

Interviewee: Jennifer Wood
Interviewer: Sarah Bodzinski and Lauren Reddington
Date: October 24, 2016
Place: Assumption College, Massachusetts
Transcriber: Sarah Bodzinski and Lauren Reddington



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Abstract: Jennifer Wood was born in 1973. Jennifer and her parents have both lived in Worcester their whole lives. Jennifer attended three different colleges, Franklin Pierce, Worcester State, and New Mexico University, but ultimately decided to pursue other interests. Currently, Jennifer owns her own massage business called Amethyst Point. In this interview, Jennifer reflects upon how her massage business has been a financial struggle, but a recent move has made it easier. She speaks of how her staff is like a family and has helped motivate her through tough times. Jennifer touches upon how much her mentor, the former owner of her business, has helped her. Jennifer asserts that she has not been discriminated against as a female business owner. She says that Worcester's greatest problem is being unable to make big change, is active politically, and gives advice to "keep your eye on the prize."

LR: Do we have your permission to record this?

JW: Yes you do.

LR: Before we start off can you just state your name for us?

JW: Sure, Jennifer Wood.

LR: And your occupation?

JW: Small business owner, massage therapist.

LR: What is your full name including both maiden name and married name if applicable?

JW: It's Jennifer Wood.

LR: Okay, When were you born, I mean when were you born sorry.

JW: February [] 1973.

LR: Have you ever been married?

JW: Yes, Divorced.

LR: What was the name of your husband?

JW: Espach E-S-P-A-C-H, though I never changed my name.

LR: Thank you, do you have any children?

JW: No.

LR: What cultures do you identify with?

JW: Not really any. [Laughs]

LR: Tell me about your parents.

JW: Both alive, both born and raised in the Worcester [Massachusetts] area. Still married forty-six years I think? Both retired.

LR: What neighborhood did you live in, in Worcester?

JW: Not far from here actually—the west side.

LR: What was the neighborhood like generally?

JW: Very white. [Laughs]

LR: Do you have any family members that live in the same area?

JW: I currently live—I'm a neighbor of Worcester State University. And my parents still live in the same house that I grew up in and my sister lives on the Worcester/Paxton line.

LR: What challenges do you think this city still faces?

JW: Inability to make big changes.

LR: That's a good one. What are the distinct characteristics that make Worcester the place that it is?

JW: Inability to make big decisions. [Laughs] Well, not wanting to let go of the blue collar background and let in the college students. I mean we have had ten colleges in this city but, we've not ever been that welcoming to them.

LR: What do you think women's experiences in Worcester have been generally?

JW: I really have no idea. Mine's always been good. I can't say as far as gender wise is there a difference of experience in this city? I can't really say. Can't say.

LR: This is a little more simpler. [Laughs] Where did you attend school?

JW: I attended Doherty High School. I attended College of New Hampshire for a short time. I attended Worcester State [University] for a short time and I attended a college in New Mexico for a short time.

SB: What were the names of the colleges?

JW: Franklin Pierce College at the time is now university, Worcester State College it's now university, and New Mexico State University.

LR: Upon finishing formal education, what did you see as your options?

JW: I never finished. [Laughs] Three schools, two degrees, three states and no degree.

SB: What degrees did you pursue?

JW: English at first and then anthropology.

LR: What was your first job?

JW: My first job? Was a bagger at Big D's Super Market when I was whatever age you can get a job. Fifteen?

LR: Yeah I think it's fifteen, yeah. Okay, what other jobs have you had and what do you do now?

JW: I have, oh gosh, I've done hotel front desk, assistant manager in retail, I have cleaned houses, I have ,oh my god, I was a cashier at a supermarket, I worked for the Girl Scouts in the office, I [laughs] what else, what else. There is probably other things I'm just forgetting. I worked on campus at New Mexico State University in the Alumni Office begging for money from alumni and now I am a massage therapist and business owner.

LR: How did you come to be a massage therapist?

JW: I was working in retail and I hated it, and I wanted to do something else, but no one would hire me to do anything else because I had been doing retail for so long. And I realized I needed another skill and I had been interested in massage off and on for a while. So I went to a massage

school, and that's all she wrote. My last day of school was my last day of my job I was done immediately.

LR: What are the pros and cons of the path you have chosen?

JW: It's financially a struggle. It's been a real—it's been a big struggle over twelve and a half years. Luckily I don't have any children otherwise I would not have been able to take the path that I took. I made massage my full time job right out of the box even though—or out of the gate—I should say, even though I had no clients, no experience I just made myself available as many hours as possible and made it my full time job. But I had only myself to support. So when I hire people who are right out of school I make sure I explain to them what my path was. What I did. And if you cannot do it that way, if you have children, if you have things—if you need money, you need to have another job while you're building a practice. Don't do what I did. It's hard, it was very hard.

LR: Well you kind of have already answered this question but how do you feel about the choices you made in your life and do you have any regrets?

JW: For a while I regretted buying the business. But we have made a change in the last year that's made me realize that I was just angry—not angry just disappointed in the circumstances, but we have made a change and I am much happier with it and I can't imagine me going back. I couldn't imagine going back and working for someone.

SB: What kind of change did you make?

JW: We moved.

SB: You moved? Where did you move to?

JW: We moved from where we had been for twenty-seven years or twenty-six years to Pleasant Street near the Corner Grille. You might be familiar with it. Most students are. We are almost across the street from the Corner Grille.

SB: Better location.

JW: Yes.

SB: Do you consider yourself active politically?

JW: Yes.

SB: How are you active politically?

JW: Well I guess maybe not active, but I have supported candidates actively, locally. I'm more informed and interested I guess.

SB: Have you been involved in volunteer or community work?

