

Interviewee: Louise Charbonneau
Interviewers: Allison Juneau and Alexis Packard
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Place: Holden Senior Center



Overseen by: Profs. Christine Keating and Leslie Choquette, Assumption College

Abstract:

Louise Charbonneau was born in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1954. She is the daughter of Blanche and Wallace Seager, of Swedish and German decent, and originating from Holden, Massachusetts. Louise grew up in a Protestant home where she attended church every Sunday. She has two older siblings, one brother, and one sister. Louise started her working profession for WPI [Worcester Polytechnic Institute] as a secretary for the president. She married soon after graduating from a two-year college, Becker Junior College, continuing to work for WPI. Some years later, Louise had two children of her own to care for, interrupting her busy work life. She took time off from WPI and started to write chapters for *The Worcester Heritage Preservation Society*, all while being a stay-at-home mother. She soon started to work part-time at the Holden Senior Center where she was eventually offered a full-time job as the director. She gladly accepted as her children were now school-aged. Louise is still the Director of the Holden Senior Center. During the interview the focus was on Louise's strong involvement with the community as well as creating a family environment for the elderly at the Senior Center.

AJ: We are completing a citywide oral history of the lives of Worcester Women, aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences. Based on the goals of the 1850 National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on areas of women's education, health, work, and politics/community involvement. We want to focus today on your experiences with community involvement. We want to thank you ahead of time for your help with this important project.

AP: So what is your full name including both maiden name and married name if applicable?

LC: Louise E. Seager Charbonneau.

AP: Okay, where were you born?

LC: In Worcester.

AP: Have you ever been married?

LC: Yes.

AP: What is the name of your husband?

LC: Scott

AP: Do you have any children?

LC: I do.

AP: How many?

LC: Two.

AJ: What are their names?

LC: David and Andrew.

AJ: How old are they?

LC: 30 and 33.

AJ: Nice. Where have you lived during your life?

LC: Right here in Holden.

AJ: Did you grow up anywhere else besides there?

LC: Born and raised.

AP & LC: [laughs]

AP: Like me [laughs]

LC: Mhmm, like most of us [laughs]

AP: Yup. [pause] What was it like in your neighborhood when you were growing up?

LC: Our neighborhood was really small, because I lived—I didn't live in a typical neighborhood. We lived right on Main Street at the Rutland End so I mean I had three neighbors. That's it. So it's not your typical neighborhood.

AJ: Interesting.

AP: Was it quiet a lot then?

LC: Yes except for traffic.

AP: Well, yeah. [laughs]

LC: But yes.

AJ: Mmmmm... [pause searching for a question]

AP: You don't live in a city. You were born in Worcester though. And then...

LC: Right.

AP: You – you've lived here.

LC: My parents first lived in Holden. But I was born in Hahnemann Hospital.

AP: Have you lived in anywhere else in Holden? Have you always lived in the ...

LC: I grew up at the North End, nearest to Rutland.

AP: Mhmm.

LC: And when I got married, I moved to the South End. Nearest Chaffins, right near what is now the [unclear word] light department.

AJ: Mhmm.

AP: Do other family members live in the same area?

LC: Yes my brother still lives in the house that we grew up in. [pause] And my son just bought his grandmother's house, down the street from us. So he's going to raise his family there.

AP: Awesome, that's awesome.

AJ: Do you have any connection to Worcester? Other than you being born there.

LC: None.

AJ: Where did you attend school, like, for college? If you went to college.

LC: I did. I graduated from Wachusett [High School], just like Alexis did. And I went to Becker Junior College. Actually, I only went to junior college.

AJ: Oh okay.

LC: I went to Becker, in Worcester.

AJ: Ohhh, okay. Is that a four year or...

LC: It's a two-year school.

AJ: Two year. Okay.

LC: Two-year school.

AJ: Cool.

AP: And what degree did you graduate with?

LC: I graduated with an associate's degree.

AP: In?

LC: Oh...I think it says secretarial science on it. Obviously I moved on.

AP: [laughs] you switched.

AJ: So did you just start working right away? Outside of that.

LC: I did, I worked at—at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI).

AJ: Oh okay.

LC: For just shy of ten years. I worked for the – for the – I worked for two of the presidents actually. I worked for Dr. Hazzard and Dr. Cranch. Until I had my first son, I worked a year after he was born and then I stayed home with my children.

AP: Awesome. What did you do there?

LC: At WPI?

AP: Yeah.

LC: I was a secretary to the president.

[Pause in interview]

AJ: Did you have any challenges while you were in school? Like anything that you found difficult while you were in college?

