Quinsigamond Community College in Worcester, MA, serving as faculty member, administrator, and Dean of Academic Affairs. She describes her efforts to help eradicate racial inequality on campus. Upon retiring, Margaret continued her role as champion for education by serving for over 12 years on the Wachusett School Committee and on the Mount View School Building Committee. She continued her crusade against discrimination especially within her own community. This was just one of the many social issues that she devoted her time to throughout her life and during her extensive career. Margaret is also a member of Worcester Women's History Project and served on the Steering Committee. She is currently teaching various courses to seniors at the Worcester Institute for Senior Education at Assumption College.

RA: Alright so let start from the top. Tell us a little bit about yourself. Let's start with your name and then your birth place; where it was and any anything you feel like is relevant to your life.

MW: Alright my name is Margaret J.K. Watson. I was born in Kalamazoo Michigan and I grew up in southern Michigan. My family moved when I was about five to a farm near Detroit, Michigan, and I grew up learning to milk the cows and what you would normally expect around a farm existence. I lived not far from Andover, so that's why I went to the University of Michigan and I got my bachelor's and advanced degree there. I commuted from home on a daily basis.

RA: Wow.

CA: So, what made you move to Massachusetts?

MW: I was looking for employment frankly and I will elaborate on this one. I went to Michigan for five years. I did not have one woman teacher the entire time that I was there except for physical education. There were quotas on women in the colleges. The medical school had five percent ceiling for women, and the law school also had ceilings. A friend of mine, a young woman who went to the law library to do some work and the male students hissed at her when she was in the library. The school did not like to hire women. They did not like women in the

graduate schools. So, I went to a whole state university where they were more liberal when it came to accepting women in their graduate programs, and it was there that I learned how to do research and textual criticism. I did have one woman professor there, she was not my mentor however, I never had a mentor. When I was finished with my program there, I did teach at Ohio State. I taught Freshman English and I also had a sophomore class as well. At that point I finished the program there, and I was looking for employment. I applied to 40 colleges and I finally did find one here in Massachusetts. I was employed by Quinsigamond Community College in the district. So, I walked through the door and they hired me on the spot. Well I had also written to Holy Cross and WPI, and Clark University, and I never gotten any response from them. I later became acquainted with the first woman who was hired at WPI and I became friendly with her, but she was one woman and it was a non-permanent spot. So that's how I ended up coming to Massachusetts.

RA: So, once you came here and you got into the whole process of teaching at a college, what got you more involved in other things? So how did that lead to you becoming more involved in certain aspects of the community and trying to better it? So, we know you are also affiliated with the Worcester Women's History Project, you are affiliated with the Wachusett School Committee for years, and I just wanted to ask how did you after reaching such a significant place, like how did that transfer into you becoming more involved and engaging more?

MW: Well I became interested in bringing more minorities into the college. We had almost no African Americans students there at the college when I first began. Our Hispanic students were part of Hispanic families that were moving into the area, so I wanted to reach out to them. I became involved with a community service committee and we began to bring in African American, Hispanic students and other minorities into the college. So that happened in the 1970s. I also when I got into the administration, I also hired more women and I also hired African Americans and in other words we don't live affirmative action. I don't think affirmative action is really given enough credit, because at Michigan if the college wanted to accept money,they had to agree to affirmative action procedures, and at Quinsigamond Community College we also adopted a very respectable living action policy. I remember at one point, I was the dean of academic affairs at the time and the chair of the committee was looking for our first director of cooperative education and they brought me the name of a man who was not qualified. But he was an internal candidate and I said to the chair that this person is not qualified, and he said, "I know it, but that's what the committee wants." They gave him a complimentary interview and were very taken by him until they recommended him. I said to the committee, look, here's a young woman who's African-American who has all the qualifications. I said, I'm going to hire her, and I am not going to pass over her and hire somebody who's not qualified, so I did, and she did a wonderful job and she climbed the ladder to her own success as a result. So, I was very proud, but it occurred to me that at community college you have to have staff that is representative of the college in which we reside in and my interest in the community still continued after I was retired. I don't know if I should go on with that now or later.

