

Interviewee: Linda Rosenlund
Interviewers: John McVey and Peter Janeiro
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Transcriber: John McVey



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Abstract: Linda Rosenlund was born in Worcester in 1960 and grew up in Bellingham, Massachusetts after the age of seven. After graduating from Assumption College in 1982, she got married and worked a few different jobs before finally working where she is now, at Assumption College. In this interview, Linda discusses her life story, including her various jobs, her experience with her family, and her affiliation with the Worcester Women's History Project. Linda was raised in a family which was held up by traditional values through her father. After marrying, she moved to the Burncoat area of Worcester and worked at Raytheon Company, Fitchburg State College, and the Worcester Historical Museum, and coached basketball at Nichols College and Blackstone-Millville Regional High School. She now works at Assumption College where she is the Associate Director of Annual Giving and the Director of Parent Programs. Finally, in this interview, Linda relates how she has helped the community of Worcester through the Worcester Women's Oral History Project and how she has continued to search for new goals in life in order to improve both her life and the life of the Worcester community.

JM: 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 the areas of women's education, health, work, and politics and community involvement. We want to focus today on your experiences with how you found meaning in life. Thank you for your help with this important project!

LR: Oh you're welcome!

JM: May I ask permission to record this?

LR: Yes

PJ: Okay so first off my name is Peter and obviously the first question would be what is your maiden name—your full maiden name and then if you are married, what is you married name and what is your spouse's name?

LR: Okay so my full maiden name is Linda Joyce Burlingame B-U-R-L-I-N-G-A-M-E. My married name... I dropped my middle name and have taken my maiden last name so now my name is Linda Burlingame Rosenlund.

PJ: So was there any specific reason for doing that with the married name? Was that a cultural thing or...

LR: No it wasn't cultural, but I think back in 1982 I didn't have the courage to keep my maiden name as so many people do, it's more common now...

PJ: Right

LR: Because I felt I'm really not a Rosenlund, I'm a Burlingame.

PJ: Right

LR: But then I thought, I didn't want to hyphenate it either because it was more like a law firm [chuckles] there were many, many letters and it's two long names but so now I'm more or less known as Linda Rosenlund and just keep the Burlingame. Interestingly as I work at Assumption and I graduated from here in 1982, we always use the maiden name...

PJ: So it's kind of a tradition

LR: Because it's a tradition... Because people that graduated in '82 with me wouldn't know my married name.

PJ: True

LR: So now I have this long name anyway: Linda Burlingame Rosenlund.

PJ: Okay

LR: Okay?

PJ: So do you have any children and if so, what are their names and basically what are they doing right now?

LR: Well I—we have two daughters, I think I forgot to mention yes I'm married. We have two daughters: Sherron, she is—she just graduated from Temple University last May.

PJ: And how do you spell her name?

LR: S-H-E-R-R-O-N

PJ: Okay

LR: And right now she is teaching English in Spain. She's been there since August and she'll be there until June. And our youngest daughter Jaclyn J-A-C-L-Y-N is a senior at the University of Maryland at College Park.

PJ: Okay and now how old did you say Sherron was and how old is Jaclyn?

LR: Sherron is 22 and Jackie is 21.

PJ: Okay well very close. You know obviously this is just a general question. I don't know if they're married or not or if they have any children, do you have any grandchildren of any sort?

LR: Oh no, no they're still students, unmarried, and no children.

PJ: Okay

JM: Okay, alright, so may I ask you, what is your cultural background? What is your heritage?

LR: Well that's an interesting question because I consider myself Italian, but I'm a very small percentage Italian. My mother's mother was full Italian, 100% Italian, but she married a man from Finland, so my mother is only half Italian and my mother married a man who is Irish, English, and French so I'm a real mixture but I consider myself Italian, I think mainly because I was very close to my maternal grandmother and we've kept a lot of the traditions alive—the cultural traditions especially around the holidays. Also I got very interested in genealogy after she passed away about 20 years ago so I've delved into all things Italian and I've visited Italy quite a few times to conduct genealogy.