LC: I found college difficult period. You know cause

AJ: Amen. [laughs]

LC: [laughs]

AP: [laughs] oh yeah.

LC: You know what I'm saying. I mean – I mean – I didn't live at school either. I didn't live at school. I lived at home. So I lived at home, I went to school, I held down a job – at school and outside of school. So, just – you know, getting everything done and to the level that I wanted to get it done, was a challenge.

AJ: Mhmmm.

LC: Just that by itself was a challenge for me.

AJ: Yeah, definitely. Umm... so what did you like – when like – let me rephrase that. When you graduated like what were your plans for the future?

LC: Well when I graduated, I already had a job. I mean I had a job to go to—I worked at WPI part time while I was in school, in their bursar's office. So I was allowed to—to go back to the bursar's office.

AJ: Okay.

LC: And then, not too long after I was out of school, probably about a month, the opening in the president's office became available so I applied, interviewed, and got that. So I mean I went directly to work.

AP: Awesome.

LC: As did Scott.

AJ: When did you meet Scott?

LC: In high school.

AP: Aww that's so cute [laughs].

LC: Ain't that sweet? [Pause] So really I mean basically we both—I mean Scott went to school in Boston and would come home on weekends. And also went to a two-year school.

AJ: Okay.

LC: And came back, and worked for Granger Contracting, Granger Brothers, while I was at WPI. And I'm trying to think of how many years after we were out of school we actually got married about four years I think so you know kind of saved, bought a home, did all that kind of things.

AP: So you started there and then, you, when did you switch into this job?

LC: Ha! It took a while. I worked at WPI, like I said just shy of ten years and then I stayed home with my kids.

AP: Mhmm.

LC: Okay? And then when the kids were young I did do some work for WPI at home. And then I typed a book.

AP: Oh wow, that's awesome.

LC: While I was at home with the kids for the Worcester Heritage Preservation Society. They would bring me chapters; I would do them. I would call and say, "All done." And so you know, my work kind of came to me. I did like work from home. And then when it was time to, well, and then I did do some part-time work at WPI when the kids were in school. I'd drop them off at school; I would go to WPI and come home before they got off, before they got home.

AP: Right.

LC: Then I worked at Mount View School in the library for a couple of years. Nope.

AP: Are you excited to see

LC: Nope. That's not true.

AP: Being redone?

LC: [laughs] It's a pain on my street. Uhh, that's not, that's not, not quite true. I did the part time WPI thing and then I worked at the senior center part time as the transportation coordinator. And I scheduled the van, oversaw the drivers, but then they wanted to make that, that job full-time and I thought my kids were still too young you know. So I left,

went to Mount View, for a couple of years and then the director that I had worked for retired. One of my other co-workers, previous co-workers, moved up to the director's job and called and said, "I have an opening. Do you want to come back?" It's a great place to work, so I did. Initially part time. And then the secretary for the department, retired, so I moved up to that position. That became full-time. And then, now I am where I am now. So I mean the town does take some pride in it. It hires from within. So although I do not have a degree in gerontology, I kind of got grandfathered into the job. So I have worked with all of them. College students, middle school students, and elderly.

AP: That's awesome, little ones. [laughs] Wow.

LC: So that's how I got there. That's how I got here.

AJ: Wait so what's your title right now?

LC: The director of Senior Services for the Town of Holden.

AJ: Oh interesting. What does this work mean to you?

LC: You know, we make a difference every day. That's important to me. I, I, I, was teasing you Alexis, about you know, there is no money in what you are going to do.

AP: Right.

LC: There's no money in what I do either. Okay? They pay, I mean, I shouldn't, don't, we get paid. But I mean it's not, not, we don't make big bucks.

AJ: Right.

LC: We work for the government okay? But we make a difference every day. And we can see it. We don't—we never have the same day two days in a row. Here. Ever. But because we deal with people and their lives—okay, we deal with the elders, we deal sometimes with their families, trying to help the elders. We get a lot of feedback that says, especially after someone's lost a spouse, "I don't know where I would have been if you people in this building weren't here." So you make a difference every day. And that's important to us. And it's gratifying. It really is. They are a very grateful population, I mean a lot of people will say, "How do you do what you do, old people are cranky?" And yes they are, some of them.

AP: Mhmmm.

LC: But not all of them. In fact, a very few of them are. Most of them are quite good-natured and, and very happy just to be able to come here every day. So, yeah.

It, its, important to me to make a difference. And I can honestly say that my staff and I do.

