

Interviewee: Jo Massarelli
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Overseen by: Professor Selina Gallo-Cruz, College of the Holy Cross

Abstract: Jo Massarelli was born in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1958. She is involved in several organizations in Worcester, such as Family Matters, the Medical Safeguards Project, and the Social Role Valorization Implementation Project (SRV Implementation Project). She travels the globe to teach courses on such topics and highly values the sanctity of all human lives. In this interview, Jo discusses the establishment of Women Together, an organization that focuses on improving the neighborhood. Additionally, she highlights important aspects of having a hospitality home. Jo emphasizes her transformative experience with faith and the ways in which it has guided her peace work, especially in regards to her involvement as Treasurer on the Board of Directors for the Mustard Seed, a Catholic Worker soup kitchen.

EC: Just another background, we're in Professor Gallo-Cruz's Women and Nonviolence seminar. So that's like basically what the entire class is about. And just like learning about women in history that's kind of like written out and that like most people don't know about.

JM: Uh-huh, good, good.

BP: So we're going to do sort-of an oral history so first, if we could, we could start with your childhood so if you were born in Worcester or where you were born, what your family was like.

JM: I was born in Worcester, I'm fresh, uh, salt water Worcester...

BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: ...fresh water Worcester, and I grew up with my parents and my five brothers.

BP: Oh wow.

JM: Yeah, so it was a very active household, it was a wonderful household. My dad was a physician in Worcester, the fifth doctor for the Fallon Clinic, which is now a huge enterprise.

EC: Yeah [laughs].

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JM: And yeah, I grew up in Worcester.

BP: Neat. So what was your neighborhood or your school, what was the community like at that time?

JM: Well I grew up on the corner of Park Avenue and Salisbury Street, right across the street from the Antiquarian Society Library, so the neighborhood was kind-of behind that, mid [inaudible] street area, and it was all boys, and I didn't like that because I only had boys at home.

BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: So, I grew up tough with the guys, you know? Playing, when they would let me...

JM and BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: So I always lamented not having more girls in my neighborhood, but it's just how it turned out. And then when we would gather with my parents' friends, it was the Orscnidors, the Mannings, the big families all big families. And with those families that I mentioned, there were 24 kids, 21 boys.

BP and EC: Wow, woah [laughs].

JM: So boys everywhere!

JM and BP and EC: [laughs].

JM: So my girlfriends when I was a kid were very dear to me.

BP: So when did you first kind-of become aware of activism, issues, or involved in any social issues?

JM: I would say I went to Notre Dame in Worcester, Notre Dame Academy ...

EC: Mhmmm.

JM: ...and we had a program called Love in Action and I think that was, that just made a lot of sense to me. I had always been moved by the lives of the saints and people who gave their lives to others, you know? So that was always in my mind. I mean I remember when I was a kid, like five or six, I gave away my cashmere sweater to a kid who was cold at school and my mother

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was furious, and I remember being really confused by that, because you're supposed to do that, right!

JM and BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: And she called up the girl's mother, and the girl's mother came over and said she was sorry and I remember being deeply confused by that because that wasn't the sense of the world that the nuns were telling me or that I was reading about in the Bible. So I always kind of wondered about it and was trying to work out a way to be in the world with people who were different from me. But the first formal one was I would say was the Love in Action program.

EC: What sort of stuff did you do in that program?

JM: Well it's funny I remember I was sent to a nursing home with my best friend Sharon. We adopted grandmas, that's what we did, and Sharon's grandma was really cool. They were gonna go shopping together, all this stuff.

BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: And then I got introduced to my grandmother, and my grandmother had very advanced senile dementia. And she talked at me, gibberish, the whole hour I was there. And I was, it was a little scary at first, and then confusing and I had no connection with her at all. And I went home that night and my father as he usually did asked, "What did you do today?" And I said, "Well I did my Love in Action at the nursing home, but Sharon got a good grandmother and I didn't get such a good one so I'm gonna ask if I can change." And I remember my father saying to me, "What made her not a good grandmother?" And I said, "Well she's crazy and she doesn't talk to me," and my father said, "So Josephine, you're telling me that she shouldn't have company because she wasn't interesting to you?" And I said, "I didn't say that!" And he said, "You kind of did!" And I went back, and it still moves me. I haven't thought about this in a long time. But when I listened to her, she was telling me about her husband, who died in World War II and her son who died in Vietnam. But she couldn't do it direct, she was doing this crazy roundabout way, but that, that was the theme. And I finally listened to her and then we connected, so that was it.

EC: That's so cool.

BP: That's really great, wow.

JM: So I went to Georgetown...

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BP: Right, mmmm.

JM:... There, there was Father [Richard] McSorley who was a big Catholic Worker priest. You're familiar with the Catholic Worker?

EC: Yes.

JM: So that kinds touched me. I never took him for a class, but I was aware of his work. And then I did work with poor people in D.C. tutoring in the projects, so little things like this, and it was beginning to kind-of work with me that this is how you're supposed to live.

BP: Could you tell us a little bit more about your college experience? What that was like, developing through that, and sort-of becoming aware of all this?

JM: Yes, I started reading about Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, and I wanted to understand her mindset so I read the literature that she loved. I read a lot of Dostoyevsky; it was beginning to create a theory in my mind. I was a theology major, although at Georgetown in the '70s it didn't mean a lot.

BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: And we studied Theravada Buddhism compared to Christianity and it kind of – I thought it was cool, but it didn't really answer those questions that I was questing after. And when I worked with the kids in the projects, their lives were so radically different from mine and mine from theirs that it was hard to make a connection there. I remember one, I was seventeen when I started college, the kid I was tutoring was eleven. And he looked at me and he said how many babies do you have?

BP: [Sigh]

JM: And I said, I don't have any babies. And he said, "Is it 'cuz you're ugly?" And what he meant was, I wasn't wearing any make-up or a dress like his sister. I would wear my pea coat and my jeans. So it was just this whole different—thank god I had a good self-image, thought I was ugly but...

JM and BP and EC: [laughs]

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JM: But it was this just whole different way of looking at the world and I remember I brought them a pumpkin for Halloween, and when we cut it open and I lifted it up they were shocked to see what was in there. They had no experience of fresh vegetables, so it was like this whole world and I remember thinking we live in the same country and our lives are so different. So that really moved me, and I began to wonder about that. So my formal training in college wasn't a big help, but my experiences were. I went to Appalachia for my spring breaks, and Appalachia in the '70s was Appalachia.

BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: I did labor there but I also drove people to dialysis appointments and things like that, because I could drive a 4-wheeled vehicle. And they didn't live on places with roads, and, I mean it was just—so those experiences in college really formed my mentality I think.

BP: So after college, when did you first get involved with any of – so I know you're involved with the Catholic Worker, and now the Social Role Valorization Implementation Project (SRV Implementation Project) and lots of things like Family Lives. What did you first get involved in, and how did that kind-of progress later on?

JM: Well when I graduated I was going to work in publishing in New York City, and I got a job with Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publisher.

EM: Mhmmm.

JM: And I never took it, because my mom got sick. So, I went back home and kind of was trying to figure out what to do. Didn't want to stay with my folks, although I loved them dearly. But I wasn't making any money, so this kind of dilemma, which I hope you don't have to experience as deeply as I did, but anyway. While I was there in that dilemma, I opened up the newspaper and I heard about this great deal. You could move into this house, they wouldn't charge you for rent, anything, and all you had to do was sleep over. And it was a respite house for people with impairments that was being run by—at the time the agency was the Worcester Area Foundation for Retarded Children, now it is called the Seven Hills Foundation. So I moved in there and I was teaching high school. And I really liked my housemates, a lot more than I liked arguing with the high school administration. So I stayed in that field, and for 10 years I ran residential services for people with troubles with their behavior. And my job was to help them have a good home. And at the time I was doing that Duffy, Scott Duffy, was a—do you know who that is?

BP: Sounds familiar, yeah.

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JM: He's from the Catholic Workers in Worcester. We worked together, we were co-workers and he was living this radical Catholic Worker life, and he was so odd, and yet I was so intrigued by him. So I began to kind-of think about that, but it was really through people with impairments, and at the time I was helping people get out of institutions, like the Worcester State Hospital or other such places. And [pause] and I was trying to figure out their plight. I remember I met a woman there at the Worcester State Hospital who had gone to Fordham [University], her father was a doctor. She had the same education I did, the same socioeconomic background, and here she is at the mental hospital. And it's because her boyfriend left her and she was distraught, and she tried to kill herself and she didn't have a friend, a base of friends to watch over her. And I had that similar experience, my boyfriend left me, that's one of the reasons too I didn't stay in New York. I was distraught, but I had good friends and I had a good sense of myself, and it never occurred to me to kill myself over a guy, even though I loved him. And I remember thinking, it's not that she's crazy, it's that she's disenfranchised, it's that she doesn't have people, and that made her crazy. And then I began to think about how the only religious figure who hung around with the people that I'm hanging around was Christ. He hung around the least among us. The Buddha had different company, Muhammed had different company, but this was my company. And so I began to take my faith more seriously, too. And I began to consider what that would mean for me and how I would live my life. At the same time I met Wolf Wolfensberger, that's a name you don't often forget.

BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: He was a professor at Syracuse University and he forced the ideas of Social Role Valorization and those ideas made perfect sense to me. They had to do with the fact that people who have impairments—having an impairment is a hardship, but much more so was the way other people respond to them, the social response makes the problems. So I began to work with him, and that started me both in the Catholic Worker direction and in the SRV direction. They're very compatible.

BP: Right. So personally I am looking into medical sociology as well, that kind of thing and Alzheimer's disease and things like that so because you have so much experience, how do you think that stigma kind-of shapes the medical field in that regard?

JM: It does, absolutely. So when I was a kid, there was no Alzheimer's, it was senility. People were senile and senility wasn't a disease. Senility was a human condition that happens to some old people where they can't think straight. When we parlayed it into disease mode, called it Alzheimer's, that's a death sentence, you know? And there's dread with that. Senility there wasn't. I mean nobody wanted to be senile, but it wasn't a death sentence the way Alzheimer's

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is. So the sociological nature of illness has a lot to do with its treatment, with its outcome, with what kind of medicine that gets practiced around people whether its surrounded by despair or hope – there's a lot to it, absolutely. That's the short-hand answer.

BP: Right [laughs]. Yeah, could you tell us a bit about the Medical Safeguards Project or Family Lives, things like that?