PJ: Okay, actually, I have a question: when is—when were you born?

LR: When was I born?

PJ: Yes

LR: April 6, 1960

PJ: Okay, and where were you born?

LR: I was born in Worcester, but I—my family relocated to Bellingham [Massachusetts] when I was seven. After I graduated in 1982, I stayed in Worcester and I've lived there ever since.

JM: Okay and tell me about your parents, what were they like?

LR: Well they were very nice people: they were very nurturing and very encouraging. My dad passed away in 2003, my mother is still alive. She was a young mother because she had me when she was—she was only 20. My dad was five years older than her, but they grew up in Worcester. They didn't attend college so I was the first in the family to go to college, which was a sense of pride for them, especially my dad. My dad was a hairdresser, he owned a few businesses and he stayed with one shop in Framingham and my mother has worked for the Bellingham school system for over 20 years.

JM: Oh wow, okay, so...

PJ: So you said as of now you live in Bellingham...

LR: No I live in Worcester.

PJ: Okay so you moved back to Worcester. What neighborhood do you live in and what is your neighborhood like as compared to—well because when you hear about Worcester, there are many different sections just like many towns...

LR: Right, well I live in the Burncoat Street area it's considered, so that's over near Allmerica—actually it's called the Hanover Insurance Company now. It's a very close-knit neighborhood. I live on North Parkway, which is a street that only has about 20 houses on it, and only one side of the street has houses on it because the other side of the street is Burncoat High School and Middle School and Hanover Insurance Company. When my husband and I moved into the neighborhood in 1987 we were the youngest—youngest couple on the street and it's been very interesting to see the changeover because we're now one of the oldest [chuckles] we recently turned 50. We brought up our children there and many of our older neighbors have either passed away or moved on to nursing homes.

PJ: That's exactly what happened to my neighborhood with my parents. They moved in as the youngest couple and they're not the oldest yet but they're getting there.

LR: Mmhhh, but it's a neighborhood that really—that really cares about each other. It's interesting because on our street we only have 20 houses as I said and we have a real mixture of nationalities which is probably very indicative of Worcester, but we have a man from Ireland, we have a man from Canada—we have two people from Canada, we have a man from Scotland, we have a woman from Romania, and we have a woman from Korea, and our new neighbors—well new as in last five years are from Ghana, so all in just 20 houses.

PJ: Jeez, that's amazing!

LR: Isn't that amazing? But it's funny because no matter who moves in it's just a very welcoming atmosphere and we do, like I said, have a close-knit neighborhood.

JM: So you must be pretty happy there.

LR: We are, we are, we—both my husband and I grew up in Bellingham which is—it was a very small town, it's much larger now, so when we got married in 1982, he had one more year of school—college so we decided to live in Worcester where there was public transportation and we never left. We just got to really love the city and the sense of -- it's a small enough city where you can feel comfortable knowing your neighbors and knowing different neighborhoods and once you move into the city, you realize how small it is because people are very connected to each other. You know that six degrees of separation theory?

JM and PJ: Yeah

LR: It's really like that here, you always know someone here who's either the son or daughter or cousin or niece or nephew, it's really very well connected.

JM: Alright so you said that you went to college at Assumption.

LR: I did.

JM: Did you go anywhere else before you graduated at Assumption or did you always go to Assumption?

LR: No, I got my four-year degree here and after graduating, probably two or three years later, I thought maybe I'd like to be a teacher, so I started going to Worcester State College and... now known as Worcester State University. But anyway I took quite a few courses in secondary education but I—I never finished it.

JM: Okay, so after you... Or after you finished college, what did you see as your options?

LR: Job wise?