RA: You can if you want.

CA: Whatever you want.

MW: Ok. When I retired, and I retired not because I was unhappy with the job but because I wanted to travel, and I did. I traveled to Europe and I went on a lot of different cruises and but when I came back, I decided I wanted to do some volunteer work for the community. It was at that time that I ran for the school committee. I was on the school committee for 12 years and I was the chair for 4 years. More than that I became interested also in problems with discrimination and that I'm still working on it. So, I'll go into that. I was in church and we were singing for the healing of the Nations and I said to the pastor on the way out we've got to start right here at home. So, I have a Muslim friend and I met her through my work with the school committee and I said to her, "Why don't we do something. Let's get together and get a relationship between the Mosque in Holden and our church and she said, "Fine." We established a committee. The committee, it was a triad. Not only members of the Mosque and from Christian churches but also members from the temples as well and we put together a program. Our first program was done to introduce Islam to the congregation. It was not a very big audience, but it had begun there, and it was very successful, and we had some publicity about it. It got into the paper. So that's how the representative to congress [U.S. Rep. Jim McGovern] became acquainted with it. He read about it and asked me to introduce him to the Muslim moderator, and they had a dinner together. He ended up inviting her—her name is Asima Silva—and he invited her to President Obama's State of the Union message. So she attended as his guest. She met the president and shook hands with him, and she came home as kind of a celebrity, although she is very modest about it. She was then asked to start her own radio program in the Worcester area and so she started a program called Perspectives and then she was invited on her own television program. She invites people who have issues that are not usually reported in the media, but they are very real. For example, there was a physician who escaped from Syria when he came to this country and after working towards getting his requirements, he became qualified to get an MD. He set up a practice in Boston, so he was one of the guests who explained his background, the problem that he was facing in Syria, and why he came to this country. So, this is the kind of thing that a lot of people don't know about and it's firsthand and these are people who may have been in war zones and they have seen the action. The families have experienced the problems, or they may be women who have endured cultural restrictions. It also had other panels which include the triad three major religions. I've also participated in it. I tend not to do this, but the rabbi at one of the local temples was scheduled as part of the discussion on Ash Wednesday, but she couldn't find a Christian who was free to come talk about religious restrictions on women. So, I volunteered to do that. So, this is my current interest and I'm very pleased to do it, I'm 82 years old and still fairly healthy. I would like to continue in that direction right now. We have a proposed plan next year 2020, marks the 100th anniversary of the women's suffrage in this country and I would like to have a panel composed of three women: Jewish, Christian and Muslim, to talk about current issues facing them today in employment, education and cultural restrictions. The name of the program would be We've Only Just Begun. Okay, I'll be quiet now you can ask the next question.

CA: So, you mentioned being on the school committee. What was one of the greatest challenges or issues you face while on the Wachusett School Committee?

MW: That's rather hard to choose, I think probably balancing the budget and getting adequate support for a good budget that's permeable. It it's not just one year that you have that particular problem. I was talking with the current chair of the school committee just yesterday and said to him that there should be a higher priority on the education of children in this country. So, what we did is the district is composed of five towns, it's the largest regional school committee in the state. We had 20 members on the committee. They are now 22 because the population keeps growing and over 7,000 children in the school system. We have students who are talented, and we have about 17 percent of students who have some kind of disability and we're trying to get enough funding—adequate funding for programs is difficult. The books are often way out of date, when you are talking about history and science you don't want something that goes back to 1995. It's a matter of getting good materials for them, of keeping the classes small, and getting good teachers at the pay that we want to pay. But every year it becomes more difficult because there are people that don't like to pay taxes in this country. I will tell you that the tax rate in Massachusetts is not very high, it really is not. In the Wachusett district and the other towns it is about 17 percent, no I'm talking about real estate tax. So that you pay for every one thousand dollars of your evaluation you pay 17 dollars. In the Midwest, my brother who is still on the farm where I grew up pays 30 to 35. Where my father was born, which had a very good school system, 40 to 42. A lot depends on the evaluation of the property of course if there are states and school districts that don't seem to have the struggle that we do. So, I would pick that as number one, it's not the only problem but it's number one.