JM: Sure, medical safeguarding is a concept where people with very significant impairments require advocacy in the hospital. We all require advocacy in the hospital, but particularly for people who don't speak for themselves. So that's a project made up of nurse practitioners and physicians mainly in the southeastern part of Massachusetts, and I am the person who teaches the values and the sociology, the sociology behind it. And I convene the clinicians to teach advocacy strategies based on social work. So essentially the docs and the nurses accompany very impaired people when they're in the hospital to make sure that excellent standards of medical care are offered them and to protect their lives. So that's what that project's about, and we meet every month, we brainstorm what has happened that month, we try to hone our craft to make sure that we can preserve at least some lives, and that's what it is. Family Lives, though, is a nursing project that provides 24-hour nursing support for kids, mainly kids. It serves now some adults who have aged into adulthood so they can live at home with their parents. Again, it is based in the social role valorization approach that says that children—these kids all have a lot of technology, they don't breathe unassisted, they don't eat by mouth, they eat through gastrostomy. So there is a lot of machinery around. And it's hard to look beyond the patient role, when you're surrounded, when you need help mechanically to breathe and to eat. But, my project is about helping the nurses and the families see the bratty little brother, or the first communicant, or the conformondi, or the you know, the Boy Scout or Girl Scout or student. So we work with these ideas to get a little bit beyond the patient model.

BP: Great, thank you.

JM: So, so we do in both projects.

EC: How did you first become involved in both of those?

JM: Well, in medical safeguarding, it's a reasonable offshoot from social role valorization, but my brother Tom, one of my brothers, had cancer. He had to live in Falmouth, and he got it very young, he got it at 32. And so my family took care of him and my dad was a doctor and he knew to keep him away from the medical model as much as we could, to use medicine as it was needed, but not to have it overtake his life, which is in accord with SRV, right? So, Tom did die when he was 39. He'd gotten married 13 days before he died. He left us with a wonderful sister-

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in-law. And this was a guy who lived every moment before he died. And [pause] I remember he said to me, “So you work with people like me, you work with people who are looking at short lives. I want you to remember this,” and he basically schooled me in medical safeguarding came from that, so.

BP: Throughout these experiences, how or what how did you find this or what was your inspiration through this? Or did you look up to one person? I know you’ve been talking about faith as kind-of a foundation...

EC: Family?

JM: Mhmmm

BP: Family, yeah.

JM: I would say when I began to take my Christianity seriously, it all began to make some sense. And Dorothy Day inspired me, Wolf Wolfenberger is an inspiration for me. Those were the main influences but really it was informed by my faith. Now all of the work I do is in the secular world and we teach workshops basically on the sanctity of human life, but we don’t use that term because we teach them in a secular context. But I find that you can get pretty far with people who are of good mind and heart, to prompt them to think about really the value of the human life, which is at the basis of all of my work.

BP: So throughout Worcester’s history, because you said you grew up here, what other movements that you were aware of took place, could you tell us about things that you didn’t really take part in and why you didn’t take part in them, or anything you see of note regarding that?

JM: Well I grew up, you know fairly sheltered. So I’m 59, I’ve always been the youngest in my set, so I was a little too young for civil rights, but I heard about that. And I was kind-of on the periphery of that, but I was 11, so I was too young to do much about that. I was a little too young to protest the Vietnam War. It would have been in my nature to want to do that, because when the Gulf War came, I was right there. But a lot of my colleagues and friends like Frank in the next room with the loud voice...

BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: [phone rings]... that was a big thing for them and for a lot of my peers so I was kind of on the periphery of that. But I did very strongly object to the Gulf War, all of them, and I was part

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of the—I remember when I was in high school, I went to Notre Dame [Academy], all women [phone rings] excuse me, I'm sorry. He doesn't take no for an answer [laughs], and one of my classmates got pregnant, and it was 1973 so the nuns had a celebration mass because it was in contrast to Roe v. Wade, that was the year that the decision was made. And I remember that really heated me because we knew that that this girl's life was going to be marked by difficulty, and we knew—I'm sorry, there's a guest at the door, hang on.

BP and EC: Yeah.

[pause]

JM: He wasn't hissing at you, was he? (referring to the cat)

BP: No, no he's very sweet [laughs].

JM: So I was speaking about, so that was the first notion about the injustice of abortion from a woman's perspective, right? So, I've been involved in, I won't say the pro-life movement because I have what I think is a more comprehensive look at the sanctity of life issues because I also oppose warfare, I also oppose the death penalty, and a lot of pro-life is just that one issue. But when we have merged the issues of warfare and abortion, what happens to the poor in this country, which we do in Worcester with the Catholic Worker. Recently with Million Women's stuff, I've chosen not to be a part of that because—it's what your professor—I met her because she wanted hospitality last summer, she didn't have a place to live...

EC: Mhmm.

JM: ... so we invited her to come stay with, with us and her kids. She ended up not requiring that, but that's how I met her. Then she invited me to do that, Million Women's stuff, and I had to decline. And that started this great dialogue, and I think that's how I got to meet you. But I declined it because I thought the issues were very confused. I thought the issues about immigration, right on, but the prohibition of women who oppose abortion was unconscionable, I believe. And then to just mix it all up with the gender identity stuff just seemed really deeply confused. And either you had to sign on to it all or you weren't welcome, which is hardly how women should behave I think, like a truth test or something. So in this for the ostensible purpose of dialogue, people were excluded, so I couldn't be part of that. So I'm pretty thoughtful about what I will do and what I won't do.

EC: Mhmm.

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JM: And so I don't know, does that answer your question?

EC: Yeah. To go back to the war...

JM: Yeah.

EC: ... what kind of stuff did you do to oppose it?

JM: We had protests in front of City Hall and at Lincoln Square, we supported people who went to prison for protesting weapons manufacturing. My husband went to jail for that, along with Scott Duffy so we were supportive of that.