JM: Yes

LR: It was very limited back in 1982. We were having an economic crisis much like we are now, I mean different reasons, but it was very difficult for us to get jobs, but I -- it almost sounds quaint now but I got married two months after graduating from here and now when I look back it seems like a crazy decision because I didn't have a job, my husband was still in school, and I really didn't have a place to live. We got married and we lived in a three-decker for a while and he finished his degree and I started working at Raytheon Company so the answer to that is things were very limited and I felt as though depending on who offered me a job, that's the job I was going to take. It was a really -- I didn't have the time, because I got married so early, to figure out really where I may like to work and the economy was so terrible that you were lucky to get a job and that was really done through networking, much like today.

JM: Yeah, well, and I just want to ask you one more question about your college experience: Did you have a mentor or professor that helped you find yourself or supported you and helped you find your way?

LR: An important person here at Assumption for me was Dr. Moynihan, Dr. Kenneth Moynihan.

JM: How do you spell that?

LR: M-O-Y-N-I-H-A-N and he, I think, retired last year, but he was my internship counselor and I was a politics major, and he helped me secure an internship with a state senator, his name is

Gerry D'Amico, and he spent a lot of time with me because coming from a very small town, coming into Worcester was very intimidating for me because it was a big—it was a large city and Assumption was even very intimidating for me because I was coming from a very small high school and even though relatively speaking Assumption is very small, it wasn't to me. So then, to think about going for my internship in Boston without transportation was very intimidating to me. But anyway, he spent a lot of time with me developing my interview skills and also to just help me navigate the transportation issues and also the internship issues and he was important.

JM: So, do you work outside the home now?

LR: I do, I work at Assumption, I do.

JM: Did you have any other jobs? I know you said you worked for Raytheon, but did you have any other jobs besides that?

LR: When my children when young—when they were first-born, I coached basketball—women's basketball at Nichol [College] and then at Blackstone-Millville Regional High School in Blackstone Mass. and I also worked at the Worcester Historical Museum, Fitchburg State College, and Assumption. I began here in 2005.

JM: So you've done a lot of work, you've got a lot of experience then, how did you come to Assumption?

LR: I have friends who work here and they knew I was doing some program and event planning at Worcester Historical Museum and at other volunteer organizations that I belonged to and there was a job here that was particular to event planning so they told me about it and they invited me to come in, so I came in and interviewed and got the job.

PJ: Would you have ever thought, you know, while you were a student here that you would ever come back to Assumption?

LR: Never

PJ: Not even one small thought where maybe it was a possibility?

LR: Never because it never really was a part of my world. I came here as a student and I wasn't the type of student to have even thought about administration. To me the school just ran, I don't know how I thought it did, I never thought it real [chuckles] beyond the faculty and the president and a few other secretaries you would see sitting out the faculty's or your professor's office, I never thought of all the people employed by a college to make it work, so no I never had a thought.

PJ: How did you react when that option finally came to work here, you know, did you ever think, you know, I would have never thought to work here, was that your thought process?

LR: Well when I was working... Like I said I've been living in the city since 1982, when some of the volunteer organizations I was involved with held some of their events here -- and Worcester Historical Museum, we would often get involved with some of the professors here so I got to know the school pretty well so it wasn't shocking to me because the position was open, but it wasn't something I aspired to or even pursued, I never thought to work at a college, no.

JM: Does it mean a lot to work here then?

LR: It does now, yeah it does because when I graduated I guess I came back for reunions every five years but I wasn't involved in that but I guess I'm pleasantly surprised by the way I do feel about the place now, because it's nice when I -- first of all it looks very different then when I attended here, there weren't this many buildings on campus, amenities, and things like that, but it is a good feeling to know that I'm back at my alma mater.

JM: So I know you said you were married, what's work like at home? Do you have any specific duties you have to do, like anything you do at home...

PJ: Basically, you know, now do your daughters live with you when they come back to school?

LR: Yes

PJ: Okay so, what's that division of labor, kind of at home, what's your lifestyle?