RA: So, you've already spoken about the accomplishments you very proud of which was choosing someone who was qualified a woman over someone who was coming into the institution through some internal hiring process. Was that your major accomplishment like personally speaking right if you were to self-assess. Would that be your biggest accomplishment, or would you have something else that you had in mind that will be your biggest accomplishment?

MW: Well, when I was on the faculty, I think bringing in minority students from Worcester was probable number one because we live in a city that has many immigrant families and these tend to be students who are not well off financially. I knew the former mayor of Worcester and he said that in the school system in Worcester there are 92 countries represented in the student population. I also know the mother of the current city manager. She works for the school system. Her job is to interview new students coming into this country to establish where they are with English, whether they have English as a second language, where they should be, and she is very busy with that. We have a lot of children, but they do well. Many of them do very well in school so when they graduate, they need to come to a college, and we were just not advertising to these children. So when I was a faculty member my interest was in that. [audio paused due to extensive background noise]

CA: What effects do you think the current White House Administration is having on the education system not only in Massachusetts but in the country as a whole?

MW: When you say the present administration, I assume you mean the federal administration.

CA: Yes, more of the federal administration than the state administration.

MW: I'm a little disappointed that the Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, seems to be partial to private schools. There are not many families that can afford to have their children attend private schools. Charter schools vary from state to state considerably. So often times the students who need the most attention are going to public schools, and that's where I think we need to concentrate our efforts. So as far as elementary and high school education are concerned, I think we're going backwards. You talk about education, say college education in Finland which has one of the highest scores among high school students and the lowest dropout rates in the world. They have free education for the first six years of college. That doesn't mean that they pay necessarily for the student's residence, but you find that that's often true that education is free but with minimal costs in many of these civilized countries of Europe. But you would know personally how much it costs to attend college here in the United States, and there are people who spend a good deal of their adult life trying to pay off that debt. It's not really fair; we need to take a look at that. We put half of our government money into supporting the armed forces. We have the largest armed forces in the world and sometimes more than most countries that are all put together. I think that our priorities really need to be examined especially now since we need more people in the workforce. There are people in this country who are working minimum wage and who are working a couple of jobs, part time jobs, several of them, and are just to pay the bills. We need to take a look at that, we need skilled workers in this country, so we've got a long way to go.

RA: So, what do you think, you kind of spoke about the cost of education but what do you think is the largest threat to our public education system today?

MW: Do you mean from kindergarten to college?

RA: So, in the U.S. for the most part?

MW: Everything. Parents know what their children need, and they come to work for it, but people who are elderly often forget that somebody else paid for their education. Maybe there should be different sizes in the tax system. It is pretty clear that society as a whole benefit from educated citizens it makes for a much better society. I think also that we need to teach our children it doesn't matter whether you like school or not or whether you like the teacher or not or whether you like mathematics or not.You're there to learn it and there are children in another country who understand that because their parents tell them that. I think too often in this country that children are allowed to express preference in whatever it is that they like, and they need to learn that we do a lot in this life that we don't really like to do, but we have to.

CA: How do you think the social media has an impact on education as a whole, hurt or helped?

MW: A lot of it tends to be political. Now you have some presidential candidates for 2020 who are speaking out for free education through college and there's a lot of attention being given to that in the media. There are liberal networks and there are some that are conservative. I think that probably the members of Congress need to get together and come to an understanding that educational costs need to be reduced. You know, how much books cost. When I was in college, I paid maybe three and a half four or five dollars for a textbook. There's one of my own students who had to pay a little more than that, but nowadays it's not just a matter of the tuition it's also a matter of the fees. The book companies compete among themselves, they will put out an edition and three years later they'll change it, so that the students cannot buy a used book. It's capitalism and I think capitalism should not be a part of education. This business of competing and raising prices. You get about the latest fraud scheme [college admissions scandal]. People who try to work around the system because they want their children to be able to compete. It breeds dishonesty.

