

INTERVIEWEE: Regina Wolanin
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Worcester Women's Oral History Project

ABSTRACT: Regina H. Wolanin was born on October 29, 1926 in Webster, MA. Her parents immigrated from Poland. She grew up in the Vernon Hill section of Worcester, which was the “Polish” section and went to school at Saint Mary’s and then Commerce High. Regina started working upon her graduation from high school and never attended college. Her family was rather poor, but they had a rich family life. Regina worked as a dental assistant and as a sewing teacher at the Girls Club and public school, all arising from her attitude of “I can do it!” She is proud of her family history and Polish roots and was very involved in the Polish community in Worcester.

[HS: After introducing myself, Regina started talking, before I had a chance to start recording.]

RW: [I lived] down below Ward Street, which is the Green Island section, Millbury Street, which had a lot of Polish places, sold groceries, barrooms and everything else, the housing below Millbury Street was very, very poor. A lot of the houses did not have bathtubs, did not have hot water, so the people used to go to Crompton Park? At Crompton Park they had showers, and that’s where they used to take showers and then go back to their apartments. They were very poor apartments, poorly kept, not very good. So that’s why my father wanted to live closer to Vernon Street. Vernon Street was primarily Irish section, very well-maintained and everything else. My father’s landlord was Mr. Samko, who was a very, very good landlord. One time my father lost his job, he couldn’t pay his rent. Many times, a landlord will say, “If you can’t pay your rent, go.” Mr. Samko said, “Don’t worry about it, when you have the money, you can pay me.” So, for three months, they were unable to pay their rent, and they still lived in the same apartment. And then after my father got a job again, he paid the rent. My mother worked in the woolen mills; she was a weaver. And she worked in Spencer in one of the woolen mills, and then she worked on School Street in Worcester, where they made belting for the parachutes in World War II.

We had a wonderful family, we had Christmas at home, and my father allowed us to have a small glass of port wine, that was the only drink we had. We celebrated Wigilia [trans. Christmas Eve] every year in my mother’s and my father’s house. And on Saturdays, the neighborhood plus other people would come over and play cards at different houses. That was the Saturday ritual. So, they would play cards and that’s how we learned to play cards and the children would all play together. We all got along. Sometimes when we would get angry at some of the neighbors who didn’t know how to speak Polish, we would speak Polish amongst ourselves, and then they would speak Lithuanian amongst themselves, or whatever, and the only ones who couldn’t speak any language were the Irish. So, they wouldn’t know what we were saying. But really, we had very, very good neighbors and we looked out for one another. The men who were able to work in the wire mills, they were the ones who made out better. They were able to draw the wire out, they were strong and could pull. But like I said, my father just had rheumatism, all the time, all the time. He suffered with that, had problems with that, he could not work. He tried working in a mill once, but he couldn’t do it. He fell sick so that was it, the end of that. The mill workers

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made very good salaries. Although there was one family, we had across the street from us, with six children. They were on welfare for a while; very, very embarrassed and did not want to tell anyone they were on welfare, but they were on welfare.

My father and mother worked, so when we went to school, my mother used to pay the lady and we would go to her house and have lunch, so that my mother could work. A lot of the Polish immigrants had grocery stores. It seems as though every time someone came here, they would open up a grocery store. [They] knew nothing about it but would open up a grocery store. We had about eight grocery stores just in our neighborhood. Some of them did very, very well, others just did not know what they were doing. Mr. Gebski, he owned Millbury Furniture Company. He started a grocery store, from what I understand, from the history, and then he couldn't let it go. So, he and Mr. Mis started a furniture store. And, they did very, very well. But then something happened, they split, Mr. Gebski kept the store, Millbury Furniture that was the name of it. [He] did very, very well. Now, on the other side, was Mr. Konczajni (sp?), he also had a furniture store. He didn't do as well; different ideas and things like that. Mr. Buinski, (sp?), he was at Vernon Drug Store, very, very good. Then in competition, Mr. Zendzik (sp?) opened up a drug store, but it was competition, and it was harder for Mr. Zendzik. Mr. Buinski was one of these, that you would go in and say, "Oh, I've got a problem with this." He would say, "just a minute." He'd go in and make an ointment, give it to you and say, "This will fix you." For some reason, I think he was a pharmacist also, but he used to make concoctions for people who had rheumatism and things like that, so he did well.

A lot of barrooms on Millbury Street, and many people, men especially, used to go the barrooms. Then there was, I don't know what else to say, but grocery stores were primarily the big business and, as I said, a lot of them closed.

HS: Tell me, how was it growing up in this neighborhood, where did you go to school?

RW: I went to school—well we started off in public school, my brother and I, because Saint Mary's, which was the Polish school, but didn't have a kindergarten. So, I started off in kindergarten in public school and my brother started in the first grade. So again, we spoke Polish at home, so in the schools, do I say [we were] discriminated against? That would be the word now but at that time we didn't use [the word] "discrimination?" We just could not speak English like the English people, the Irish people spoke, so they kind of passed us over. So anyhow, I did not like kindergarten because the teacher told me to draw something and I didn't know what she wanted me to draw. And she thought, "We'll, you'll sit in the back of the room," so she pushed me to the back of the room. So, we started at Saint Mary's, went to Saint Mary's all through eighth grade. Saint Mary's opened up to high school, but I didn't want to go to Saint Mary's High School, so I went to Providence Street Junior High. And my brother went to Providence Street Junior High. And then we went to Commerce High School, graduated Commerce High School. I went to work at Heald Machinery Company that my husband worked. While I was in high school and I was 14, when I met him.

So, we belonged to an organization called the Polish Falcons of America. Best organization as far as I was concerned for the young people of Polish descent, wonderful. I joined when I was 11

years old. We had gymnastics, we had track and field, we had drilling, weightlifting, parallel bars, anything to do with gymnastics. I belonged, I still belong, but I belonged for many years and became an instructor when I was 17 something. We traveled to New Britain Connecticut, Chicopee, to Holyoke, Webster. We'd rent a bus and a whole bus full of children would go. A wonderful, wonderful organization. Unfortunately, when the war came, all of our teenage men went into the service, and the organization went down. Although it is still strong in other parts of the country. In Pittsfield, I don't know about North Adams, but in other areas, it was a wonderful organization. We also had the PNA, which was Polish National Alliance. They had a wonderful drum corps, played everywhere, very, very good. But again, like everything else, it has its limitations. It goes downhill after World War II. There was nobody there to carry about. Then there was always the PNI, the Polish National Independence Club. That was also for Polish people and everything. When my mother and father were here, the City of Worcester had a class at Ward Street School, and I remember my father going to school there, before he became a citizen, he studied history, spelling and the English language. I used to have his books, I don't have them anymore, but anyhow, after studying there he became a US citizen.

HS: When was the year, do you remember the year? More or less?