LR: Well, there's always been more of a 50/50 type of atmosphere in my home. Like I said my husband and I got married young, we were 22 when we got married and his... My dad was more of a traditionalist in terms of my mother was the one who did the cooking and the laundry and the errands and things like that and my dad would do the yard work, but when we got married, we, maybe we really made a conscious decision to split things because I was working full time as well. My daughters have always been expected to help out and when it was age appropriate to help do laundry and not just do girl things, but boy-type things like go out in the yard and rake the leaves or mow the lawn or shovel...

PJ: So you basically broke free from when you grew up.

LR: Mmhmm

PJ: I mean that's how my house is too.

LR: Yeah we just all, you know when there's something that has to be done we do it, we don't just think "Oh wait that's his job, that's my job or that's a man thing or a woman thing."

PJ: Clearly there are things here or there, maybe some handy work, you know in my house my mom's a better sewer and little jobs like that but okay, there's a division of labor that's interesting.

LR: Yeah

JM: What type of work does your husband do?

LR: He works as a—in marketing for a small start-up firm, it's a computer internet company... But I want to answer that question because it's interesting how I said that I grew up in a traditional family, my mother was the handy one.

PJ: Really?

LR: Really. She would do wallpapering and the painting and like if there was a problem, she was the first one to do it so it was traditional in the sense of the cooking but she was definitely the one to roll up her sleeves and tackle a problem

PJ: So do you think that's how you came to the decision with your husband at the time? You know the 50/50 whatever needs to be done needs to be done...

LR: Yeah maybe, but it was also the time because back in the early '80s women were fighting hard to be thought of as equals in the workplace and also in the home place.

JM: Alright, so how do you think you've balanced your different priorities, responsibilities, duties, and interests in your life?

LR: Well it's always a struggle because I am one who likes to keep busy and I am involved in a lot of things and I have a lot of hobbies but I think I learned well from my grandparents and my parents because they always put family first and they understood the value of friendships and I like to think I'm following their lead on that, so I like to think I work hard, but I like to play hard too and I like to keep people close and I just think it's really important because at the end of the day, that's really what you have in your life: your family and friends. You may forget the job you had or the meeting -- you're never going to regret it if you didn't attend a meeting to go to your daughter's soccer game, probably not.

PJ: So let's transition into how you're involved in the community now that you're back in Worcester, whether it be politically or through voluntary work, what is your goal or who are you to Worcester basically?

LR: Who am I to Worcester? Just an ordinary woman trying to make the world a better place or the city a better place. I got involved in the Worcester Women's History Project in 1999 and I've been involved since and I helped establish this oral history program.

PJ: You did? Okay.

LR: I did so I think it's a very important program for the city and really beyond that because as I mentioned I had gotten interested in genealogy and my family from Southern Italy they didn't—my grandmother—my great-grandmother didn't even know how to write so when she came to

this country all I have is an “X” from her in her signature block with her passport, so when I started to do genealogy, I couldn’t find any letters or diaries or anything like that because she couldn’t even write, but it doesn’t mean that her life wasn’t important, so she would be considered an ordinary woman but she did great things for her neighborhood and for her family and I wanted to make sure we could capture the stories of women and that was really the genesis of my thought. I mean often times I think you heard this, you particularly, when you ask a woman to sit for an interview, you will hear “Oh well I don’t have anything to share... My life is... What have I done?” Because they’re thinking grandiose Hilary Rodham Clinton type of things but every person is important, I mean people touch other people’s lives all the time and it doesn’t mean...

PJ: That’s a good point because otherwise you wouldn’t know anything.

LR: It’s really—it’s gratifying for me being involved because I’ve gone to many of the programs like you’re going to have on December 2nd and it’s really great to hear younger people learn about the lives of older people because sometimes you may assume things or you don’t take the time to ask so you learn things not only about the person but about culture, about Worcester, and about division of labor, education and all the things that you’re asking.