RA: As someone who has essentially devoted a large part of her life to helping further the education of the youth in the area what are your thoughts on the recent massive cheating college admissions scandal?

CA: As you mentioned before.

MW: The people who have done this need to be made an example of. This is not something that should be excused overlooked or treated lightly. Children need to be accepted on their own merits and not because of someone that they know or because their parents have more money. You find this kind of dishonesty in other areas too, and it needs to be addressed. You find it in sports for example.

CA: So, based on your life experiences what advice would you give to woman of today and future generations as a whole?

MW: To woman of today? Okay, I'll give you a personal example. I was the head of a department when there were very few heads of department and one of the male administrators in the college said to me, "Margaret, you look like a woman, but you think like a man." But I don't think that was intended as a compliment. I didn't take it that way because I'm not sure what that means. Well how do men think characteristically? How do women think characteristically? I would suggest that women concentrate on critical thinking. That they work with their analytical skills and they'd be objective about them. That they consider causality and extrapolation. I'm not sure that that is thinking like a man, but it's how intelligent human beings should be. Use the data and make a judgment on that.

RA: So, you kind of touched upon how the affirmative action thing helped your experience through your career. I just wanted to ask based on where you work, worked how does how the political climate change and influence the nature of the job. Just how it changed?

MW: Ok, when I was in Michigan, I had no women mentors—even the cheerleaders were male by the way at Michigan at the football games. If anyone had suggested that there would be a female president of the Michigan community would have been laughed out of the county, but they did have one and I think that what has happened is that there were a few women who come forward and this was in many areas. You find them with Rachel Carlson and Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman in Congress. You find them in the few women who are willing to step forward and expose themselves to criticism. They evaluate the woman's hairdo and the way she dresses and don't necessarily do that to the men, but when there is success there, then more women will follow and they can mentor. The ones who were successful can mentor those who follow after them. I think that that's an important duty. When I was going to be the head of a department, I went to a conference with other division chairs and I had to use the ladies' room and the secretary looked at me and she said, "We weren't expecting any women today, so we changed the ladies' room into a men's room." You can see things have changed. There are now women in the news. There are women who become weather reporters. You find them in more areas now, but at one time it was very rare, and they were figureheads. There are women FBI agents, there are women who are astronauts. I can remember a time when a friend of mine went to a meeting were there were FBI recruiters there and I sat there and laughed at her. I remember a woman dentist speaking to a group of dental hygienists. She was woman dentist. I went to a conference and she was speaking into the microphone and the audience—dentists mind you—would yell rude things at her. So yes, there has been progress and I think it makes it so that women have to be ambitious, they have to do their homework. It's not just going to happen.

CA: Currently, thousands of students across the country and around the world are protesting the country's response or lack thereof to climate change what are your thoughts on the matter as a whole?

MW: The problem once again, is that there are people who are making themselves wealthy by continuing in the old ways, like the coal mines for example. As long as that happens it won't be changed and the coal workers themselves know the dangers of working with those materials but still, they don't know how to make a living without that amount of money. So, we need to have a good documentation on the types of damage that's being done because we do not have climate control. So, if we bring forward the evidence, we can persuade more people. It's not going to be done unless people are persuaded, and we make it an issue. The League of Women Voters was willing to make an issue, but there are still people who deny that there is any change in the climate. We can ruin the planet for future generations if we don't pay attention, that people have to be persuaded.

RA: Yeah that is kind of depressing, how younger people do hear these things with climate change deniers. I kind of wanted to ask you really quickly. So, you were able to go to college for

five years and then you were able to move, and this was a few decades ago and how was, how were your parents influential or not influential in where you are today. In terms of the fact that so many decades ago it wasn't very common for women to be in a position where you are educators or such, but just like what influence did your parents or family or even culture have on pushing you or pushing you away from?