AP: That's awesome. What type of programs do you have here like on a daily basis or weekly basis?

LC: Okay. We have things that we do consistently every week. Arts and crafts, knitting, we have a blood pressure clinic every week, we have a billiards room down the hall that people can come and play billiards if they want to, we have card games, we have you know, your typical senior center stuff. However, pardon me, today, we had a woman, she has a collection of horns that they used to use for like hunting. And she brought her collection and she talked about each one and what the history of each one. So we offer educational programs, we offer, we have like sometimes, one man or woman plays. We had a lady come and she dresses the part and talks about being a maid upstairs in the White House.

AJ: Wow!

LC: And talks about the different presidential families. She had, it's actually a two-part thing she has. She had to actually come twice. Because we've had so many presidents. But, so, I mean we offer stuff like that. Concerts, they love music. We have a lot of volunteer opportunities, so once a year we do a volunteer recognition. And, we have an exercise room. So, because, we, we, promote, you know, staying healthy, eating well, you know, staying active, so you know, if you're a walker and it's snowing outside, you still can come and walk down there on the treadmill kind of thing. They don't, they don't, have to pay a gym membership, and that kind of thing. So we try to do a lot of different things. We offer trips, day trips once in a while. And the staff has taken to cooking one meal a month. So they have something different than just the regular elder services. Lunch, we're cooking—actually we're cooking on Wednesday.

AP: Awesome. What are you going to make?

LC: We're making vegetable lasagna.

AJ: Wow, yummm.

AP: That sounds good.

LC: I'll get back to you [laughs]. I've never done it so, but it's not only fun for them. Some of the things are fun for us too.

AJ: That's good.

LC: So. Basically that's what we have. I mean if you want, on your way out today, there's a newsletter right next to Maureen's window. And if you want to take one with you so that you can see the kinds of things we do, you're more than welcome. You could do that.

AJ: Awesome, thank you. Is this like, like a member thing? Or is it just like anyone can?

LC: No, it's—we are part of the town government. Okay?

AJ: Okay.

LC: We are part of the town budget. So we are funded by the town, we are also funded by the Commonwealth. The Executive Office of Elder Affairs gives every city and town in Massachusetts what they call a formula grant. And it's based on the number of elders in your town, 60 and older, you get X amount of dollars per elder. I don't remember right now if it's 8.00 or 8.50 but it's right around there. I get like 26, 27,000 dollars a year that I can spend on certain things. I mean there are some things you can't use it for. It's not a member thing. Any elder from the town of Holden is welcome here, at any time. We do have people come from Worcester because they don't want to go all the way across the city to their senior center. So like we have a lot of people from Tatnuck, lot of people from Salisbury Street area, lot of people from Greendale. And they can participate as well. There are a few things, during the year that are Holden residents only. And then those people, unfortunately, can't participate, but overall we're a pretty open door. Overall.

AJ: Nice.

AP: That makes it nice.

AP: You talked about how like balancing a lot of stuff in college...

LC: Mhmm.

AP: Have you ever balanced like different interests? And like figuring out which one was the right one to pursue and like anything like that?

LC: No. I didn't because of, you guys grew up differently than I did. Okay, in that mom and dad always each had a car. Right? Yes?

AJ: Yes.

LC: Yes?

AP: Yes.

LC: Yes. Okay, not the case in my case. And there wasn't always an after school bus so I didn't get to pick a lot of extracurricular activities to participate in. You know, we either took the bus home or it was a very long walk. Because my dad, you know, worked at Wyman and Gordon, and he worked shifts. So one week he would work seven to three, the next week three to eleven, and the week after that eleven to seven, and then start all over again.

AP: Right.

LC: So like it wasn't really, the only thing we really got to do, my sister did 4H and I did Girl Scouts. But others, so like, you know, my extracurricular were very narrow.

AP: mhmm.

LC: You know, growing up. And then when I went to college it was mostly working.

AP: Exactly.

LC: You know, I, I, I, worked at college as part of my financial aid.

AJ: Work study?

LC: Work study. And then, you know, I held a job outside of that just to help pay for school period. So I didn't get the opportunity to try a lot of different things and then say you know, which one do I like the best. I just, I had to really kind of focus and choose what I thought I really wanted to do because I wasn't always able to get to where I needed to be in order to try a lot of different things out.

AJ: Right.

AP: Did that change when you got out of college? I know you still, you worked but

LC: Well it changed when I got out of college because I got a car on my own. So I mean, you know, but by that time, as well, your, your, your dad will probably attest to this. I was in a relationship by that point, so I went from living with mom and dad to living with a husband.