RW: It would have to be about the early '30s, maybe 1931, 1933, someplace around that idea. Because then, after my father became a citizen, my mother became a citizen, so they were both citizens. They were teaching us, in their own way. They were learning their own English and our English. I remember in the evening sometimes, when it was time for my brother and I to go to bed, my mother, my father and I would get into their bed, and my father would read the newspaper in English, so that we would know. So, they would learn better English. So, they both spoke English, both read and wrote. I always feel that they were ahead of their time, they did a lot of things that the immigrants at that time did not do. They were poor, like I say, but I didn't realize that. But on Sunday, my father would take us down to Crompton Park and we would watch the semi-pro baseball. And that was the only time we were allowed an ice cream cone or a popsicle because that's all they had the money for. During the depression, my mother made apple pies and my father tried to sell them to make money. But again, we were living in a neighborhood that couldn't afford it. We never had a car, we didn't get a telephone until I was like maybe 16 or 17 years old, my parents never owned a car. My uncle, my mother's brother, he lived in Amsterdam, New York, and he worked for Bigelow Rug Company. He had a car, and used to come down and bring sometimes a rug for my mother, always brought something for my brother and me: a ball or something to play with. He had enough money so he always helped my parents out. We always went to the park; we were a very close family unit. My father's brother lived in Hartford, Connecticut, my mother's sister lived in Yonkers, New York, those were the only relatives that were here, the others were in Poland, my father had a bigger family in Poland.

HS: So, you always lived in the Vernon Hill area?

RW: Always lived in the Vernon Hill area. When my father, it was strange, when my father was 77, their landlord's daughter inherited the houses, or the father signed the houses over to the daughter. Well, as is usual, she wanted to raise the rents. So, my husband and I talked to my father. We said, "Look, you're going to pay so much rent here, why don't you buy a house? And

what you're paying rent here for, you'll pay for the mortgage on the house." So, they did, they moved out and they moved onto Montrose Street, and my father was 77 at the time when they bought the house and they lived there for quite a few years.

HS: Where is that?

RW: It's off of Vernon Street. Montrose and Euclid Avenue. They had Polish neighbors, very good neighbors. They were nice because they would help them shovel the sidewalk. One neighbor would come down and, "Oh, Mr. Bylinski, I'll do it for you" and would shovel the sidewalk. Oh, during the depression, what happened was that; if you were worked in a factory, especially the shoe industry, if you worked in the shoe industry, and like during the winter, just before Christmas it was slow. They worked overtime in the summertime because they were getting ready for winter, for Christmas. But come November, December, they slowed down because they already had the production out. It was a rule that they had to sit in the factory, not get paid, but they could not get a job anywhere else. So, they had to sit there for 8 hours, doing nothing, not getting paid. So, when Roosevelt became president, he says no, you can't do that, if they're going sit there, you have to pay them. So, a lot of them, at that time, were laid off for that season, but were picked up again later. So that made it very difficult, as far as getting salary and getting money. So, for two months, you weren't paid. So, what do you do? Anyhow, that was difficult at that time.

HS: Were there a lot of shoe factories in the area?

RW: Yes, Webster and Worcester had a lot of them. They had Kleven (sp?) Shoes, Gibbs, Brown Shoe, which was a big ... in fact, my husband worked at Brown Shoe. Oh, they had Manning and Gibbs, they had many, many. Webster and Worcester were really the shoe industry, and we had an awfully lots of the textiles, loads of textile everywhere, and now we have nothing.

HS: I know, Worcester was a big industrial city, once.

RW: And then, like my father-in-law, he was an entrepreneur. I think he started, if I remember right, when he came here, his father used to bring people from Poland. He used to escort people from Poland on a boat, and he would transport them to Bevel Falls (sp?) New Hampshire, I think it is. I'm not sure what year it was, I think it was 1912, when my father-in-law came over, he was at the time 15 or something like that. He came with his father to help him. Well, they got to Bevel Falls, his father said they were going back to Poland, and my father-in-law says "no" and he took a hobo on a train and went to Chicago. So, his father had to go back alone. And then from Chicago he came here. They also lived in Webster, my father-in-law and mother-in-law, they lived in Webster. It's strange, because one of the bridesmaids at their wedding was the same bridesmaid at my parents' wedding and yet they didn't know one another. They never knew one another at the time.

Well, my father-in-law started, from what I understand, he started a grocery business. He was one of those that didn't know anything about, didn't know how to cut meat or anything, so he lost that. But then he learned enough English, and of course Polish and everything else, and he

worked as an insurance salesman for Metropolitan Life. And of course, working for Metropolitan Life, he had all the Polish people as his customers. And he would go from house to house, and he would collect a dollar or something a month, or something like that, so he did well. And then, after he retired from there, he bought a business in Oxford and sold that, and bought a business in Webster and then he bought, after he sold that, he bought a business in Worcester. That was his last business; he bought a couple of barrooms and then the one in Worcester was the last one he had, but he did well for himself. He spoke fairly good English. My mother-in-law spoke English but poorly, and they had a good life.

Who else? There was Mr. Nadolny who started a bakery, and he made the best fruitcake. Those were the wedding cakes we had, that was a very, very good bakery. They never had any children, but the bakery was very, very successful, they had excellent stuff. And like, the Gebskis had a furniture store, that's not there anymore, the children didn't want it. But that's another story. The Szlyks - the Szlyk family came over, from what I understand, there were three brothers. Each brother opened a grocery store. We traded at Stefan Szlyk, which was down on the corner of Perry Ave and Suffield Street. Wonderful, wonderful people. When we were children, my mother would send us down to the store to buy this and that. They knew exactly what kind of meat my mother wanted, because one time I went down, and I came home, and my mother said, "He knows better than that! That's not the kind of meat I want for this! Take it back down." I took it back down and he [illegible] it. But again, as I said, we were poor and we'd go to Mr. Szlyk and get some groceries, and then we would say.... Can I speak in Polish?

HS: Yes, I do understand very well but I will have to translate this, but yes.

RW: It's just a short word - "Pan Szlyk, can I have a free lollipop?" And he would give us free candy, and that was such a wonderful gesture, because like I say, we couldn't afford the candy, even though it was penny, but we couldn't afford that penny. But he would, my mother would go shopping and we would go with her, and he would give us penny candy. Wonderful people. And then my children were growing up, I was still doing business there, and I'd go in and his son would say, "Oh, we've got coffee in the back room if you want it." And then one time he says, "My mother washed the coffee pot, so the coffee doesn't taste as good" [laughing]? They were fabulous, there were so many wonderful people. There were very few that you could say were bad people, they were good people.

HS: So, you were a very close-knit community here?

RW: Very much, the organizations and the church. The Polish women would make paczkis [trans. donuts] in the school auditorium and they would sell them to make profit. The Sisters all spoke Polish and we'd walk up and down the hill talking to the Sisters, the whole group. We just got along so beautifully. We had one family that lived next to us, they had a big family, and I imagine they had a tough time, but they used to make moonshine in the bathtub. And one time, my brother and I once, and this is a silly story, but - my mother and father or a neighbor, I don't know how it was, we both got a Devil Dogs. And that was such a treat for us, a Devil Dog, my mother never bought any pastry. She baked everything, very good baker, very good, Josie [her sister] learned a lot of cooking from her, and baking. My mother was an excellent cook and an

excellent baker. But anyhow, we got these Devil Dogs now, they were bought, we never had anything bought. So, we're sitting there, right around the fence, and we're eating our Devil Dogs, and this lady from another street came over to buy moonshine. And, I think, she had some moonshine inside the house, and she got sick outside the house (laughing). My brother looks at me, he says, "Ugh, you want this Devil Dog?" I said, "Sure!" [laughs]. It didn't bother me. But we had good neighbors, we had Lithuanian neighbors, we had Irish neighbors, we just all got along, we helped one another. One day, my friend, her family owned Millbury Furniture, her parents always rented a cottage in Cape Cod for the whole summer. So, my friend says to me, "Want to come down for the weekend?" I was working and I said, "Well, gee, my mother's working at night, my father was sick in bed, he couldn't get out of bed, he had sciatica, and I said I had to make supper for my father and I said, someone has to take him to the bathroom and everything. My neighbor from across the street came over, "You go, don't worry about it, we'll take care of him." I said, "Yeah, but I've got to make supper for my father." She said, "Don't worry, I'll make supper for him." She came over to our house – our houses were like, her house was like my house, my house was like her house – so she came over and she says to my father— ok it was Friday, my mother was making string bean soup, which was on Friday and all it needed was some potatoes added, and she says to my father, "How many potatoes should I add?" And he says, "Oh, two or three will be okay." It was just a small pot. She puts the potatoes and, well, the soup became like mush [laughs]. And he says to her, "Don't worry about it, it's wonderful, it tastes good and I'll eat it." And he ate it. He was one of these men, my father was a very calm person, he was a nice guy, he was very, very calm and very good. He would always calm everyone down, "Ok, ok," you know, and he would calm everyone down.