BP and EC: Wow, really?

JM: Yup, Worcester's got a rich history of this stuff, it does.

BP and EC: Yeah [laughs].

JM: It does. So that kind of thing.

EC: Mhmm.

BP: What was the most challenging part of that, for you? For being in that activism and participating in that?

JM: Well, I think I'm still there.

BP: Well right, but specifically about that.

JM: I think the divisiveness of the recent stuff. Because as I said it, it was almost a truth test, like if you didn't participate in that, then you were this kind of person, and that kind of person isn't what we want to be, that is the sort of feeling. And that was never the case, we could always focus on the issue at hand and not, you know, we could stand up with people of different faiths and different perspectives as long as we agreed that this was the issue. But when you mix some of the issues you run into a lot of problems. So there were some personal costs to that. People were—we had to deal with [President Donald] Trump...

JM and BP and EC: [laughs]

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JM: ... never mind one another, and then this last election just got so divisive. People would say – I have a beloved Auntie that’s in her late 70’s who told me, “If I don’t vote for Hillary [Clinton], I should leave this country.” And of course, I couldn’t vote for Hillary because of her death-making policies, certainly couldn’t vote for Donald [Trump] for obvious reasons. So the Catholic Worker position is when you vote for the lesser of two evils, you are still voting for evil. So we have a non-participation with our government kind-of stance, and that gets you in hot water too. I mean we compromise. We own a house, we pay taxes. So that is some participation with the government, but there’s a lot of things we don’t participate in, we don’t participate in investing money, that kind of thing.

BP: So because this is a women’s history project, although you started to talk about it a little bit, how did your perspective as a woman kind-of shape your role in this, in these activism and rights and social issues?

JM: I guess, I don’t really know. I mean, what I’d say about that is I always had this sense, I guess because I was the only girl of five brothers, that it was pretty wonderful to be a female person in the world and I had all kinds of privileges and that some limitations, but the limitations weren’t such big deals to me, you know? Like I never, I never felt like I was held back, or I never felt like I was—couldn’t be who I wanted to be. I will say my aunt, the one who told me I should leave the country for not voting for Hillary, she was an inspiration to me and when I was in high school she said to me, “Do not learn how to type,” which proved to be really bad advice...

JM and BP and EC: [laughs]

JM:... because everyone uses a computer now. But what she was saying was if you learn how to type you’ll be somebody’s secretary. And I was on the cusp of that, so I really appreciated that she had it much harder than I did, being that much older than me. And it’s upsetting to see young women today, not appreciating their strength as women and feeling like they have to be totally sexy objects and that’s so upsetting to me, because I didn’t have that mentality. My mentality was I am beautiful for the person that I am, I don’t have to and work too hard at being the kind of person who would be desirable, but I think women today, I feel like we’ve gone a totally about-face in some ways, you know? And I see just the superficiality of how women treat themselves as women is upsetting. So I feel like I’ve had great advantages as a woman, I’ve as I said, I’ve never felt held back except that there weren’t enough of us as I was growing up.

JM and EC: [laughs]

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JM: And my mom was probably influential that way, too. She was a force to be dealt with. Her name was Viera and we used to call her Severia...

JM and BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: ...because she was a strong woman, and so I probably benefited from that.

EC: What kind of stuff did she do that influenced you?

JM: You know my mom was a stay at home mom, so home and family absolutely key. But she was also very big into volunteerism, so she worked tirelessly with other women about the hospital you know volunteering at the hospital, getting things done for the hospital, raising money for the hospital. And that spirit of volunteerism that was so strong among my mother and her peers, this pretty much waning I will say in a big sort of way. So when we try to do things in this neighborhood, we have a group in this neighborhood called Women Together, and when we try to do things, what we find is we're all looking at white college-educated women of a certain age doing all of the work. And one of the reasons, and this neighborhood is not a white neighborhood, you know, it's a very mixed neighborhood, and the reason for that is everybody is working, working three jobs and the focus is not on the community when you're that engaged with your livelihood, the focus is on what you can make for your family. And I think that's a big loss. So my mom had that background, you take care of your family but you also take care of your community. And she was pretty clear about that.

BP: What other things have Women Together done or tried to do in the community?

JM: So Women Together started when one of our neighborhood women lost her son. He was shot by some guys from a gang, he was not a gang member. But they stole his car, the gang guys stole his car, and he reported it to the police, and they walked into his living room while he was watching TV with his uncle and his dad, and they killed him. So Nanette, his mom, at his vigil—so we always vigil in this neighborhood when there's violence. So at his vigil she said, "We can't depend on the cops for everything. The cops couldn't have done a thing about this." So she said we need to know one another, we need to spend time with one another and get to know one another. So Mary Keefe across the street and I and some others, decided to host coffee every Saturday so the women could get to know one another in the neighborhood. And that started this group called Women Together. And the first year we cleaned up the neighborhood. We all had brooms, we thought that was so funny, because we're witches ...

BP and EC: [laughs].

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JM: ... and we cleaned up the neighborhood, and we'll probably do a neighborhood clean-up this year too. But then we built that little park near Ed Hyder's store. Did you ever see that little park down there on Pleasant Street? It was slated to be four houses, this empty lot, and I was the treasurer for Women Together, and we had \$597 in the bank, and the deposit on the land was \$500. So we just, we just wrote a check.