AP: mmm.

LC: I never, cause I never, I didn't get to do what you're doing. You know living away at school.

AP: Right.

LC: School, and that kind of thing, because my parents couldn't afford that. So I never really got to venture out on my own a lot. And you know, I suppose, I don't think I'm worse [misunderstood word] for it. Well, well, well...

AP: You're just different.

LC: And I made sure that my kids got those opportunities that I didn't get. Both of my boys went away to school and they lived away.

AP: I wasn't given the choice to stay at home.

AJ: Me either.

LC: Well, I mean, I, they just wanted to go. I didn't have, I didn't, thank goodness have to say, "No this is what you need to do."

AP: Right.

AJ: Mhmm.

LC: You know, they just kind of looked away from Worcester. And my oldest son ended up in Saratoga Springs, New York is where he got his undergrad. And then he went to UMaryland and College Park to get his first grad degree.

AJ: Wow.

LC: And then got his second grad degree in Boston. My younger son only went for a bachelor's degree and started at Quinnipiac, which is in Hamden, Connecticut and then ended up at UMass Amherst. So you know, I wanted them to be sure to have all of those experiences that I didn't have.

AP: Right.

LC: I never learned how to swim, my mom didn't have a car to take us to swimming lessons. So I made sure that my kids were at the Y when they were six months old and they were in that pool. My in-laws had in-ground pool. You know, they need to be able to swim. So I mean, I just, I tried to make sure they got, what I didn't. I think that's what we all do.

AP: Right.

AJ: Yea, definitely. So are you like happy with your choices like where it's like lead you to work here? And like lead you to like have like your children...

LC: Yea, yea I am, I am happy with my choices actually. I've had in—in working in, working with different segments of the population, you'll learn a lot.

AJ: Mhmm.

LC: I think this segment of the population is my favorite. It really is. Most of the time.

AP: I'm sure it has its challenges.

LC: It has its challenges, but then so does being a student. So does whatever your dad is doing these days, or your parents. I mean, everything has its challenges. I mean there are days when I am looking at an adult who's behaving like a seven year old. Okay. That's hard. Because you know, you really want to say, you know, "Gee, when you turn eight come back and see me." And you can't do that. You know, but, yeah. I, I, I'm pleased with the choices, the majority, of the choices that I've made. I mean, I've had a fairly successful marriage; we've been married 36 years.

AP: That's awesome.

LC: I never got that phone call from the police department with, "Your son is here, come pick him up." So I've been, I think, fairly successful as a parent. They're, they're, pretty good human beings as far as I can tell. I love what I do. Getting close to the age where I could retire. I have no strong desire to do that right now because I like what I do. I like doing something different every day. If I sat in a cube all day just like inputting data or something like that, I wouldn't be, wouldn't be all that pleased with that choice. But you know, my experiences at WPI too, as, as, as, a young woman, I mean, you know, on a college campus, majority of men was an interesting experience. No two ways about it. And I got to see it from two different perspectives, at an administrator perspective, and then when you work in the bursar's office, you work a whole lot more with the students. One on one. So and that was exciting. You know, I was 20 years old on a college campus. It was fun. It was fun. I'd do it again.

AP: That's good. Let's see. Have you been involved in volunteer, community work, for your whole life? Have you kind of like grew up in it?

LC: Volunteered obviously with the Girl Scouts.

AP: Right.

LC: I mean they, you know, they, they do that. I volunteered, you know, this is, a lot. We couldn't do a lot of what we do here if we didn't have volunteers. You can see the

picture out there and it tells you how many dollars our volunteers saved the town. And, and I do that calculation every year. If you had to pay these people, and the state sets a, a salary for them. You know, if they work this many hours over the year times this amount of money, the town would have kept, paid out whatever. So I did a lot, growing up in church, in the youth group. That was something that my, both of my parents, I mean, we did that as a family. Every Sunday we went to church, you know, my brother, my sister, and I did youth group. We did all of that. I do a lot of volunteer work through the [misunderstood word].

AP: Yes.

LC: You know, clothing drives, and you know, all of that. So I've done something within the community all my life. I, I, I, you know, my parents were big believers in giving back. It doesn't matter how much you have, you can always give back. I've tried to, you know, bring my children up that way as well. You know, both of my boys volunteered here. Whether it was pouring tea at a Victorian Tea or helping out of [misunderstood word]. You know, you've volunteered with us, you know what we do.

AP: Yup, yup.

LC: My boys all did that as well. And even Andrew was hurt one year and he had surgery and he could do nothing. I mean he couldn't even ride a bike.