JW: Not in a long, long time. So, no not, definitely not enough I wish that I had time for it.

SB: Yeah, what role has religion played in your life?

JW: None.

SB: Okay, how have health issues impacted your life or those in your family?

JW: I have a pretty healthy family, luckily. So, not really it really hasn't.

SB: Okay, what are your experiences in accessing affordable quality health care? Especially as a business owner.

JW: Yes, all of the people that work for me are independent contractors so I don't have to get into benefits with them and that kind of thing. They're not my employees, but as far as my own health care, the health care system that we got in the last few years has been extremely helpful to me. I make very little money and would not be able to afford health care if it wasn't for the changes that were made. So I think that I am extremely lucky on that. I think that the system—like any system needs some work, and I don't take advantage—that I have health insurance thankfully due to the government that we have.

SB: Who's health are you responsible for besides your own?

JW: Just mine... and my dog, my cat. [Laughs]

SB: Absolutely. So nearing the end, how do you get through tough times and what kind of thoughts keep you going?

JW: My friends and family, huge support. The staff that I have even though they don't work for me, we're a family. There's twelve of us. We are a family, we help each other a lot. But my mom has come to help me since she's retired and since we've moved she's come to help me at work answering the phone so that I can take more clients to build our business. My family is extremely supportive and always there for me. I have a best friend of twenty five years that doesn't live close—I mean an hour away, but extremely helpful when I am going through tough times. I have a boyfriend that is- [phone rings] Sorry.

SB: That's okay.

JW: -who's great also. He's very supportive. And actually in the past few years going through some tough personal stuff, my ex-husband and I are still very good friends. So he is also there for me as well. Using people [laughs]—well not using them you know, deferring to the help of others.

SB: Alright, how do you define success in your life? Has this definition changed over time?

JW: Yes, it has definitely changed. Success I thought was going to be living financially a lot more comfortable and I'm not there yet, but where I was gosh two, no three years ago, I feel like I have succeeded. I am much better off mentally, emotionally, and financially, but not what I thought success would be. But the little steps are good too so.

SB: Based on your life experience, what advice would you give to women of today and future generations?

JW: [Pause] Well, this interview comes at quite an interesting time, doesn't it? With where we are as women, what's being said about us.

SB: Yeah, absolutely.

JW: I would—just keep your eyes on the prize. Do what you feel is right. Do what you want to do. Don't let anybody, man or another woman, tell you you can't. I mean this is advice that I would—my best friend has a three year old. She's autistic. And this is advice that I would give her. Be who you want to be and do what you want to do. There's no reason why you can't. There's just no reason that you can't. So, that would be the advice. There's no excuses, I mean you'd be your only excuse. You're the only one who should keep you back. If that's what's going to keep you back let that be it. Let it be you, but don't let someone else—not that you should keep yourself back [laughs].

SB: [Laughs] Good advice. Now that we are working to tell a fuller story of the history of women that has been recorded in the past, what should we be sure to include?

JW: Hmm... say that again. [Laughs]

SB: I'm not really understanding it either. Now that we are working to tell a fuller story of the history of women that has been recorded in the past, what should we be sure to include? I think maybe more questions to include?

JW: Hmm...

SB: If you can think of any.

JW: [Pause] Are there any women that have helped you along the way?

SB: How would you answer that question?

JW: The former owner of my business was a mentor to me for five years leading up to me buying the business. She started a massage business in 1988 which was almost unheard of at least around here. I mean maybe not out in California or just some other places where the thinking was a little more forward. But I mean in Worcester to start a massage business in 1988 took a lot of guts. And she didn't take no for an answer from landlords where she was looking to open the business. She didn't take no, she found someone who would. A guy who had a building who did finally say, "Yeah, I get what you're trying to do." And put up with a lot of creeps who called at first. You know those first few years a lot of weirdos and still stuck with it and turned it into a profitable business.

SB: Why did she end up selling that business to you?

JW: She wanted to retire. Yeah. She's now in her seventies. She wanted to continue doing massage, but did not want to continue owning it. It had become too much for her so we basically switched jobs. She worked for me [laughs] as a massage therapist and I did the other stuff and it was a year ago this past August that she fully retired. She doesn't work with us at all.

SB: And last question is there anyone else that you suggest that we should talk to?

JW: Oh gosh... [Pause] Probably? [Laughs] I have to think about it. I'm sure there is. I am sure there is. But I can't think of anybody right at this moment off the top of my head so sorry.

SB: Well if you think of anybody you could always email us and we can pass the information along.

JW: Okay, great, great.

LR: Yeah, that's kind of a wrap. If there's anything else that you would like to add or tell us or...

JW: No? I don't know. [Laughs] Well. I have not had any—I can say that I have not had any discrimination against me as a woman business owner. In fact, I wonder sometimes if I was a man owning the business that I own, if people would find that weird and sort of discriminate, not discriminate, but find it odd.

LR&SB: Yeah.

JW: And where we did recently move I had to find a new place to move to. We had had the same landlord for twenty six years. So I didn't have to actively try to find a place that would accept what we do. It still can be thought of as, you know, some people some landlords just don't

want to get near that. But I was lucky to find a woman who owns the home that we now use. We are in a first floor apartment, she lives upstairs and she absolutely thought it was great and had heard of our business, but I wonder if I had been a guy with this business if she would have...

LR&SB: Yeah

JW: ...been strange and been like, "No thank you." [Laughs]. So I think being a woman in the business I'm in has probably helped me.

SB: Okay. That's a good point to add.

JW: Yeah, so.

LR: Alright, well thank you so much for coming here.

JW: You're welcome.

SB: Thank you very much.

JW: That's it?

LR: That's it.

JW: Alright that was easy!

LR: Easy, very easy.