But that's what I was saying about friends. The man came over and he took care of him that evening because, like I say, he had to go to the bathroom and who was going to take him? So, he did that. So, friends were very, very helpful, they were outstanding, all of them. I can't say a bad word about any of the neighbors we had. And we say some were poor up the hill. There was a family that lived, there was a big family, they were poor. So, what we used to do, we had a field near the house, and every so often, we would say, "You know, let's build a fire in the field." And, we used to steal a potato from home, each of us, so we would put the potato to cook it on the fire. Well, did we know it was going to take an hour for that potato? So, after 15, 20 minutes, half an hour maybe, we said "Oh they must be done". We took the potatoes, but they were still raw. But this one girl from the house, she says, "I'll take them," and she ate them, they were still raw, but she ate them. It was a very poor family, actually one of the daughters still lives in that house. But we had our good times, we played together, we did everything together.

HS: It was safe to play outside?

RW: Oh, we played outside all the time. And roller-skating, we loved roller-skating. I never had a bicycle, my brother never had a bicycle, my friend had a bicycle, my husband had a bicycle. And then during the war, Mrs. Gebski was the wife of Mr. Gebski who had the Millbury Furniture Company, during the war, because we belonged to the Falcons and it was all Polish group, she used to put on play productions for the purpose of helping Poland. So, every winter she'd gather the Falcons that wanted to be in it, all in Polish – in fact I have someplace some of the things that we did – and we each had something to say, cause this was all Polish. And she

would sell tickets, and we would be on the stage at Arkadia (sp?), and chairs all around, and people would come around, that's how I met my husband, but anyhow. My brother, we put on a wedding [play] – Wiejskie Wesele [trans. Wedding in the Village] and he was the Jew, and I don't know, I can't remember now. Oh, no this was for the adults. She also put on a play for the adults, my father was in there – and this was mostly for the neighborhood – and my father was one of the ushers or something, and Mrs. Stoklosa was something, and someone else – so it was an adult one.

My friend Rita and I, she was the Krakowianka [trans. girl from Krakow], I was the Krakowiak, [trans. boy from Krakow]. I was the boy and she was the girl. And we danced, we made up our own dance, and we danced, and this whole thing. We had the – what do they call the Jewish lady that “swatowac? [yenta] Yes, swatowac, where they get the couple together, and they had, Mr. Szeniawski, he was the—I don't remember who the bride was, but I know he was the groom. And they had the wedding party come in and they had the celebration, and Mrs. Gebski used to do that. And all of that went to the Polish fund. And we had a play every year, I was 14 when I started, and had to be 17 or 18 before it was the end of it. We had one woman that played the piano very well and we sang. It was such a big community; we were a wonderful community. What can you say about it? Like I say, you can't criticize anybody, because everybody worked together, poor or rich. I mean, like I say the Gralicki, they lived, in the beginning, I think it was like Windham Street, and Millers lived, and we had the people who were closer to the church, meaning they went more often to church during the week, like Mrs. Gralicki. She belonged to that group of women, and Mrs. Miller and Mrs. Gokowski, all these women, they belonged together but they had their own group. They're the ones that used to bake the “paczki” [trans. Polish donuts], but they had the Polish Women's Club, but again, it was not for the poor people. They were the doctor's wives, the businessman's wives, the lawyer's wives, all of those belonged to that group.

HS: What did Mr. Gralicki do to be rich?

RW: I don't know what he did, I don't remember. They had the women's group, but at the same time, the men, not thinking that someday they were going to pass on, the men had their own, they called it the Quo Vadis group.

HS: Yes, I know about it.

RW: But, again, in order to belong to the Quo Vadis group, you had to be a doctor, a lawyer, a businessman.

HS: So, it was a professional group?

RW: Supposedly. Now, my husband was an engineer, they didn't accept him. Mr. Kraska owned a business, they would not accept him. Mr. Bartosiewicz owned a restaurant, he was not accepted. He held that against them forever. To this day he holds it against the Quo Vadis he never joined. My husband joined; Mr. Kraska joined. But that was the new generation – these doctors and lawyers didn't think that they weren't going to pass on and who was going to take

over? See? So they, both of them, the Women's Club and the Quo Vadis, they ruined themselves because they were picky, exclusive, exclusive. Now, at church, we have the Guild of Our Lady of Czestochowa, anybody can belong. We have the boosters, anybody can belong. At one time, again, when we were growing up, Monsignor Bojanowski was our pastor. And, some of the organizations, the PNI, the PNA, the Falcons, we were all separate organizations from the church, we were not church organizations. Monsignor Bojanowski wanted them, for the church to be over them, and they said no, because we are not – like the Polish Falcons is an insurance company. So, it's still existing, it's an insurance company. So, they said you can't own us, you can't tell us what to do because we are an individual company and everything. So, at one time, when we used to have – we had a lot of parades, lots of parades, all these organizations, the PNI would play the bands, the Falcons would march behind the bands, and everything else. One time we were having a track and field event at Gaskill Field and we were going to march to church as a group, and he made it, I don't think we were allowed to march to church as a group, because of . . .

HS: Because you were not a church organization?

RW: Exactly. And at that time, that was in 1936, I think it was when we had like we had almost like Olympics at Gaskill Field, and Stella Walsh, who was the Polish athlete, Walasiewicz, she was the Polish track and field athlete, she came here and she ran with the group. And it was wonderful because, as some of the people, they were the older members, were running the track, there was one that had a hard time, so she put her hand back and she was pulling her along and they were running the track. Well, of course she won because she was an athlete, an Olympic athlete. She was Olympic, she won a gold medal. That goes back to like 1936 that she won a gold medal. She went under the name of Stella Walsh, but her name was Walasiewicz, think it was.

So, the Falcons did an awful lot. We always held, like I said track and field. We went to New Britain, Connecticut, and we stayed overnight. And, all the Falcons, from all over, like I say, Holyoke, Adams, North Adams, New Braintree, Meriden, all of these, we were all in New Britain Connecticut and we held a track and field event. We used to do drills to "nie rzucim ziemi [Polish hymn: we won't abandon our country] I still remember that [laughs], and I don't know, what else do you want . . .

HS: I would like to ask you a little about your education. You mentioned that you went to Saint Mary's?

RW: Yes

HS: So, Saint Mary's was a private school, a church school, but you said you were poor, but yet you could go to Saint Mary's

RW: Oh yeah, we went.