AP: Awwww.

LC: And so he thought he should stay up all night and play video games and then yelled at us when we made too much noise in the morning. So we put a quick end to that.

AP: Yup.

LC: By, he would get up with me, three days a week and he would come here and he would work in the kitchen, he would do what he could. And then, my other son would come and pick him up around one o'clock. And they would go do whatever it is they do. So I mean, it's important to give back. And you don't have to be Oprah Winfrey. So yeah, always something in the community.

AJ: Would you say that like the volunteers that come here, are mostly like younger kids or like adults?

LC: We run the gamut. Okay. Mostly during the day because kids are in school, so during the school year, during the day, it's mostly elders or I have a lady that drives meals on wheels. So she works nights, she's a nurse. She volunteers once a week during the day. So anywhere from I would say during the day, adults, you know, young adults to an elder. In the summer, Alexis volunteered for us a couple of summers and her

brother. We get, you know, the younger kids that when you're not in school, and mom and dad want you to give back and jobs are hard to come by. So once in a while we get younger volunteers and summer. I mean people say, you know, get a high school kid. Well, that's all well and good to get a high school kid but high school kids are in high school.

AJ: Yeah.

AP: Mhmm.

LC: And you know, I needed a computer teacher. "Get a high school kid." Well yeah, but they're unavailable till four o'clock in the afternoon so it's a little more difficult. But lot of the times the high schools though do come—like the holiday times, they'll come down. Or if they have a play or a musical, they'll come down and do a snippet of it for the seniors. So we count that as volunteer time. But we do get kids that need community service for the honor society. So we do try and find something for them to do, sometimes it's something as simple as putting meals on wheels into a computer. But at least its community service and you know I've written a lot of those letters.

AP: Mmm.

LC: A lot of those letters. So we run the gamut with mostly adults.

AJ: Yeah, okay, that makes sense.

AP: What are the senior centers main goals?

LC: The senior centers main goal is to keep elders in their homes, healthy and safe for as long as possible. That is any senior centers main goal. People don't want to leave their homes. Been to a nursing home lately? It's awful. You know, some are better than others obviously. But everybody wants to stay home. So our goal is to keep elders healthy but safe in their own homes. And, and, you do that through a lot, a lot, of different ways. I mean I have two outreach workers that go out and visit elders in their homes and you know, say we have this service, this service that you can take advantage of. And that will help you stay here longer. Okay. Meals on wheels being one, okay, so you do it that way. We also keep them safe and healthy in their own homes by providing them transportation because a lot of times they can't drive anymore. So we have two vans, one we get through a contract with the WRTA. And one is owned by the town of Holden. And we take elders where they need to go. We don't prioritize; it's first come first serve. So let's say your grandmother called and said, "I would like to go across town and have tea with my friend." We give her a time that we will pick her up; we'll give her a time that we'll take her home. Say your grandmother calls and says, "Well I need to go to the doctor and you know, my appointment is here." We do that too. So we'll take them to the doctor, the lawyer, get their hair done, grocery shopping, or just to

go have tea with their friend if that's what they want to do. To the library, wherever they want to go, we will go in Holden and one town out. So if your doctor is in Worcester we will take you there.

AP: That's awesome.

LC: So that's, that's our main goal, is to keep healthy, safe and in their homes. Try to keep them educated as far as the benefits and the services that their entitled to. And you know, we hear from families you know. My mom, my mom now, oh, can't drive. Oh my god, what are we going to do?" Or you know, "My mom has been taking advantage of." You know, we, we, get those phone calls and we work in conjunction with the police department. We work in conjunction with the fire department. The fire department, you know, goes to people's homes when there's trauma. But they're pretty observant guys, those firefighters are. And they'll say, "You know, I went to this home and you know, nicest lady in the world and probably could stay in her home but man, you know, she could use some help cleaning her house. Her house is a bit of a catastrophe. So after they get home from the hospital one of my staff will go out and visit just say, "You know, think about it. These services are available to you." We leave a business card and a lot of times we'll get a call back that says, "Can you come back and talk to me more about this?" So we get referrals from neighbors, friends, fire, police, and sometimes the seniors themselves."

AP: That's nice. Let's see. What would consider the senior centers major accomplishment or couple of major accomplishments?