MW: They urged me to go to college, they did. But they didn't want to pay for any of it. So, I was obliged to get a job and I had saved money to go to college. I was a minor, I was 16 when I graduated from high school and so my bank account was under my father's name. He refused to give me the money that I'd saved to go to college because he said that if I died, he didn't have the money to bury me. Which I thought was kind of peculiar. He was making good money, but he would not give me mine and I had to go to work. I had a scholarship and I lived at home. So, I had to pay for my transportation and my books and my clothes. And I did that for the five years. So, I would say they gave me oral encouragement, but they did nothing to give me any real support.

RA: Was this the same for your brothers? Or, was it just isolated? Was there a gender divide you feel in their influence?

MW: My brothers both went to school for a while and dropped out. I don't know, one of them did get his money. He had money in the bank, he did get that. I am not sure about the other one. But they both dropped out of school and the trouble was that the automobile plants in Michigan were giving very good wages to their employees. So one went to work for Ford, and one went to work with GM [General Motors], and they made more money than I did. One of them became a master plumber and worked for GM and he made quite a bit. So, having a college education is not always to your advantage. My father thought I made a very poor choice of profession because I became a teacher and so I didn't make that much. He thought that wasn't very good.

CA: So, if I may ask, what was his background, jobwise?

MW: My father was a plumber and he made good money. He had had a year of college and he dropped out. I don't know why. I think he was working at the same time he was going to college and probably had to drop out early.

RA: Did your mother go to college as well?

MW: My mother dropped out of school at seventh grade.

RA: Okay.

MW: She had eight brothers and sisters and she had to take care of them. She was expected to work in the factory and bring home some money. That was what immigrant children did.

CA: What do you see in Worcester's future? There is a kind of revitalization going on in the area I would say, especially with the Paw Sox [Pawtucket red Sox] coming into the area and developing it more. What's your opinion on the future of Worcester as a whole?

MW: Worcester has got some very good potential. We have a number of different groups here living together. It's a wonderful community with people of different cultures and people of different backgrounds and there is leadership, and medical research and business. I think there is great possibilities here. And I hope it continues to grow. It's probably one of the few cities which has peace among groups for the most part. It's not always true, you go back to some cases, but I think here people tend to work together better. I am not saying there is not any intolerance at all, but people have the right to make their own expression. It could be a model city. There may be more need for minority representation at the city council and in the administration but that's true in a lot of places. That should happen, I think.

RA: What challenges did you face early on as a female professor when you just started at Quinsigamond? Like you said earlier that if you walked in through the door, they would have asked for a date and had you on board, but I am sure there were challenges along the way.

MW: Oh yeah! A large number of their English department had just resigned for a number of reasons and I had good credentials. So, they were very happy. But I was given a lot of respect. I was a lot of respect. In two years, I was made head of the department. With the students sometimes, they had to be persuaded a little bit because some of them were not accustomed to having a woman professor. I did better, I think, with the more advanced classes. Students were more serious about the work and less interested in playing games. But I had respect for the most part. I don't remember having any complaints except that when you're in a meeting and you are the only woman in the meeting, they tend to make comments. I remember visiting, and there were 15 community colleges and 15 male presidents, and I had to meet one of them to give a report. I was a little surprised at the locker room language among the presidents. David Barkley, the president of Holyoke Community College at the time, he turned to me and apologized to me publicly about the language that was being used and I said that I heard about it. Not that I accepted it. Also, in a meeting they might say it's nice to have a member of the staff with us and then they ignore you for the rest of the meeting. Or you make a suggestion, somebody else gets the credit for the idea later on. Or you want to speak, you got your hand up, they ignore you. Or you're speaking, they interrupt you. But that happens to other people too, not just women.

CA: So over time, have you noticed a decline or shifts in that tone or view? Is it worse or better over the years?

MW: Frankly, I don't pay too much attention to it anymore. I did probably feel disturbed at one time and now somebody interrupts, and I just keep talking. I teach WISE classes now and I give presentations to various groups. Most of them are women. But they come voluntarily. I don't do homework. I mean I don't give any homework or give any tests or that kind of thing. I don't get any disrespect anymore. I probably would say something snappy if it happened.

RA: You were saying that you enjoy teaching much more higher-level courses. So, what would you say were some of the most interesting classes you taught in your career as an educator and which subject did you like teaching the most?