HS: But you had to pay some kind of tuition?

RW: Yes, in fact, I still have a report card, my brother's report card, one of them. And we paid 50 cents a month. My father had to pay 50 cents a month and I went to Saint Mary's until the eighth grade. And then I went to Providence Street Junior High School, down here, and from there I went to Commerce High School, graduated Commerce High School, and then I worked at Heald Machine Company as a secretary for four years, got married in 1948, and so then I quit my job because I was pregnant. And, I didn't work again until my youngest son was in the fourth grade. We had three boys and they all went to Saint Mary's, and then went to Saint Mary's High School.

Well, the thing was, my husband was brought up in a public school, I was brought up in a Polish school, or private, and so we decided that our older son – the oldest you make all the plans for – we said, ok he'll go to parochial school till the eighth grade, and then he's going to go to high school in a public school, and college, he can choose whatever he wants. So, he went to Saint Mary's till eighth grade, went to Providence Street Junior High School for one year, loved it, and went to South High School for one year, hated it. He said: "I'm not going back there". So, we said: "Where do you want to go"? He said I'll go anywhere except there, because the boys on the bus, he said, some of them are doing drugs, some of them are smoking, they have no respect for the teachers. He didn't want to go there so we said ok, so he went back to Saint Mary's, and he loved it, he just loved Saint Mary's. He graduated Saint Mary's and then he went to Holy Cross. Then he taught for a couple of years, two or three years at Grafton High School, but he was coming up to tenure, as is with schoolteachers sometimes. Well, ok, we'll hire someone new for less, so he didn't [get tenure]. So, he went to school for a while for special ed or something, I don't know if he went for a year, but that wasn't what he wanted. He did substitute teaching in high schools and everything. And then, my parents were getting older and my family, my mother and father and I were very, very close. And my father was talking, he was getting sick, and he was talking, and he says, "You know, when we make our will, we want to leave something to the grandchildren." And I said to him at that time, I said you know what, I said, you're not gonna need what you have, and it's better to give it while you're alive than after you die. Cause when you die, it's not given from you. But I said, if you give it now, it is now. So, they gave each of the grandchildren some money. My son used that money to go to law school, so to this day he always remembers it, yeah that paid for my law school. And then the others used it – one bought a car and I don't know what the other one did.

HS: How about yourself?

RW: Me? Ok, I started on that. So then, like I said, my youngest son was in the second grade, and one of the sisters, because like I said we had Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth. They were teaching and Sister Philomena, she was there, and she got sick. So, they couldn't bring more sisters in. So, what they did, this one woman, Mrs. Gebczak (sp?), she was teaching that grade, the first-grade sister was teaching both grades. But then they said "Mrs. Gebczak, can you teach in the morning?" She took it. So then I thought about this and I went and spoke to the Superior, and I said, "You know, if she teaches in the morning, I'll teach in the afternoon because I don't want this class to be taught by the first grade teacher when she has so many kids in the first grade." So, they agreed to it and I taught in the afternoon, Mrs. Gebczak taught in the

morning. I don't know how long it was that the sister was out. One day I took my youngest son, he was maybe two years old, took him to school, he sat in the back, and my other son was in the second grade at the time. My youngest son fell asleep and he started to snore (laughing). But, when I taught, nobody knew that my son was in that class. I said, he's a student, he's not my son, he is a student, and that's what he was. So, I substituted for sister and then she came back and then she asked me to help her many times. We put on shows, anyhow, school always put on June plays and Christmas plays and everything. So anyway, I helped her all along and everything for that whole year. And then, by that time, my youngest son, he was already in fourth grade, my youngest son. So, there was a thing in a church bulletin – "capable person to teach kindergarten." So, I looked at it and I said to my husband, "You know what, I'm capable." He says, "Look, no no no." And I said, "Why not?" And he said, "Well, you won't get it." I said, "Well, if I don't try, I'll never know. If I go and he says no, well, I tried and he said no, that's ok." So, it took me all week to think about. Finally, on Friday I went down, saw the pastor, and I said, "I have three children, I'm capable, I can do it." And he interviewed me and everything else, and after, I know he interviewed someone else, I know he did. I don't know who else he interviewed, I have no idea, but after a couple of weeks, he says, "Ok, you have the job." So, I taught kindergarten for 10 years; loved it, loved it.

HS: At Saint Mary's?

RW: At Saint Mary's. I had a first class, I had 57 students, and I had no assistants, no nothing. And what they did, they used to have students that went in the morning, and some of them went all day and then some students only went in the afternoon. So, after one year or two years, I don't remember, I spoke to the pastor and I said, "You know what, make it an all-day kindergarten because I teach this in the morning and then there are students that come in the afternoon that were already taught and then there are the ones that weren't taught. So now, this is a repetition, so put them in an all-day kindergarten." So that is what they did, that's when they started all-day kindergarten. And it was wonderful, I loved the school. Even, the other day, I met three of my students the other day. I loved it, I loved it, I loved the life. I just loved the children. Just wonderful, wonderful.

But then, my father was getting sick, my mother wasn't feeling too good. My father had cancer and my mother, she was still fairly decent, but I know she was having problems. So, I quit. And my father died November 11th. My mother was in the hospital, she died November 18th. And I lived with my father for three months. My husband took care of my house here, and I lived with my father for three months, because the doctor said, "You can't take care of both people," so he couldn't send my mother home. My father, like I say, he had cancer, wonderful, wonderful patient. You look at people and his attitude was, "I'll be better tomorrow." I remember one day I was sitting there, and I said, "Why don't you get up and go on the couch," because they had like a dining room, but it wasn't a dining room, it was a sitting room and then a living room, and then they had the bedroom. So I went, and I helped him, and he says, "I'd like to go the window and see what's going on in the street." I said ok, and I had to walk back with him, because his cancer turned into bone cancer and everything and that's really painful. So, I was afraid, and I was walking in back of him in case he should stop. Well, he got halfway, and he says "nie dzisiaj, może jutro", [not today, maybe tomorrow]. That was his outlook all the time, all the time. We

watched the Olympics and he was on the couch. He remembered more about the Olympics, not the Olympics, the World Series, he was on the couch and he was telling me about it, because I know enough about baseball because he always liked baseball. He was, and I'm not gonna say a joy, but he was a joy to take care, because of his whole attitude.

HS: Not complaining all the time?

RW: Yeah. And I remember sleeping in the other bedroom, I remember him, and I could hear him at night saying, "Oh my god, how it hurts." You know, it was in Polish – "oh, mój boże." But he was, so wonderful to take care of, to the last day, he would try to get out of bed, on the last day. In fact, they gave him, what they called the Bronkman's (sp?) mixture. It was something that they did in England, and what they did in England, they served it on demand. But of course, in the United States they wouldn't do that because, "Oh, you have to wait your three hours," which is stupid. But anyhow, he was on that and that would help him. And I remember the last day, I was giving him a sip in bed and he just couldn't accept it, and then he went and had a stroke or whatever he had and that's when he passed away. My mother on the other hand, I could not discuss her sickness for at least three years, couldn't talk about her. She had a pacemaker put in and she rejected it. She had another one put in; she rejected that one. And so, she was in the hospital, and, where my father still, as sick as he was, he somehow had that life in him. My mother, as sick as she was, she was failing, she couldn't eat. So, I'd make soup for her and bring her soup and she would say, with noodles or a little bit of chicken and I'd bring that to her. So, then she said, "Don't put the chicken in, just the noodles". Then it would be, "Don't bring the noodles, just the soup itself." She was, I could see her wasting away. It was so hard watching her; it was so, so hard. What do you do? Nothing. Now, maybe they'd give her morphine and help her, but at that time there was no such a thing.