LC: The senior center staff or senior center itself? The senior center itself is just a place where people who feel lost can go. Okay, you lose your spouse, I mean these seniors grew up in the age where they didn't divorce every minute, you worked your way through it. And so, my partner of 62 years is gone, I don't know what to do. And so we encourage them to come here. We say you know what, you want to bring your daughter the first couple of times, that's fine, you are more than welcome to do that. And we don't charge the younger person anything, like at lunch time, anything more than we charge the older person. Or if they are a little bit leery about using the van, we don't charge the person accompanying them, we only charge the senior. So yeah it can be, it gives people a place to go, it gives people another family. A lot of them if you came during the day and talked to a lot of them that's what they would say to you, "this is my new family, I do not know where I would be without them."

AP: That's awesome!

LC: And that's why we get out of bed every morning.

AP: Mmm

LC: Ok, you kids are always praying for a snow day, we don't want a snow day, because if we get a snow day, those seniors are isolated and alone.

AP: And that's not good.

LC: And it's a long day.

AP: Mmhmm

LC: You know, I mean I look forward to my, to my isolation and alone time, but I have all of this around me all the time too. So once in a while some peace and quiet is nice. So I would say that is our, our biggest accomplishment, it that we give them a place to go. We give them stability, they know that when they are here they are safe, and they also know that if they have a problem that the staff that sits in the office will move heaven and earth for them to help them solve it. So, we had one lady who Social Security decided she was dead. I don't know where they get their information, okay....

AP: [laughs]

LC: ... but they had her marked as dead so her Social Security stopped. She didn't know her social security stopped so she had bounced checks all over town.

AP: Mmmm

LC: So I, so I mean all kinds of problems from this one little thing. She sat with my outreach worker and we got her back to the living.

AP: That's good.

LC: We thought that was a big accomplishment. And we worked with the local banks, she has a couple bank accounts, so we worked with the local banks and explained to them what went on, they didn't charge her any fees, which they could have. They could have. And helped her get her account back in order. So, you know, they really think of us as their family, especially the ones that don't have family here. So, yeah, that's really our biggest accomplishment, is that we give them the stability that they need and support that they need. Whenever they need it.

AP: That's awesome. I feel like a lot of senior centers don't do that as well as Holden does.

AJ: Mmm

LC: Well I think.

AP: Or to the degree.

LC: It depends on who you have in the seat, and I'm not saying this because it's me; in the corner office, ok ,the person that had my seat before me, I learned a lot from Cindy.

AP: Mmhmm

LC: And, and, one thing I learned from Cindy, because I tend to get a little angry once in a while. You get a whole lot more with honey than you do with vinegar. If you take that deep breath, and just keep your calm, your voice here, you're going to make your point a lot better, and you're going to be able to help a lot more. So, you know, it, it, it depends. It depends on how much autonomy you are given here I mean as well. I mean, I worked for three town managers now, Brian Bullock, and Nancy Galkowski, and now Jackie Kelly, and with the way—especially with the way I came into my job I, I was given a lot of support, and a lot of sought after advice, and it just made me a better senior center director. It just really did. My predecessor had a brain tumor. And that is how I got my job. I was just moved up as an acting director kind of thing until Cindy could decide what she wanted, if she wanted to retire, if she was going to try to come back and so I kind of came into it that way. Which is a hard way to get a job.

AP: Yeah

LC: And they are very big shoes to fill. And I try every day to fill them.

AP: Mmm

LC: The way she would want them filled. And we're, we're allowed the autonomy to kind of maneuver within the system, the way we need to. I don't want to say that we just go on and do what we want and beg for forgiveness later because we really do know where the boundaries are.

AP: Right, but you that wiggle room.

LC: We do have the wiggle, we are given that wiggle room, and I've never had to go back and say, "Help you got to get me out of this." So you have to know how far you can go into someone's life. We don't, we don't deal with finances, people's finances. There is a program through Elder Services of Worcester where they will help someone over see their finances and we leave that to them. We, we go just so far...

AP: Right

LC: ...and we turn it over to someone that has a bigger spectrum, broader spectrum, than what we do.

AJ: You mentioned, you have like outreach workers, so what other workers do you have?

LC: I have a staff of, I have three fulltime people, myself, the department secretary, and my transportation coordinator. All three of us are fulltime. I have a part-time program coordinator that works nineteen hours a week, and she plans the programs, that's exactly what she does, ok. She plans them and pulls them off. I have, two outreach workers. One works twenty three hours a week and the other one works between sixteen and nineteen. And I have, one, two, three, four part time van drivers.

AJ: Nice.

LC: And we have the, the second to smallest budget in the town.

AP: I was about to say, that is not a lot of employees, but ...

LC: It is not a lot of employees in really, for what we do. We do a lot.

AP: I know!