JM and BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: This can't possibly work out. But it did, we partnered with the city, we built a park. Stuff like that. Clean-ups, vigils, we partnered with the city to—there's this project called Weed and Seed, and you could weed out violence and seed the ground for community life is the idea. So we applied for money and we bought grills for neighborhood parties, and we rented cars to take kids to the beach, and that kind of thing. And at the end of the year when we had to report on how we spent our money, all the other neighborhoods were there. And they bought things like safety lighting, extra police presence, and we bought...

EC: [laughs].

JM: ...like 40 pounds of Easter candy

JM and BP: [laughs]

JM: And, and basics for the beach and things like that so I think our money was better spent. Women Together did stuff like that. It's a group that comes and goes. It's been a little bit defunct lately, but we just talked about reorganizing again for the spring. And another thing we did, was we made a map of the houses where people were home during the day in case kids needed a refuge, so they knew they could go to this house because somebody would be home during the day. That red house, so we did stuff like that.

BP: Wow, that's really neat.

EC: Yeah it is cool.

BP: So how are the relationships between women in all of these groups? Does everyone get along all of the time?

JM: Hell no!

JM and BP and EC: [laughs]

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JM: No, it's wicked!

JM and BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: In that particular group, one of the things that made it less effective than it could have been I think, was a big rift between the people for whom Spanish was their native tongue, and everybody else. And the reason for that was, we had Albanians, we had Belarusians, we had people from Thailand, people from parts of China, you know, this neighborhood has about 17 different ethnicities, the preponderance being Spanish speaking people but Spanish people from all over, right? But, when we built the park, there was a big discussion about whether it should be Women Together Mujeres Lideres or just Women Together. And I think it was me, because it sounds like it would be, who kind-of joined the fray and said, to call it Women Together, not Women Together Mujeres Lideres just Women Together is more inclusive because there are 17 languages here. To choose just one of them makes it sound like it's just an English-Spanish initiative. At least if we call it just one, either we call it 17 different, or just one. And that was a big fat explosion. I kind of wasn't quite prepared for the fury that came out of that. That was just one example of a big explosion. Yeah, I was a racist, all that stuff to some of the women that I worked very hard with, so there was hurt feelings and things like that. But you know, we just soldier on and so that's one of the examples. And then the Women Together can be women who work together, can be wonderful allies in the field of people with impairments, most of the players are women, and I had great partnerships with them. With the nurse practitioners most of them are women, not all of them, but most of them are, and then there can be great division. I don't know, I think that's true of all human relationships, but it seems that we tend to shoot our mouths off more frequently or vehemently perhaps which creates some other additional problems that maybe men don't have because they're less honest maybe, I don't know. More restrained, I'll say.

BP and EC: [laughs]

BP: So, this just got me thinking, why do you think women are mostly in the impairment, I guess, field? Do you think there's a reason for that?

JM: Probably, I think it speaks to our nurturing side. It's not big salaries I think that has something to do with it. Although nurses, the nurses who are involved with impaired people make I think fabulous salaries, but it's traditional I would say, the caretaking role, it's traditional, and some people, some parents of children with impairments prefer a woman to work with their sons or daughters. So I think that's natural selection there too.

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BP: So can you tell us a little bit about when you were married and if any of that shaped your activism too? I remember you mentioned that during the war protesting and whatnot.

JM: Sure, I had the great privilege of being married to Mark Tulinsky, and we also work together, he's part of the SR Implementation Project. This house is a—we do the overflow hospitality for the St. Francis and Therese House, and I probably wouldn't do that unless I was married to Mark, because as a single person it's harder to do that, to have people come stay with you who are homeless. Something about the stability and having both a man and a woman in the house that makes some people kind of feel more at ease in a way and also the reasonable requests we make of people seem reasonable because this is our home too, right? So it just works better, and Mark is the one who went to jail, not me...

JM and BP and EC: [laughs]

JM:... so I'm pretty proud of him. But I was in a supportive role to that and of course what you do for your husband in terms of support is you're putting yourself on the line too in some ways. He's a theology professor now. He got his PhD maybe four years ago and we do everything pretty much in concert well, work wise anyway. We do different work, I travel a lot for my work to teach. I teach workshops and he's pretty much now at home, because he teaches up at Anna Maria [College]so he doesn't travel with me anymore, which is a loss, but we're connected in our approach to the world and in our work.

BP: So let's see, so you both work at the SRV Implementation, can you tell us more about that?

JM: Yes, I hired him!

BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: He was the accountant for the human service agency that I channeled my money through, and I work in different countries and that involved different currency. So as the accountant, the only time he ever heard from me was when my money got screwed up.

JM and BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: I wasn't at my best when that happened, and I had an opening in the project, was quite shocked to see him apply for the job. I said no, I basically I said no because I thought who's going to take care of my money, you know, you're in the right job. But he kept coming back, and coming back, and I finally did hire him. And then, what was as big a surprise to me as anybody, we fell in love and got married four months later.

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BP and EC: Aww that's so sweet.

JM: So I guess, yeah. And it was just a surprise to me too. I didn't really consider him because he's 11 years younger than I am, and I just didn't think or dream that would be the nature of our relationship, but as we began to spend more time together we couldn't be without each other, so getting married was very reasonable.

BP and EC: Mhmm.

JM: Do you both feel the same way regarding social issues and things, or do you differ in any way on anything?

JM: Well sure, he's my husband of course we differ!