MW: I was in the division of humanities, so I taught quite a number of them. Actually, I enjoyed teaching logic.

RA: Logic?

MW: Yeah. And philosophy. I enjoyed teaching English Literature classes because that was where I had done a good deal of work. And I developed a course in critical thinking for the college which became a requirement for students in the general studies program. I like critical thinking. It's not a matter of what do I like. It's what the class is going to be interested in. So, I pick a subject that requires research and what I think is going to interest them. I just finished a class on cults and sex in America and I got a lot of not only interest, I filled two sections and they both had waiting lists. Next year I am going to propose a course on Imposter, Con-artists in America or in the world and that'll draw some. I am talking now about Nazi criminals. People who take on a different identity or lead a different life in order to hurt somebody or escape justice. That'll draw I think a few people.

CA: You currently serve as a member of the steering committee of the Worcester Women's History Project. How did you get involved in this?

MW: I finished my term last year so I am no longer a part of the steering committee. I served three years and there were two people that encouraged me. One was a dear friend of mine who gave me a copy of their newsletter which was very nicely done, and they had trips too, day trips. There was someone in one of my WISE classes who approached me and said that one of the steering committee members had passed away and she thought that maybe I would like to be appointed. So, I thought that over and decided I would do that and my chief contribution was that I started a speaker's bureau and invited people to contribute. We do have former teachers and professional women in the Worcester Women's History Project. And I developed a contract and suggested that they could present a presentation for a fee and they could donate a part of that to the Worcester Women. So, it was money making for the organization. I helped revised the bylaws, and I was also on the trail guide committee. for a time, they are attempting to write a publication involving important Worcester women, their biographies and point out where they lived, where they worked, where they grew up and so on. So, I worked on that too. So, I was on almost three projects.

RA: So, you worked for the Worcester Institute for Senior Education?

MW: That's WISE, yes. I've been doing that for 13 years. A friend of mine suggested I take classes, so I did, and I opened my mouth a couple times in class and the curriculum director

came to me and said how would you like to teach a class? So I had my arm twisted. And early on I was trying to present material that I had presented to my own students who were undergraduates. It just didn't go over very well. So, they asked me to present another class and so I picked romantic fiction, the English romantic poets and a reliance on Plato. I would start with a symposium and when writing up the course description I said, "Who is going to take this class? Maybe I should offer something people will be interested in." So, I threw it out. And I developed a class on the spot called Puritans and Witches in Early New England which spoke not only of the witch hysteria in 1692 but also one generation earlier in Connecticut and that drew a crowd. So, that was a lesson to me. I had to check some dates and research and so on, which is fine because it keeps my mind sharp too. And that class went over very well. So, ever since then, I have picked a subject that I think will interest them and not something that I happen to teach sophomores necessarily. Not that they wouldn't be—they have a lot of people there who are capable of teaching romantic poetry. I tried something a little different.

CA: So, you've done a lot of community service activities. Which one do you think had the most impact on you personally?

MW: I think that the one I am doing now. The one with the interfaith effort. Probably because I have become aware more with the problems that people have experienced because of their faith. For example, a friend of mine told me about her daughter who was—Wachusett Regional High School is about 90, 95 percent white and a few minority students who go there, they don't know, they don't have any orientation on how to deal with different cultures in the classes. I took classes at a conference in presenting materials to diverse students and also to using them in my curriculum. But if you go to one of the teachers at the high school, she'll say, "We don't have any problems here. The minority students all sit together at one table in the cafeteria and they enjoy each other's company." Oh, that's crazy. That clearly doesn't say anything really, excepting that they are isolating themselves and probably for a reason.

RA: That's really interesting. So, you've pretty much talked about the different things you've done and what you like. Is there anything that you would have done differently throughout your career that you think might have changed or impacted the way things have gone?