LC: For what, for the. But you know what, I have really dedicated people that want to be here, they, you know. They enjoy what they do,

AP: And that makes a difference.

LC: It makes a huge difference. And we are mostly a staff of women.

AP: Mmmhmm

LC: And, for a staff of women, we do ok. You know women can be kind of catty, sometimes, and, but pretty much we all, pretty much get along. Do we get frustrated with each other, of course we do, we're human. But overall we have a goal, we all work towards that same goal. So, ...

AP: That's good

LC: We make it work.

AP: So then, you must have lots of volunteers that come and help.

LC: We have about a hundred and twenty volunteers that do all kinds of different things. We have volunteers that participate in our pen pal program. We have a pen pal program with the third grade, these days, at Mayo. So we have, I believe it is eight-nine seniors and eighty-nine third graders. Meals on Wheels people, people who work in the kitchen, outreach volunteers. We have a program with the library that is called Book Express.

The elder fills out a form of what kind of books they like to read or authors they particularly care for, or movies they might like to see. The library packages them up and I have volunteers that go pick them up from the library and take them to the senior. Two weeks later, they go back, they take them back from the senior, they go to the library and bring them the next pack.

AP: That's awesome.

LC: So, we do that. We have a program with the food pantry, where we have volunteers. The seniors fill out the forms of what they want, food pantry volunteers do the shopping. I have volunteers that go out and pick up the food items and take them to the seniors. For seniors that can't get to the food pantry. They do that for us on a Friday, they do seniors on Friday's.

AP: Mmhmm

LC: So we have volunteers that do that. So we have volunteers that do a lot of different things.

AP: That's awesome!

LC: Lots of different things. Help with special events, you know about that. Don't really have one that comes regularly into the office. But like when I need to hold a staff meeting, we have a couple volunteers that we feel are capable of coming into the office and running the office for a couple of hours. On their own. So, yeah, they save the town over a hundred thousand dollars every year.

AP: That's awesome.

AJ: That's crazy.

LC: It really kind of blows your mind, if you think about it.

AJ: Yeah.

LC: If I had to pay these people, you know, I would be the biggest budget. I would be bigger than the fire department.

AP: [laughs]

AJ: [laughs]

AP: That is true.

LC: But I will never see that happen. That's ok, I don't need that kind of money. The town is very generous. Holden seniors are very lucky. They really are. We are the only senior center in the Wachusett district that has full time staff.

AP: Wow

LC: And if you can include West Boylston and Boylston we are the only senior center that is open full time and the only senior center that has a full time staff.

AJ: Wow

AP: Are there senior centers in the surrounding towns?

LC: Yes. Paxton has one, Rutland has one, Sterling has one and they are building a new one. I don't, I'm not sure Princeton has one.

AP: It's a small town.

LC: I don't think Princeton does. West Boylston a few years ago had a senior center in an old school that was a very sad excuse. I would not put a rabid dog in it.

AP: Mmm

AJ: Mmm

LC: So, now they are kind of hard up for the space and I'm not sure about Boylston. I've spoken to their director but I am not really sure where she is housed. So, I mean in Holden it started with having lunch at Mountview School twice a week.

AP: Oh wow.

LC: And it grew to this.

AP: Wow, that's awesome.

AJ: So how many seniors do you have on a day-to-day basis?

LC: You know, it kind of depends what is going on. We could have as few as twenty seniors walk through the door in a day. We could have as many as a hundred and twenty five walk through the door. Depending upon what is going on here. What's going on in their lives. What's going on as far as, health insurance is a big thing. They have to you know, re-visit their health insurance and prescription plan every year. Like right now, we are in the middle of that and I have a volunteer that comes in. It's called SHINE, Serving Health Insurance Needs of Elders. He is a volunteer, a trained volunteer, but—

and he is usually here two afternoons a month. And right now he is here, he was here two afternoons a month in October, he is here two afternoons this month and two full days and all of his appointments are full. So see it depends what is going on. So like I said, as few as twenty, and that doesn't count the people that do things for us outside the building. Ok, and as many as a hundred twenty five and that doesn't include phone calls. You know, the, the phone calls we yield every day. So, we average here for lunch, it depends on what is for lunch, you could have eight sitting out here,

AP: You have lunch, do you serve lunch every day?

LC: Every day. And you could have as many as thirty eight sitting out here. It just depends what is for lunch and if there is a program afterwards. They may, like if there is a program at one, they may say I'm going to go up and have lunch and then I'll stay for the program and make an afternoon out of it. That can happen too.

AJ: Is lunch the only meal that you do?

LC: Yeah.