HS: What was the year then? Do you remember?

RW: 1977. Yeah, I had to stop and think. Yeah, November 10th and November 18th, I know they were eight days apart, 10 days apart. I went through a lot of paperwork; I'm going through pictures like you. and I came across the death certificates, and I came across the wedding, 50th anniversaries of both my husband's parents and my parents, and everything.

HS: I would like to know ...

(side A of tape ends, beginning of side B)

RW: These women come, and we say prayer, we discuss things, we talk, and we gossip, and I usually like to make a dinner for them. So, this time, I made spaghetti and meatballs, that's what I made, and then someone baked and someone else brought a salad, so it's very nice. We do this once a month. For next month, someone is making pumpkin soup, and then we're gonna have sandwiches. I wanted to make something for Halloween, but they said no, that's enough. So, sometimes I bake . . .

Ok, so after my parents passed away, I had the hardest time, I had nothing to do, I didn't know what to do. Because here I was living with parents, taking care of my father, going to the hospital . . .

HS: That was before you were married and had children?

RW: Oh no, my husband was home, this was in 1977. So then, I didn't know what to do. I went to my dentist, I had to get my teeth cleaned, and he's complaining to me, he says, "You know, I need a receptionist." He says, "Do you know how to do office work?" I said "Yeah, I used to work in the office." So, he says "Well, would you like to try?" So, we ended, he interviewed me, blah blah blah, he was very particular about everything. I says, "I can do it," so he signed me on as a receptionist. So, that was good, I worked as a receptionist. Then his assistant left, his dental assistant left. He says, "Would you like to learn something about assisting?" "Sure, I can do it!" (laughing). That was my favorite thing – "I can do it!" So, he taught me to be an assistant, which I enjoyed. I liked working with the children especially, I took x-rays and things like that. And, I really enjoyed it, but then, I said, you know, when I was teaching school, I had the summers off. Now I have to work during the summers. Well, my youngest son was getting married in the fall, so I had an excuse. I said, "You know, I can't work because I've gotta get ready for my son's wedding and everything else." He said, "Well, would you come in part time?" I said, "Yeah, I'll come in part time." So anyhow, after a while, I left there, and my son got married and everything else.

Then, I've got to think of what else I'm going to do! [exclamation] So, I saw in the newspaper, used to be the Girls Club, where it's Girls, Inc. now, it was the Girls Club. They're looking for a sewing teacher and a cooking teacher. I can do it! So, I applied for the job! I said, "I do sewing, I do cooking, and everything else." So, they hired me. So, I was a sewing and cooking teacher. And, just looking through my papers, I'll have to let you read it because I can't say the whole thing. When looking through all my junk stuff and everything, I came across this little thing that I saved and in it, one of my former students, when she wrote this she was 17, and I almost cried reading what she had written about me. I'll let you read it, I don't want to explain. But anyhow, so I worked there for, oh, 24 years. But in the meantime, my son, his wife had a baby, and she was a nurse and he was working at work so I said, "I have to take care of my granddaughter. So, I can't work full time at the time." But then I said, "Unless you let me bring her." So, she was in a carrying case when I used to bring her to work with me. But by that time, I wasn't cooking, I was just sewing then. And, they had someone else do the cooking. So, I would take her and put her down, everybody, "Oh hello, Andrea" and all this and that. So, she knew the Girls Club very well. So, I did the sewing and she always come with me, and I did that for like 24 years. And then in the church bulletin (laughing), they were looking for somebody that would go to school at seven o'clock in the morning to admit the students that came early and then someone to do an after-school program with them. I can do it! So, this was only, because they had someone, but I guess they left or something, couldn't do it in the morning. But I went down, I said well the only days that I can do this is this and this date. But by that time my granddaughter was gone, 24 years. But then I had a grandson, one. And I used to take care of him on Thursdays. So, I said "Well, I can do this, I can't do it on Thursday, I'll just do it on Tuesday or something". Then I thought to myself, they're gonna pay me more to be at school than I'm getting after 24 years at

the Girls Club. So, I went to the Girls Club and I said—because by that time the programs were beginning to go downhill and so I said, “You know, I can come Saturday if you want,” and they said, “No, we’re gonna eliminate that on Saturday.” I said ok, so I started to do it. So every morning, get up at five o’clock, go to church, go the school at seven o’clock, stay with the kids until like eight o’clock, come home, go back to school at quarter of two and work until 5:30. Now, what I did with the children, after a couple of years, I used to do needlepoint in a plastic and everything, so once I’m doing something, some of the girls came over and says, “What are you doing?” I said, “Needlepoint.” “Oh can I do that?” I said, “Yeah, why not?” So I started in the morning, I started to teach some of the girls, not everybody, but some of the girls. They’d look and they learned, oh they made so many things, they made so many things. In fact, one of them, we made a swan so she could put like towels in there, soap or something, and I said, “Well that’s for your mother, for your grandmother we have to do something else.” So, I designed a Polish flag, and she did that, that was for her father. But we did that, it was great. In fact, one of the teachers said to me, “Please send them to class earlier,” because I’d send them at eight o’clock. But they’re working there, they’re working, they want to do this, they want to finish. They were wonderful, they were wonderful. And, even after school, some of them wanted to learn that, they did their homework and we’d do something, mostly after school was more play than anything. So, I did that until I got sick, I had a problem with my legs, so I just said I cannot do it anymore. So, they got someone else.

But what I did, I got a little bit better. And, one of the ladies, this was when I was doing the after-school program, one of the ladies said they were going to have a sewing class, just the ladies. I wasn’t in it; because I was doing the after-school program. But they were going to have it like once a month. So, I didn’t say anything the first year. Then the next year, I said, “You know what, you can’t do that once a month. Let’s do it with the after-school kids, if they want to.” So, we started to, but she was a nurse and she was on-call, so it was hard for her. But she helped me the first year and everything, we didn’t have any class. It was we’d go into the kindergarten and set up a machine or something for the kids to sew. But then, when I stopped doing the after-school program, I said I would like to run a sewing class. And so, we started, and didn’t know what to do with these kids, because they were the third, fourth, up to sixth grade. We had maybe eight to nine, and what we did the first year, for Christmas, we made stockings but we pieced the stockings so that they were like a quilted stocking, we put a back on it, put the fur around the thing. That was the first year, we did that. The next year, oh what did we do the next year? I can’t remember now. But one year we did little dolls, they had to stuff them with sand and a clothespin, they made the dresses. In fact, I have a picture of beautiful [doll]; they did such a beautiful job, oh they were so wonderful. I loved these girls. It was the best thing and then a couple years ago, we made the carolers. Now, they had to paint the heads, paint the legs, everything, and put them together and make clothes for them, hair on the top and all of that. Then last year, was it last year? No, the year before, they made the boys, the caroler boys. First, they made the girls and then the boys. Last year, I wanted them to make a runner. I had so much Christmas material left over of my own, so I cut it up into sections and gave each one an envelope. I said take whichever one you want and that’s what you’re gonna do. Oh, I was so proud of these girls, so proud of them. I’d make them, I’d say “look your corners aren’t meeting. I’ll let this one go, but this one has to come out.” And they hated pulling it apart. But they made the nicest runners, they were beautiful. And, the girls must have gotten sick and tired of listening

to me, because I'd say, "Perfect, oh that is so beautiful, look at how nice that looks." It was just wonderful.