JM and BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: But I would say that our values are very much in line, they're fairly orthodox, Catholic values, orthodox in the sense of the early church, you know the unity of life decision. He's pacifist as am I and that very much informs his work and his theology and his teaching. But the differences are pretty much I would say how our hospitality gets played out. He's a professor, he's thoughtful, he is reflective. When people come to us in need I'm initially the person in the front and center, and I am usually somebody who is quicker I think than he would be to have an unknown person at our dinner table. He likes his peace and quiet, and when you invite people with nowhere to live it's not always peaceful or quiet. So I'm—it's more of a—I would say I'm a bit more impulsive about living out our Christian message, and he's a bit more thoughtful, which is probably a good combo.

BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: But it can cause some strife too.

BP: So you've mentioned Catholic Worker several times, but just for the archive could you explain what this is a little more so they can hear it as well?

JM: Sure. In Worcester the Catholic Worker has a rich tradition, going back many, many decades now. The Mustard Seed Catholic Worker is a soup kitchen that supports people who are hungry and living in the downtown area of Worcester. That has recently formed a Board of Directors and the voice you hear [in the next room] is the president, and I'm the treasurer of that

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board. So it's kind of a Catholic Worker hybrid at this point because there is a Board of Directors. The Catholic Worker is a concept where it's a radical service to the poor, Peter Maurin, one of its co-founders said its purpose is as much a service to the poor as providing an opportunity for the rich to meet the poor and to be transformed in their service to the poor. So it serves both parties, it serves the haves and the have nots. In Worcester we have a second Catholic Worker house, it's a smaller enterprise called St. Francis and Therese Catholic Worker and it's a house of hospitality for about 6-8 homeless people a night who come and stay with Scott and Claire and their family. And as I said we do their overflow when there's not enough beds at their house people come to us. And the best way to learn about—it's well worth it to learn about the ideas behind the Catholic Worker—is there's a seven-minute vimeo video about the Worcester Catholic Worker that's well worth the seven minutes it takes to watch it. So I can put you onto that as well, but that's the Catholic Worker.

BP: What hardships have you experienced through working with that concept or idea?

JM: With the Catholic Worker?

BP: Yeah.

JM: We struggle about paying taxes in a culture that supports the war as much as we do. We struggle with owning a house in such a culture because one, we couldn't buy it outright, we had to take a mortgage and all that participation in the banking structures is a hardship for us. So that's one struggle. Another struggle is a lot of the poor are also addicted and when the Catholic Worker started in the 1930s in New York, the addiction was alcohol, which has its own troubles, but is a little bit more predictable than the difficulties with people addicted to the kinds of drugs that are here now. So that's a hardship, dealing with addicted people, having to say no to people who are standing on the doorstep on a cold night, but they're crazy high and we can't let them in, it's a hardship. There's a lot of hardships. The hard work, it's a lot of work, a lot of meals and plates and to make and things like that, it's hard work. I find the bigger struggle is that I do travel for my paid work so not being home all the time means that the hospitality we offer here is broken up a bit so that's tough. If I have to get on a plane in three days and somebody is in need, that's hard. So balancing my paid work with my Catholic Worker life can be difficult. I mean it's a lot of living on low salaries that we keep purposefully low to be close to the poor. You name it!

BP: Yeah [laughs].

EC: What are the workshops that you teach?

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JM: I teach one workshop that I'm preparing to teach called How to Function with Personal Moral Coherency in a Dysfunctional Human Service World. It's a seven-day workshop on really the nature of evil as expressed through human service structures. I teach a social role valorization workshop which is a four-day workshop on the plight of people with impairments within the kind of culture and society we live in. We teach workshops on personalism as a creed for service or as an approach to service. We teach a workshop called Strangers in the House, the Dilemma of Coping with In-home Service that really speaks to the home as a sacred private space but paid for public workers coming and going, it's hard to keep a home, I teach about that. We teach about the application of human services technologies like restraint, physical restraint what that does to the nature of the relationship of the server and the served. I teach workshops on keeping people safe in the hospital, like, all kinds of things.

BP: Are those only for nurses and doctors, or can people...?

JM: No, no, they're mostly for—I was just on Sunday I just came back from a town called Kapuskasing Ontario, it's way north, and there were leaders from an Inuit community there to try to figure out how they can take care of their elder role and the community members, you know so it's really for anybody.

BP: Mhmm, right.

JM: The medical ones that I teach tend to be directed toward medical practitioners, but people who run group homes and residential services, and day services and parents' elder services they come to our workshops, so.

BP: Do you have, I guess what's the biggest issue for you today? I know that's hard because you're involved in so many things and concerned about so many issues but, what's the biggest one for you in society today?

JM: The devaluation of human life, that life is cheap, cheaper than it used to be I think, that is in people's mind. And all the different ways that lives can get abbreviated in legal legitimized fashion, through euthanasia, through assisted suicide, through starvation and dehydration in hospitals, through abortion, selective abortion, through warfare, through keeping people poor, so the devaluation of human life, that's the big one. And what's behind that I think is just a whole secularization within our culture and we tend to we're a vulgar society, we don't look to uplift, transcend, and appreciate the spiritual realm. That's in fact a problem for vulnerable people. Vulnerable people always are at the disadvantage when that's the case, so that's a big issue.

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BP: So what movement or workshop or activism that you've done are you most happy or proud about?

JM: I'm a good teacher, I'm proud of carrying on Wolfensberger's work. He died in 2011, so I'm very grateful to be able to do that work. And I love offering hospitality and home, I love sharing our home with vulnerable people. As long as they'll tolerate my cat.

BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: So, those are my two, the two things I love, and I love being able to do that with my husband.