PJ: So in closing, it’s going to be a final statement per sé. Our main purpose for conducting this interview other than our affiliation with Worcester Women’s Oral History Project, was to see how your life played out and how your goals were satisfied or are still being satisfied, I mean I know you stated that, you know, not that you regret, but that you look back on your young marriage. Do you think your life would be any different if you didn’t get married that young, or how would your life have been different beginning with your marriage or not?

LR: Oh gosh, first of all I didn’t say that I regretted it... I didn’t mean to allude to that...

PJ: Right and that’s what I stated...

LR: Right, it’s just when you make... I guess I’ve been reflecting because now my daughter’s 22 and I think “Oh my gosh, would she be married now?” And she says it all the time “Oh gosh,” so of course my life would be different, almost any decision you make your life would be different if you didn’t make it. I’ve always tried to follow my heart and I’m trying to do that more as I get older, it seems easier somehow as you get older. You kind of have to lose some of the baggage of thinking of the way people see you. You’re ready to say “You know what? This is who I am and this is what I’m about and this is what I’m going to do, so... What was the question? [chuckles]

PJ: Well basically, did you feel like, you know, you decided to get married young.

LR: Yeah

PJ: Were your goals affected by that, or were your goals changed, or were your goals made because of that?

LR: Well it's funny because I think because I got married so young, I ended up marrying my best friend. We did a lot of things together, always, so one thing that became very important to me and I think it's because of going to school here and taking classes like Western Civilization—Foundations of Western Civilization and art classes, it opened up a whole new world to me and people around me had already travelled and the furthest I'd been to was Disneyworld. I remember thinking "I want to go travel," so my husband and I when we got married said "Okay so that's the first thing we're going to do," so five years later, we had saved up enough to go on our first European vacation so that was a goal for me and to continue travelling and I've been able to do that and I can't say I did it because I got married or I wouldn't have done it if I didn't get married, but I think I've always been able to set goals and attain them, but they keep changing.

PJ: So you know, obviously our whole Life Stories class deals with the meaning of life, how we attain meaning in life. Basically, have you found yourself already or are you still finding yourself? Do you believe that once you reach your goal you're done or is it that while you're alive you're still attaining meaning?

LR: For me, life wouldn't be worth living if I didn't always have a goal. My goals always evolve and change and once I've achieved something there's always something else to do, and have I found myself? No, I'm still looking, I'm still searching, but what I've found over the years it that I really enjoy art and I've kind of dabbled in different mediums, and that is where I'm finding lately that I get the most enjoyment out of—out of life. I've always been very busy as I mentioned and I go from one volunteer opportunity to another and I try to help with this project and another project and what I'm finding is that I really like the solitude of creating something that maybe -- art is a very subjective thing so sometimes you look at something and say "Wow that was very interesting, that's nice" and other people will look at it and say "Oh well what's that all about?" But I don't care because it feels good to me if I created it and sometimes I'm not even sure how I did it. I look at it and say "I'm not sure why I chose those colors" or that sort of thing so that's a way I've been able to put meaning into my life—I've been finding meaning in my life that I didn't even know that I--I didn't even know I had that potential so that's really interesting for me because if I thought back when I was 20 that I would be finding things at 50, I probably would not.

PJ: So blanket statement, what is the meaning of life to you, other than what you've already told us? In just a broad statement, is that even possible to put in a broad statement or is it on an individual basis?

LR: Well I think it's very individual and as soon as I say whatever I'm going to say I'm going to walk out of here and say "Oh my gosh! I can't believe I didn't say blah blah blah..."

PJ: Right

LR: But for me the meaning of life is truly to do your best to make the world a better place and to really take care of the things you have in your power to take care of and for me that's family,

that's friends, and your relationships. Everything else, I don't think is quite that important so if you could share love and do good deeds, then you've led a pretty successful life.

PJ: Okay that concludes our interview.

LR: Great, thank you.

PJ: Thank you very much, that was very interesting yeah we have a little work to transcribe it but it will be worth it in the end to give to Women in Worcester Oral History Project and our class.

LR: Great.

JM: Thank you so much!

LR: Well thank you very much for asking!