HS: So, are you still teaching this?

RW: No, I was just teaching them sewing, after school, this was after school, from two o'clock to about four fifteen.

HS: Even now, you are doing this?

RW: No, this year I can't do it. Because, one year, a couple of years, they had me up on the third floor of the school. And I didn't mind, I walked up, I liked the classroom because it was my classroom. Everything, the ironing board, the quilting, my pads for cutting, it was my room, and I could mess it up and clean it up how I wanted. But then, last year, they gave me, I said I can't climb three flights anymore, so last year they put me on the second floor, but I was sharing a room. The art teacher had the room, so this was his room. So now I had to put everything away when I left and one of the sewing machines was very heavy because it was metal. I had a hard time lifting it and putting it away and everything. And I'm getting older (laughing). But to me, when I went up there, and did the sewing with the girls, I was so calm, so, I really, I enjoyed it tremendously. It was something I enjoyed very, very much. And I wish I could do it this year, I'd love to do it, I'd love to do it, but I can't climb the stairs.

HS: And there is nothing on the first floor that they can give you?

RW: No, even the first floor, well although if you go in through the high school where you go in now, there aren't many stairs, but no, all the classes are on the first floor. So, you know, I just couldn't do it. But it was so gratifying, it was just wonderful.

HS: So, you had long, long experience of teaching! Were you ever thinking about going to college and getting a degree?

RW: I went to Worcester State. I earned, I don't know, I went one year or two years I think, I went but it was, you know, you couldn't take a full course. So, I would take subjects, I took child psychology, early education, art, I don't know what else I took it. But yeah, I got credit for the few years that I went. But it, it was so satisfying. I like being with children, to me there's nothing like being with children, they make you feel young.

HS: Absolutely right. So, you had one brother – did he go to college?

RW: No, he never finished high school. It was during wartime, he was 17, he wanted to go in the Navy, and that was it. He went into the Navy and he became a signalman. And actually, to become a signalman, you had to go to school, so he went to Butler University in Indianapolis to learn his trade. And, he was smart, he just didn't want to study. But he was smart, so he was in the Navy, he was a Navy Signalman, on a ship, on a cruiser really, he wasn't on a battleship or anything, but he was on a cruiser. But that's what he did.

HS: Was there any higher education offered to you, or was it because you were a girl, nobody thought about it?

RW: No, it wasn't that. My parents wanted me, I wanted, when I was in high school, I wanted to become a gym teacher. But there were no schools in Worcester that taught gym at the time, it was in Boston. And my parents couldn't afford it, no way they could afford it. And restrictions were different then too. I think you had to take a lot of medical courses, and things like that. It was just like, like being a stewardess, you had to be a nurse.

HS: Oh really, I didn't know that.

RW: My brother and I, when we were growing up, we were very, very close. We were the only two siblings, you know. 'Cause my parents lost a daughter, you know. Now as I am older, I don't know how they could have lived through it. It's strange, because my husband lost a brother to a sledding accident, my girlfriend, she lost a brother to a heart condition I think it was. There were all three in the family. Then next door to us, they lost a son to leukemia and then they lost a daughter to a boating accident. There were a lot of hardships. But we were never, like, we were never told we were poor. My mother used to sew our clothes. And our landlord, Mr. Samko, he was a tailor. So, he would, sometimes he would help me. In fact, I remember making a black and white checkered jacket, and I was making it but he was showing me what I'm supposed to do, you know, do the lapels this way and put a ribbon around it, so he helped me in that. But my mother, she always, she used to sew my slips! And I remember, when I bought a slip, she looked at it and it was all on bias cut. She says, how can you wear that? So, you know, she did a lot of sewing. I remember eighth grade, she made me a beautiful suit, a plaid suit, and a Scottish cap, it was so nice.

HS: So, did you learn sewing from her?

RW: I learned from her sewing. I was in the eighth grade, I think, and we were going someplace, and I wanted to make a shorts outfit. But at that time, we couldn't go in shorts without a skirt, so I had to make everything. Made the shorts, had no problem, made the blouse, had no problem, came to the skirt and the pockets were kind of curved, they weren't in the seam, they had to be curved. And I looked at the pattern, and I'm reading it and reading it and I said, "I can't understand this," I said to my mother, "What am I supposed to do there?" She says I don't know, because she never used a pattern. She says, "I don't know." Well, I studied it and studied it. Finally, I figured it out and so I was able to make it, I was so proud with that outfit. Then I used to make bathing suits for myself. It's awful, I am not a shopper. I don't know how to shop. I have no idea how to shop because I always made all my clothes. I was, when we went down to the Cape with my friend, I bought a dress, the first dress I bought. It was \$14, it was brown and white check, it was two pieces. But that was the only dress that I bought at the time. Once in a while I would buy a dress, but I would make all my clothes. And, the thing was, I wasn't ashamed of it. One Easter, my husband, my three sons, and I, I made all our outfits. I made trousers for my husband and the three boys. I made sport coats for them to match, they all matched. It was a gray plaid, and the boys had gray trousers, and I made myself a gray suit, hat

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and everything, and went to church. I think of it today and I say, my husband wore that?! (laughing). But he wasn't ashamed of it. When my husband was going to school, they don't do this now, but at school they had a lot of proms and round robin dances and everything else, and I always made my gowns, there was only one gown I didn't like. The Kosciuszko Foundation in Boston used to have, they used to call it like a debutante ball, every year in Boston, and we used to go to that. And my girlfriend was making her debut in Boston with her family and I was going, with actually my boyfriend at the time. And I made my gown, and it was funny. I wasn't embarrassed by this at all but when I think back on it, her mother said to the other neighbor that she had, Mrs. Kosciuszko's milkman's wife, she says to her, "She made that gown, she made that gown!" And I remember I had straps with little diamonds put into the straps, and I had a little ruffle around the top with diamonds put in there, and a little ruffle down the bottom. The top was black, the bottom was white. I made all my gowns.

HS: Did you keep them? Do you still have them?

RW: No, I have pictures of them, of when we went to proms, I've got all the pictures of the proms and everything. Yeah, we had a lot – the job my husband had, he was an engineer at Brown Shoe Company, and we were going to the vice president's house in Westchester County in New York, big house and everything. I made my clothes – I mean, I didn't feel ashamed of them. I didn't feel ashamed – I thought they looked good. I remember there was one dress I made, I really liked, there's some clothes you make that you really like. It was green and white and had a cross here and white up here and green and it had a jacket with it, it was very pretty. But again, in making that dress, I couldn't figure out how to make the top. So, I said to my husband, "You're an engineer, what am I supposed to do here?" (laughing) He looked at it and said, "I have no idea." [laughs]. But I figured it out and I made it. Yeah, life was different. And like I say, until recently, because I was talking to a friend at the Guild too, she says, "You know what, we were poor, and I never knew it!" I said, "it's the same thing with me!" We were poor but I never knew it! I made clothes for my mother. I remember a brown dress I made, ooh she looked so nice in that dress, geez, she looked beautiful in that dress. It was brown and we put lace around the collar, lace around the slip, gorgeous. And I made her a suit for her 50th anniversary, apple-colored jacket and a blouse. I used to make clothes for her. I made a purple outfit for her, which I didn't like because it didn't go with her skin, but she wanted purple, so she got purple. But, like I say, you know, everybody has ups and downs in a family. We all have them. But there were more ups than downs. I look back and I say to my children, "You know what, I had a very good life. I had an excellent life." I had a husband that was very good, he provided for us well, he took good care of the children, he played with them, he was a good father.