BP: So what's it like opening your home to people? Can you speak to that a little more?

JM: Yeah, it's how we live. We had one man who lived with us for 16 years. He came for six months and he stayed for 16 years and become a part of our family. And some people stay a year and a half and some people stay three nights, I mean it's varied. We find that what people need as much as instrumental help like shelter or a good meal, people also need relationship, and so they may come to us with an instrumental need and we try to develop relationship because that's a really important need that gets overlooked. So Andrew, who was at the door, he lived with us for about ten months, I think 20 years ago. And he's still in our lives. He left, he ran away from this house, and he walked to California. And when he came back I said, "Just come home," and he said, "No," he said it was too hard. I said, "What's too hard Andrew?" He said, "It's too hard to live in a place where people care about you. And that is too hard for some people." And so what he does is he has his own, I think, pretty crappy single apartment but he can I come for breakfast, can I come for dinner, it's my birthday next week, you know, so just always in need of that relationship. So he's housed, he's fed, but his real need is people who care about him, and he comes back, and he knows we care, even though sometimes it's hard.

JM and BP and EC: [quiet laughter]

JM: So those are a few things, teaching and hospitality it's

BP: Is it, is the varying time that people stay, is that difficult for you to form a relationship with someone who might stay for a while or might leave very soon, what is that like?

JM: It was hard when Andrew literally one day didn't show up for dinner, and was missing for seven months. I was frantic, and I thought he was dead. And that was the hardest problem for me. Ron, when he came to live with us, the man who stayed for 16 years, he actually came here,

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we supported him at the end of his life. He died here, he had the most glorious end of life I think and most glorious life too, he was just a wonderful person. I kind of knew within the first three months that I didn't want this relationship to ever end. So you get to know people and you sort it out, you know? One couple, they came from Nigeria and we found the husband at church, we do the liturgy of the hours three days a week, morning prayer and he would come and he would pray so hard that I knew something was wrong. Nobody prays that hard.

JM and EC: [laughs]

JM: So I asked him and he told me he had a very severe stutter, it was hard for him to talk, and he said my wife is pregnant, the place where we live they turn off the heat, and they were just brand new from Africa. And this was in November in New England, and they turn off the heat during the day. So, we said you shouldn't live like that, you can't live like that so come. So they came here and her baby came three days later. And they stayed a year and a half until they could get a place on their own, on their feet. And now, Mark is the godfather of one of their four boys, I'm the godmother of two of their four boys, and they live three blocks away, right? So you just build with people. I didn't know how long they would stay or, even if we'd frankly get along, but I think what happens is when you're open to the relationship, then the Holy Spirit just comes in and takes care of things. And sometimes it doesn't work out, but then that's ok too. We've never—people leave us more than we ask them to leave. People leave us because we don't have TV here, people leave us because we expect that you know we'll eat dinner together at night, you know, and we get up early and we have a pretty ordered life. So if you wanted to have an ordered life, if you've had disorder in your life and you want to change it, like Ron, who we got right from prison, then this was a second wind for him. If you're quite happy with your disordered life it's just not going to work, and people figure that out and they leave.

BP: Have you ever asked people to leave before?

JM: No, but I will say there were some people that I did not admit.

BP and EC: Mhmm.

JM: So Larry, Larry, Larry, Larry. You know, I would say to him "Larry, I just can't trust you, I just can't have you sleeping in my house because I just don't trust you." To which he said, "Jo, I'm not gonna steal from you, when I go to prison it's for assault, it's not for stealing."

JM and BP: [laughs]

JM: It's like, Larry, don't tell that to me. But really, that's part of not trusting.

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JM and BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: So I would offer him food and fellowship, he could come for a meal, but I would not let him stay. So there are some people, this is our home and we have to feel comfortable in our home.

BP: Right.

JM: So many people we just, poor Larry, I got to know him well enough not to trust him.

EC: [laughs]

JM: Other people, you don't know at all and it just seems to work out.

BP: Were there things you felt passionate about when you were younger that your views have since changed now?

JM: Oh sure, yeah sure. I really rejected the Catholic faith when I was young. I thought it was oppressive I thought it was bad to women, all kinds of things. Basically the stuff you hear today, and then I started studying and I was wrong, and the popular media is wrong about a lot of things. So I changed my mind about our faith. I used to defend the right to abortion, I was wrong about that too. I used to think that sexual liberation was human liberation, definitely don't think that anymore. I think as Sigmund Freud said, sexuality variety is the key to sexual boredom, and I think that's true. I think we're meant to be in a relationship with one another and that's the basis of sexual life. So sure, I was a child of the 70's.

JM and BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: And a lot of that proved to be just falsehood. So yeah, and I was passionate about those falsehoods when I was younger.

BP: [laughs] What do you see as a challenge in sort of organizing a group or something like facilitating a workshop, because we just talked about the community movement amongst the women, Women Together. What are challenges in organizing such kinds of groups?

JM: I think the biggest challenge is discourse is not appreciated. It used to be that you could organize around the idea and not have to agree with everything. It used to be that you could have disagreements with people, now people don't know how to disagree with one another, and I think that's the biggest problem, I think it used to be that people of very different kinds could

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still be civil to one another and still find some common ground. And I think that we have a very unforgiving public forum now and people will personally attack and you can't have discourse when that's the case. So I think it's just the nature of how we try to solve problems in the common, it's very dysfunctional I think.

EC: Mhmm.