AJ: Ok.

LC: Yup, once in a while, uh, we'll do coffee with the Town Manager where we put like a continental breakfast out there. But that is just for, you know, for a special event.

AJ: Ok.

LC: I don't have enough staff to spread out through a whole day. Like, we don't do night events right now because I don't have enough staff to staff it. There are some senior centers that do, like Northborough is open one night a week. I know that. So we do what we can with what we got to work with. We try to make the best of it. So, we try to cram as much into an eight hour day as we can.

AJ: Yeah.

AP: So what are your hours? Regular?

LC: Monday through Friday eight to four. We are not like the other town offices, the other town offices like Starbard and the Town Hall. They stay there until seven on Tuesday's and leave at noon on Fridays. That doesn't work for us. I have van drivers out there.

AP: Right.

LC: They need administrative support. So we didn't sign up for that. So we do Monday through Friday eight to four.

AP: That makes sense. And I'm sure the seniors like the stability.

LC: Well you know, I can't tell you how many phone calls I get on Friday afternoon, we'll get, "I'm trying to call the Town Clerk and they won't pick up the phone and they aren't there

AP: Yeah

LC: ...but you're there." Yes we're here.

AP: Mmm, it's different.

LC: Yeah I mean, they don't like change.

AP: Mmm

LC: And they just like everything to be the way it is supposed to be. So we try to keep it the way it is supposed to be. I moved a table out there and I can't tell you the flack I'm taking.

AP: Really?

LC: This round table right here use to be over in front, up near the office. And we had my daughter in law's baby shower here one day and I put that table there because I thought it looked nicer and I decided I really liked it there, so I left it there. And you can't, all the flack I'm taking from moving that table.

AP: Mmm. Wow, I never would have guessed moving something so small like that.

LC: Something, very, very small. Because if someone use to sit at that table and read the newspaper, where is the table?

AP: That's true.

LC: I say, "You know what, there are six here." But, so I mean, we do move things around once in a while because it might look better or just, if it works better. But we try to keep things as close to the same as we can, because that just makes them comfortable.

AP: Right.

LC: If I want to move furniture I move it at home.

AP: [laughs]

AJ: [laughs]

AP: I guess that is a solution.

LC: There you go.

AP: Mmm

AJ: Mmmm, like what would you say the toughest part about, managing a place like this?

LC: The toughest part about managing it, uh, politics.

AJ: Ok.

LC: Ok, you have to play politics. You work for any part of the government, well when you work for anything. There is politics in everything you do. Okay, we try really hard to work well with all the departments because we want that same curtesy.

AJ: Mm

LC: Ok, that's the hard part. I've been doing this for a while now and I'm pretty good at it, but I still have other people that like to tell me how I should run a senior center. And it is really hard not to come back with, "I don't tell you how to run this." But overall, I mean it has its challenges, and I look a good challenge every now and again, so that's okay. Like I've said, I'm given quite a bit of autonomy. Jackie knows that I know what I'm doing over here. So I don't have the town manager breathing down my back and I'm kind of proud about that because it tells me she has confidence in me.

AP: Mmm

LC: So the toughest part really is personality. You have a lot of strong personalities here. Not just in there but out here. And you know so and so sometimes it's like running Romper Room. Okay, but, and that's a challenge. And we deal with some difficult personal things that are really hard to talk to people about. That is a challenge personally for me, you know. I'm okay at it but I am uncomfortable with it, shall we say? So that's a challenge. As far as dealing with the population, you know when they first come here they are well and you watch them decline.

AP: Aww

LC: And they eventually pass away. It is really hard. That is really hard. And some of them really endear themselves to you. Like I have more grandparents than I know what to do with.

AP: Ah [laughs]

LC: Okay, and some of them really endearing—we had one lady in particular, just endearing, I just loved this woman. She was just—there was nothing not to love about her.

AJ: Aww

LC: And she had the opportunity to meet my younger son and daughter in law. And she was very excited about the babies. She thought my husband walked on water.

AP: Aww

LC: And she thought he was just the best-looking man, she had ever seen.

AP: Aww, so cute.

LC: So he went by her one day and just touched her arm, and she just went, “He touched me!”

AP: [laughs]

AJ: [laughs]

LC: Like he was Elvis or something. And she recently just passed away. And that is the really hard part.

AP: How has the role of women changed?

LC: Just this job alone has changed. The first woman, Fran O’Neil, brought the senior center to Holden. The first senior center was the old junior high. And it came to be because of Fran. Now, this building is here because of Cindy Beck. I wonder what my legacy is going to be.