MW: That's an interesting question. When I first started out, I taught the curriculum that was in front of me. And later I developed my own curriculum and patterned it after what was in front of me. I think what's necessary really is to reach out to students and begin with familiar territory. Territory that's familiar to them. And then work from that. To use examples that they can relate to and to enhance their experience so that they can come to appreciate. You don't start out with Byron and Shelley and Keats necessarily, but you start out with material that seems they could relate to according to their background and then work in different areas. So, I learned to diversify my curriculum not simply because of the culture necessarily, but also because of the level that they were on. I always thought about how you teach critical thinking to elementary school students. Well, I didn't teach elementary school, but I learned back from my own experience, you come to with Robert Lee Stevenson's poem, "In winter I get up at night and dress by yellow

candle light, in summer quite the other way, I go back to bed by day." So, you can talk to the students, why is it you go to bed by eight o'clock, why is it night sometimes and why is it day sometimes. And then the students come to understand that the length of days are not always the same. They come to understand the science behind the length of days as a result of that. So that's what I mean, you start with where the student is, and you build on that.

CA: So, you said, you taught at the college and also high school level?

MW: I did practice teaching at the high school level.

CA: Which do you prefer?

MW: I am not sure that's a fair comparison because I did practice teaching with the head of the department and those students were chosen. So, it was a wonderful class, but they were the most advanced students in the school.

CA: More so, how was the experience different.

MW: Yeah, it was a different experience. I have taught at different levels in the college. At times, developmental freshman and sophomores and I find that there is a difference in all of them. I was generally assigned to logic classes for some reason. So, you know, when I assigned myself classes I usually pick to sophomore classes sometimes. I like writing, and I like teaching writing. But there again, you have to start with where the student is, and you give them three things you want them to work on. so, each one is a different challenge, and I think the best thing a teacher can be is flexible and try to keep it interesting.

RA: I know we have touched upon many things but I kind of wanted to ask, your mother has a Dutch lineage?

MW: Yes, she was born in the Netherlands.

RA: What about your father?

MW: My father's ancestors, most of them were born in Germany. Then I found out his mother's family came from England. They were Puritans. One of them founded the town of Hingham. He came from Hingham, England. It was when the Puritans were being persecuted in England and they came to establish their own community. And this was not Boston, it was in Hingham. And, I am a direct descendant of that person. His middle name was from his son in law. So, I am Dutch and German and Puritan English. I told my doctor and he said you're Teutonic.

CA: So, you mentioned how you really enjoy writing. Did that have a big impact early on in your life? During high school or that age.

MW: When I was in high school, I was given good grades for writing. I was given very little direction on how to write. Actually, I was on the PhD level before I actually found out what writing was all about. I wrote papers and didn't care but there was one teacher who was very strict. "Alright, here is your problem, one page. And use as few words as possible in your sentences. Make it terse, make it slappy." And I learned to write. I used the EB White as a model. And, I still do. The trouble is, I tend to think that way now. It becomes a havoc. It's characteristic. Friend of mine called a vibrant letter to the paper, the *Telegram and Gazette*, complaining about something or the other and a friend read it and he identified the author before it got to the signature. He knew that was mine. So, I write. I write handouts for my classes, and I have written op-eds for the women's history project. Written several. Specifically, for Women's Equality Day. And I have written articles for the newsletter. But it's Strunk and White. You know Strunk and White? No? It's quite the pity.

CA: If you wanna explain or elaborate on that.

MW: It's a short book. It's really not taught, and I taught it and used it successfully. You say what you have to say, and you don't use these long loose constructions. You collapse a sentence and say it in as few words as possible. So, if you say, "There are many doves in the field," you take out the "there are" and you say, "many doves are in the field". So, you eliminate the unnecessary words and you eliminate the words that really aren't doing very much. Students have papers, they increase the predicate by adding more clauses which don't do anything. Yeah, I did that this morning actually for a proposal and I revised it in order to tighten it. And it makes a very big impact.

CA: Do you think now, education wise, do you think its improved? Do you think it's more focused on helping the students? You mentioned before something along the lines of being more direct in helping out the students than just going by the numbers.