JM: So that's a big issue. People come to our workshops, we challenge the hell out of them, they are very challenging workshops. And one of the reasons they're so long is because we try to build a—the first thing we do is we try to say, “Ok this is the common mindset of today and this is, this is what's wrong with that,” so we call it stripping, we help people to see the falsehoods in common ideologies and then we help to build up something that's going to be more in or opinion anyway helpful. And if people will sit still for it, then then a lot comes of it. But a lot of people once you start, you know picking on their icons they freak out.

BP: What sort-of uh falsehoods do you try to address?

JM: That professional helping is better than person helping. That only the professionals know how to care for the vulnerable. That the medical model is appropriate in all situations in every person's life, the impaired person's life or every elder person's life I'll say. That psychoactive drugs are the savior of mentally disordered people. That, I mean ...

JM and BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: There's a lot to it. That some people's impairments render them less human than others, some lives are worth more than others. The quality of life thinking about human beings is preferable to the uh value of all human life, or sanctity of human life plain and simple. And that's just the three-day workshop.

JM and BP and EC: [laughs]

BP: I was going to say, that's...

JM and BP and EC: [laughs]

EC: How long is like the longest workshop?

JM: Seven.

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EC: Seven?

BP: Do you do them, I mean you said you traveled to Canada where else have you gone to teach these workshops before?

JM: The next seven day one is in June in Sydney, Australia.

BP and EC: Oh wow.

JM: And then Japan, Europe, you know these ideas are influential, but I would say they're influential but they're not popular, right? So we go, we go where we're invited to go and that's where we end up going.

BP: How many workshops usually do you end up running in a year?

JM: I don't know, but that's a really good question.

JM and BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: I don't know. I teach about—it depends. I don't work from the third Sunday of Advent though the baptism of our Lord, I don't work that five-week period. I don't work in August, I make August a retreat and vacation and reading period. So I take certain breaks from the work, but generally one or two a month I would say.

BP: I'm trying to think. Can you recall the most influential workshop or a time when you really changed someone's perspective, a personal experience, something along those lines?

JM: It's a great privilege to do Wolf's work, the Wolfensberger work. Many people say their lives are changed by it, happens you know tens of times a year, it's a real blessing. And it happened to me. The first time I went to one of his workshops I was like wow! And so it's a gift I was given that now I get to give.

EC: Were his workshops taught on like the same topics?

JM: Yeah.

EC: They do now? Oh cool.

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JM: Yeah, I mean as the culture has declined we've developed them, but pretty much. So what they're doing in the other room, they're attending a workshop where they're evaluating the Mustard Seed, but we're teaching the evaluation technique of how to look at any kind of program from the perspective of the people served and see what that offers. Not just in terms of what the program says it offers, but also the unconscious dynamics behind it and how it disadvantages people or how it advantages them. And you know in that room there's Jane from Canada, there's Ed from Cape Cod, there's Sandy from Wisconsin, lot of people come from all over.

BP: Wow, yeah. So when you go travel and do these workshops, do you typically stay in contact with people afterwards or who were running – I can imagine that would create a big network of support.

JM: Isn't it. We have a conference every three years or so, the last one we hosted in Providence, Rhode Island, the next one is in Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada but it's all about developing relationships.

BP: Outside of work, what are some of your hobbies, what are things that you like to do?

JM: Every September I go to Mohegan Island and just hang out, I love it there off the coast of Maine.

BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: Yup, and then I go on retreats, I take a week of silence once or twice a year to kind of not have to listen to my own voice.

EC: [laughs]

JM: And I'm involved with at the Catholic Worker—there's a home baking business, we bake bread so I am interested in that. And there's a bunch of homeschoolers in our parish that I'm involved with the kids, you know, and we do all kinds of things – go to museums or just fun stuff like. I help a farmer raise some pigs every year.

BP and EC: [laughs] Neat!

JM: So I do that, the hog business. We sell the meat and I try to arrange for the free food for the pigs, that's how you make money on pigs so school systems give us their milk so I arrange all of that for the pigs. I kind of get a kick out of that.

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EC: [laughs]

JM: I love my cats.

JM and BP and EC: [laughs]

JM: So I don't know, I like to read.

BP: Was there any book that's been particularly influential in terms of your activism or recognition of social issues?

JM: You know, as I've said, I've studied the literature that Dorothy Day studied. Her books are great. I think the *Long Loneliness* was her biography. That was pretty influential. I just read a great book by Marilynne Robinson called *Home*. It's a novel that's just beautiful about relationship.

BP: I think we're getting close to wrapping up. Do you have any...

EC: Yeah, do you have any other groups or activism projects that we didn't mention that you've been a part of?

JM: Probably.

JM and BP and EC: (Laughter.)

EC: I'm sure.

BP: There are so many!

JM: But no, I think it's pretty thorough.

BP: So I have one last question for you, moving forward what's a goal that you have or something that you're hoping to do moving forward?

JM: You know, I don't think I've ever thought that way, it's funny. It's not that I'm whimsical about what happens, but I trust the Lord just presents things to me so I'd hate to second guess him. I don't know, I really don't know. I mean there are certain things, there's a lot that I say no to, to preserve what I do because you can't say yes to everything. And I'd like to be home more

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than I am. I travel a lot particularly now and I'd like to be home more. But I don't know, I will take what is given me, put it that way.

BP: I have no more questions Do you have any questions for us?

JM: Well, what are you going to do with this?

BP: Well we are going to give it to our professor Selina [laughs] and it will eventually be archived in one of the Harvard Libraries.

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