And, in fact, last weekend, my nephew came down from way up Maine. He and his wife came down and they stayed with me from Thursday to Monday. And Saturday, my grandson works for a politician and they had a fundraiser in Barre, and so I said to my nephew, "We got tickets for you to go to the cookout." He said, "Oh, ok." So, we went to the cookout and after the cookout we went to my son's house. And, my nephew is gluten-free, so my daughter-in-law bought some gluten-free dough and she made them pizzas. She says, "What do you want on the pizza?" He says, "Anything! Everything, everything that you can put on them." And so anyhow, so we drove

my grandson to school because he had to be in school. So, we drove to school and we came home here. And my nephew's wife said, "You know what, I will never forget this, I am so glad we came down, I just thought it was so wonderful, we don't see this all the time. The whole family was there. The whole family – they talked, they joked, they had fun, they talked family, they talked everything, everybody talked. I will never forget this. This was just unbelievably wonderful." And I couldn't get over how she was praising it because to us it's normal. And, she said, "We don't see this very often." And I said, "Well, you have to come again." And they will, they will, because he calls me about four times a year just to check on me and everything else. And they were just so thrilled, and I said you know it's normal for us.

HS: You are very involved in all kinds of community organizations, church organizations . . .

RW: Yeah, yeah. And then, about a month ago, the end of August, my grandson was working in Pennsylvania so my daughter-in-law, they like to put a party on in the summertime. But he was working in Pennsylvania at some college teaching robotics, whatever they were doing. So, he didn't get home until late, so they didn't have a party until late. And neighbors of my son, they have a horse farm, they have horses. For years, she's been saying to me, you've got to get on a horse. And I said I will, I will. But because I had trouble with my legs, I was saying I can't do it. I was really very, very bad. Josie was the same thing at the same time as I was, I had to use a cane, I couldn't walk. But I'm okay now. When we were down there in August, she says to me, "Well?" and I say, "Yep, I'm ready this time," then I said "we're gonna go." In fact, one of my friends drove me, it's right next door, but they said, "No, you're gonna go in a car, we're gonna drive you, you're not walking." Ok, they put me in a car, and drove me around to the other driveway and then he took the horse out of the stall and everything else. It is so funny, the horse is so beautiful and everything, and then she had a ladder to get on the horse, and I'm all set and everything. So, I get up on the ladder, trying to go on the horse, my leg won't go over the horse! (laughing) And everybody is there, and Sister Teresita, a friend of mine, she was there at the time so she's there taking pictures. My grandson and his cousin were there taking pictures and then trying to support me. And I said, "Well, I can't get on, I can't move my leg." So, I said, "If I sit on the horse, then I can get my leg over this way." And, I had the hardest time [laughs], I couldn't get my leg over! But finally, I'm leaning back and they're holding me back so I can get my leg over the horse. But I went on my horseback ride! I did! And then, I learned how to ride a horse with a saddle and stirrups. This horse did not have a saddle and stirrups, this was like a bareback, they just had a blanket over him. So, now I have no stirrups, no support. Well, she said you can hold onto that thing in front and the reins. But it was so funny, I mean, they had a grand time and I always laugh, I say, "When I die, who are you going to have fun with?!" Because they'll always bring something up.

HS: You are very involved, that's why you are so young. You are an outgoing person. You have a lot of friends and family, very lively.

RW: I think I take after my father. My mother was, she went out, but she didn't dress like the European women did. Because a lot of the European women, a lot of them that came here, they wore black, they wore lousy shoes. They, you know, they looked like old ladies. My mother did not. In fact, I had gone to a gathering someplace and I had to buy a gown, I didn't make that

gown. It was black with flowers on it and a jacket on it. And, I wore the gown. And she was going to a wedding, and she says, "Can I wear your gown?" And actually, it was that August before she got sick, I think. But she put that gown on – oh, she looked beautiful My father next to her, with his suit and his hat. Oh, she looked so beautiful, I said, "Wow." And we went someplace to a wedding, and I made my gown. It was sort of a blue aqua, light blue, long sleeves and things, and I wore that to the wedding. And she said, "When I die, I want to be buried in that gown." I don't remember, I think she wore it to a wedding also, and she said, "I like that gown and I want to be buried in it." So she was. But I remember that gown, I used to make almost all my clothes. And I made clothes for her. We would go shopping for materials and things. But she was never what I consider to be the old lady type, she was not like an immigrant. But I gotta tell you about second immigration, '65 and afterwards, 50s, after World War II. My mother's cousin, we called her an aunt, she went through the war, she was in Kazakhstan, in Siberia, and she lost her father and mother on a train going over there, and they threw them out the train, she had no place. But she, her son, and her sister, they went to Kazakhstan and then they went to Beirut and then they went to England. And my parents brought her over. And the thing was, when she came over, I took her, she was an educated woman, she worked at a courthouse, but when she came to the United States, because of the language, she had to do housework. So, she worked for these people, they had a Chevrolet business in Worcester, very nice people, she worked for them. In fact, when I took her over[for an interview], the lady says, "Well, you don't speak English," and she said, "No, I speak a little French," the lady says "I don't speak French" cause she was Greek, or one of those, and so anyhow, but they hired her. They had a couple of daughters, and she never complained. This woman was unbelievable, she never ever complained. She had a beautiful house in Bialystok [city in Poland], beautiful house. Her husband was in the tile business, she had a maid for her son, she had a maid to clean her house. To go from that, to be a housekeeper, she never ever complained. [Always], she had trouble, she burned her hand once when she was little, so her fingers were crooked. But anyhow, she worked for this people, and as the daughters grew up, one of the daughters got married and she lived in New York. He [her husband], was an importer-exporter with Japan. Now, the daughter had three boys, so she says to her mother, "I want Mrs. Bana (sp?) to come and work for me." Actually, she was living with these people and the mother said, "Well, but I like her," but they said, "Well, she will take care of the children." Well, she did. She went to New York, and her son went to Columbia University. Actually, when they were in Beirut, he went to Beirut University for a while. Worcester had nothing for him. They were, what I consider to be cultured people. We were not. We were from the old country, I hate to say that, but we were. We weren't cultured. She brought with her some icons; did we know what they were? Old, that's old junk. So anyhow, her son was educated in New York, and he and a friend opened an antiques business. Yeah, that chair over there was one of the antiques she gave me, and me, being stupid, I had it painted green. Like I said, at that time, we were uncultured. So, she went to New York, and she worked for these people, and they revered her. They loved her, and when she retired, she came and lived with my parents. (And, people liked her...). She had to go to Poland and come back. And last time she came back was in 1985, when my granddaughter was born and my son's wedding, that's when she came back. And then, she went back to take care of her sister, who was sick. And she said, there was no place like America. But at the same time, she said, "The thing is, the old immigrants who are here, did not look up to new immigrants. Most of the new immigrants were educated, and all the old immigrants said, they're not immigrants, like we are." But they weren't. So, she says that was

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the hardest thing to be accepted as an educated person. I have a przegranie [trans. recording] that she was interviewed in Poland and she was talking about that.