MW: For some, its best if they learn according to examples. And students, young students are not that abstract. And that's true with numbers because numbers are abstract. But if you put three objects in front of them and they know that that's three and you take away two, there's one left. But that's not all. There is a lot that's abstract in writing. I had one international student that came to me and begged me to give him a tutorial in English Literature. Because the metaphors are different. He was from Thailand and understanding symbols and metaphors, that's cultural. A lot of it. "As pure as the driven snow". That makes no sense to anybody who doesn't know what snow is. Besides first time it's kind of dirty anyway. But kids don't understand metaphors. I remember there was a verse in the Old Testament, Songs of Warning, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge". Okay, I had eaten wild grapes, but I didn't know what that meant. I asked my father, what does that mean, he couldn't explain it. It's a metaphor, it's a wonderful metaphor. The prophet is saying, if you say you forsake God, you don't look after the little orphan, and you follow false God, you're going to lose in battle and your children are going to be carried away captive. that's what he means. But no kid's going to get that. Or you say, "The Lord is my shepherd" in Sunday school, most of these kids don't know

what a shepherd is because having sheep is not part of our culture anymore. So, then you have to explain all that and you forget to point out what it all means. So, what I am saying is that you have to build gradually. There are some relationships you see. But most kids don't get all that until they are above 14 years old. So, they have to grow up to it gradually.

RA: So, I wanted to ask, how does your everyday look? And how much does religion or spirituality play a role in your everyday?

MW: Well, I belong to a Methodist Church. I belonged to a whole lot of different churches in my life. And I like the Methodist Church because it emphasizes generosity and giving to others. That's part of their mission. And they tend to be somewhat tolerant, I think. They have established doctrines. But they don't sit you down and dissect your soul and see where you're coming from necessarily. And I think you have to be honest. And that's honest with your school, and honest with your taxes, and honest when people ask you questions. You deceive only if you have to socially. If somebody asks if you like their dress, and you think it's terrible, you think of something else to say like, "It matches your eyes," or something. In my religion, I think God is the father or mother of all humankind, and each person is equal in His sight. And I do not think you should be judgmental excepting for those who violate human rights. Or those who aren't sensitive may be need a little correction. I was brought up quite strictly, and perhaps I am a little more generous now and more tolerant I think than my parents were. I went back to a Church and my brother is still a member of this Church and these are very conservative types. So, the man stood up and he had a business in Ann Arbor, and he said, "Those are strange people at Ann Arbor." That's where University of Michigan is. But you have to remember that God loves them too. I was sitting there and thinking I was one of those people and I also went to that Church for a while. So, it's as if there is a deep divide there somehow. And I have a foot in both of them. And I have to reconcile that.

CA: Did it kind of give you a perspective having a foot in both of them, being able to see both sides?

MW: Well, the student from Thailand, we talked about the symbols and poetry, and I explained what it was, and then I had him write a paper. He was to choose a symbol, and then he was to write a paper telling what it represented. So, he came with the paper in one hand and he had something clutched in the other, and to my horror, it was his God and he had written a paper about his God. And he brought it to me so I could see it. That was an experience for me because I have seen these Gods in museums and so on but I never saw one that somebody had actually worshipped. And, I thought, how do I react to this. And then I realized this was not something he would have shown anyone. But he had enough faith in me, and enough trust, that he'd share this with me. So, I accepted that. I'm not sure I could have done that years ago. So, you learn as long as you live. Everyday. I always listen to the news for a little excitement, try to assimilate it and a lot of it is connecting. A lot of people don't do that. They see facts in isolation, and they don't relate them into one another and it's important to do that. So, I try to stay on top of what's going

on.

CA: Any final thoughts?

RA: Any advice that you'd like to give us?

MW: I think I have just about said everything in connection with the questions that you've asked. I hope to continue teaching WISE for a few more years to come. And keep learning. I do research and I enjoy it and I still enjoy teaching. I give presentations occasionally, only upon invitation. But every day, you learn something every day. And I just hope that my mind keeps functioning. I see people my age, many of them are passing away. And many of them are with us physically, but mentally they are not with us, at least not all the time. I'm hoping to be around and enjoy life for a while. You can share that with others.

CA: Thank you.

RA: Thank you so much for your time.

MW: Well, thank you.