When she was in the United States, my son was living in Maryland, so we took her to Maryland, Washington, Virginia, we took her different places. [And but that was one of the things.] But [when] she came to visit, and she said, "I want to visit my friend in New York." So, she visited her friend who was living in New York. And she called the people that she worked for, and the man says, "I'll have a limo pick you up." She says, "No, no, I'm not that dumb, I can still take the train, or the trolleys, subways, whatever they take in New York." So, she took the subway to his office, and she spent the day with him, he took her out to dinner and everything else, and then she says he had a limousine to drive her home. And she says, "Oh, the drinks were in the limousine," and everything. And her friend lived in Queens. So, they drove up to friend's house, and everybody was looking out the windows, "What's that limousine doing here?!" [laughs]. She was amazing. Those people always sent to her, like at Christmas, \$500 or anything like that, so like I say, she was well-liked. Never, never complained. Unbelievable woman, unbelievable. She was so good, she came here in 1952, the year my second son was born, and we had just moved into this house.

HS: According to what you said, there was really not much opportunity for education for women or immigrant women in Worcester?

RS: Yeah, but it wasn't only for women, it was for men, too. My husband, he worked at Brown Shoe, and there was a fellow Mike Samko, who lived on the street where we used to live. He lived there with his wife. And what these people did, the second immigrants, "Oni się dorobili," [trans. they worked themselves up]. They would buy day-old bread, they would go to the fruit stores, we used to have this one place called "Sheppy's (sp?), and they would go in the fruit store, in the back of the store they would have the little older vegetables, that's what they would buy. Well, this fellow Mike, he worked at Brown Shoe, as, I don't know what he was doing at Brown Shoe, because he didn't know the language. He just got a job there. A lot of the Polish people worked there. In fact, this one woman, I see, now she says, "Oh I remember, your husband worked there, you know he'd tell me what to do and everything." Well, this fellow Mike, he was working, and he went to school, became a real estate agent. And he quit work, he got a job. An engineer, Mr. Korczewski, worked at Reed World Thread (sp?), he was an engineer. Others did the same thing. They first learned the language, and then they got their good jobs. I spoke to one man, I don't know what kind of a job he had, I don't know. He must have had a good job; he has a little boy on the second floor. He had a good job and his grandchildren were going to Saint Mary's. And then what happened, he says "You know I live in Millbury; they live in Rutland, I pick them up here, let them go to school in Rutland". So anyhow, I was talking to him once while he was picking up the children and he says, "I'm retired, I have nothing to worry about". He said, "I own a couple of three-deckers, lived in a three-decker for a while, sold it." They live in Millbury someplace, travels extensively now. When we went to Poland two years ago, they brought their grandchildren, paid for their grandchildren to come, their daughter and her husband and three grandchildren, they paid for everybody. So, I mean, they're helpful people, they're good. People sometimes, years and years ago, people used to say "gdzie dwóch Polaków, to jeden za dużo," [trans. where are two Poles, there is one too many]

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because they would undermine one another. You know, “Oh you’re too rich. Oh yeah, how did you earn your money?” and things like that. It’s not like that anymore. Now, they support one another, they help one another. I see these women – when we were making “pączki” [trans. Polish donuts], we were making pierogi last week, all these Polish women come and they’re like “blah blah blah blah”, they’re so friendly. You don’t see any jealousy among them. If one has a problem, “Oh yeah this one is good” and this and this. And they help one another out. Whereas years ago, I think because of the immigration, and you had the ones that we were willing to be an entrepreneur and start something. And maybe sometimes they lost money on it, but they weren’t afraid to start something. Then you had the people that, “Oh, I’m afraid to do this.” In fact, my father, they should have bought a house years ago, but he was afraid he wouldn’t be able to afford it. But he never said, “I don’t like this guy because he has money.” My best girlfriend, her father owned Millbury Furniture, and they all hung around each other. We used to go the beach, we didn’t have a car, they had a car, we’d load up into the cars, we’d have eight cars going to the beach, open up the blankets, and who thought of putting a cooler? We didn’t have coolers. And the mother would roast the chicken in the morning, at 6 o’clock, pack a basket, put in the car, go to the beach, open up the baskets, all the kids would be eating first. Can’t go in the water for an hour, you know? And then the grownups would eat. We had so much fun growing up, that we didn’t have time to think about being poor or anything else. Cause I’m thinking of all the beach trips that we took. Like I said, we had no car. Neighbor next door didn’t have a car. But ok, the Gebskis are going so they take their car so we can load this one up. This man has a car, we’ll load up that car. We kept loading up the cars, all these people, load up the cars and off to the beach we went. And it would take two hours to get there! [laughing] It took a long time to get there. And all of the kids played together, it was just fun, it was a good life.

HS: You were never involved in politics?

RW: My grandson is.

HS: I know, but you were not, you were not politically active?

RW: No, my father belonged to the Henryk Sienkiewicz Society, and one of the members was Stanley Wondolowski, who was a senator? No, representative in Massachusetts. And he and my father were very, very friendly. And, they used to sometimes, because of the Sienkiewicz Society, they would travel together. They went to Cleveland once and Chicago once, and different places they went together. He was very involved. And then what happened, one year. Maybe I shouldn’t say this, but anyhow, what happened one year, he was running again to be representative. The opposing, other people in the same party as him, brought in a Polish man from New York, who had a record, and that split the Polish vote, and Stanley didn’t get the Polish vote, because then the other people got in. You now, there was a little bit of, between nationalities, there was a big [competition] going on. [You had], the Irish were very, very political; the Swedes owned Norton Company and they would hire more Swedes. You’d get in and have good company to work there. I worked for Heald Machine, I liked working for them. They didn’t pay as much as Norton’s, but they had air conditioning [laughs]. It was a good company to work for. I enjoyed that. It was engineering [company] and we did grind machines and boramatic (sp?) machines and we had some Polish people working there that were engineers

and draftsmen and things like that. But, yeah, when I was growing up, the politics, like I say, the Irish were very dominant in politics, in police, firemen, mailmen, and it was hard to get a foot in. Once in a while you would get a foot in, once in a while you would get someone in, like a token. This one lady that comes over, Senkiewicz, her father was a lieutenant on the police force, and he got in. She says that they used to make fun of his name because they couldn't pronounce it. He did well, but he died young, unfortunately. But like my brother got into the police department, which was very good, was good for him. From what I hear, from people that knew him, they all liked him, they said, "Oh yeah, Sgt. Henry." People, even now sometimes, if I see a policeman, I say, "Oh my brother was a policeman," and they say, "Oh yeah, who was he?" I say he died a long time; you wouldn't know him. "But who was he," and I'd say, and then he'd say, "Well, I heard about him." Yeah, even now. So yeah, he was well-liked. My brother was very well-liked. My kids loved him, they always say Uncle Henry did so much for them. One time my son got caught with a case of beer in the car and he was underage, and of course "Uncle Henry, I got caught with this case of beer in the car, what can you do?" So, he would get it done for him. My kids talked very, very nicely about my brother, they really . . .

HS: So, he was the husband of Josephine Bylinski?

RW: Yes, yep, yeah, they always liked him.

HS: Thank you for the wonderful interview.

[end of side B of tape one]

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