

Voices of the ARCHIVE - Massasoit Community College Oral History Project

Ellen Lavarney
Oral History Memoir

Interviewed in person by Jennifer Rudolph

July 1, 2014
Health Services Office – Massasoit Community College – Brockton

RUDOLPH: This is Jennifer Rudolph, Coordinator of Libraries at Massasoit Community College. Today is Tuesday, July 1, 2014, and I am interviewing for the first time Ellen Lavarney, Coordinator of Health Services at Massasoit. The interview is taking place in the Health Services Office at the Brockton campus of Massasoit Community College. This interview is being conducted by the Massasoit Community College library and is part of the Oral History Project for the 50th anniversary of the college. First, Ellen, I wanted to thank you very much for taking part in our project—

LAVARNWAY: Thank you.

RUDOLPH: —for letting me interview you here today. And we'll start off with some things about the early part of your life. I wonder if you would tell me a little bit about yourself, where you grew up and went to school.

LAVARNWAY: I grew up in Massena, New York, a small town on the Canadian border. I look back on it with great fondness. It was typical small-town living. I was pretty lucky to be born into a happy family, two parents, all my grandparents, a lot of cousins, so I was a very content child. It was a very safe place; we could be out at night; we could be alone walking to our friends' house and we never were afraid or never had untoward happen. I'm still friends with people I grew up with. And one of my dearest friends from home happens to live in Brockton, so we stay in touch with whatever news we hear. I really have only happy memories. Riding bikes, hanging out, going to dances—I always loved to dance; that was the highlight of my week. I think it sounds kind of naïve, but that's how it was. I fit in. And I think children who feel they fit in probably do have happier memories than others. My grandfather was—a lot of people knew my family—my grandfather was an assemblyman. That didn't really mean that much to me as a kid, but because of that they'd say, Oh, that's so and so. You know who she is; she's Alan's little granddaughter. That kind of thing. So, I was always very comfortable there

and happy in school and my parents were happy together so it was idyllic in many ways and a very happy childhood.

RUDOLPH: I've heard you talk about Massena before. Was it a small community? Was it what we call today a bedroom community? Was it a farming community?

LAVARNWAY: It wasn't a bedroom community because there's no big town up there. The next town was in Canada, so the Saint Lawrence River divided my hometown with Cornwall, Ontario. We were probably the biggest town around from little tiny communities and a lot of farms; a lot of dairy farming up there. Alcoa Aluminum was in Massena and that was the big industry. My grandfather had come from England and came to help with the construction, and that's how that side of the family got there. The rest of my family were old Yankees and had been here since 1620 and emigrated from Massachusetts and Connecticut and came at all different times. But, it was probably about twelve or thirteen thousand people growing up, and then the Saint Lawrence seaway was built when I was in junior high, and they probably added another ten thousand people because of that. So today it's probably twenty thousand people. But the industry is dying out and kind of a dying town now; it's too bad.

[03:49.5]

RUDOLPH: What was the industry there?

LAVARNWAY: Aluminum.

RUDOLPH: Aluminum.

LAVARNWAY: Yeah.

RUDOLPH: Oh, Alcoa.

LAVARNWAY: Alcoa and then Reynolds Aluminum came in so they had two big plants.

RUDOLPH: Interesting. Now what about your college background? Where did you go to school?

LAVARNWAY: I went to SUNY Plattsburgh, which was about ninety miles from my home town. I was in the school nurse teacher program. We were certified nurses and teachers. I had to go to two summer sessions when I was in college, ten credits each summer so we could be certified to teach. My sophomore and junior years were spent in New York City. And you can

imagine how eye-opening that was for a girl from a small town. I loved it. We took not only our nursing courses but we had an art appreciation course that we took, and the teacher took us to all the museums and got us acquainted with the cultural life. We went to plays and I went to see the Beatles, their first concert when they came over fifty years ago. That was a big night. That was really one of the funnest nights of my whole life. I emailed the woman that I went to the concert with the day of the fiftieth anniversary of that concert. So New York really opened my eyes a lot and it was just a lot of fun. We *[clears throat]* came back to campus for my senior year. I did grow up quite a bit. My eyes were open to a lot of things. I heard little children swearing for the first time when I was in New York. I was like, Oh, you're not supposed to talk like that. So I was real naïve. And then I did graduate work at Bridgewater State and at SUNY Plattsburgh as well.

[0:05:29.0]

RUDOLPH: Before you came to Massasoit, did you hold any other positions?

LAVARNWAY: Yes, I taught nursing. For four years. I enjoyed it a lot. I think it improved my skills, and I've always enjoyed the educational process and it was fun. I really enjoyed it; it was a hospital in Plattsburgh.

RUDOLPH: So it was probably an easy transition over since you liked education so much to come to a college?

LAVARNWAY: Yeah. When we moved to Massachusetts, my husband took a job down here, and the lady across the street said, "Oh, there's a job over at Massasoit." Well, I'd never heard of Massasoit; we had just moved here. So I applied for the job and got it. But it's the only position I've ever had here, so I've been here forty years.

RUDOLPH: Now, who hired you? Who was the person who—

LAVARNWAY: Roy Simmons was the Dean of Students at the time. And on my selection committee were Henry Camillo, who worked in the library, and a couple of faculty people, whom I just don't remember anymore.

RUDOLPH: What year was that?

LAVARNWAY: Nineteen seventy-four.

RUDOLPH: Nineteen seventy-four. Had there been a nursing or health services department before?

LAVARNWAY: There was [*clears throat*] a woman who—I was young, I was still in my twenties—and the woman who had been here was older. And I think she had been trying to promote having a non-smoking campus as early as that, and I was a little more relaxed than that in those days. So it was—

RUDOLPH: I wonder if that would have flown in those days.

LAVARNWAY: No, it wouldn't. It didn't. It took quite a while. We're still not smoke free.

RUDOLPH: No. We've come a long way.

LAVARNWAY: I used to sit at my desk and smoke. Maureen Thayer and I took breaks together to have cigarettes. I would smoke with the students in my office. Times were very different.

[0:07:40.5]

RUDOLPH: So you came to the college on a recommendation who knew about the opening. How many years have you been here?

LAVARNWAY: Forty years, this year, retiring.

RUDOLPH: Congratulations. [*talking at same time*]

LAVARNWAY: Thank you.

RUDOLPH: Congratulations, so a long time. What was the community like when you first came?

LAVARNWAY: The college was small. Our student population was small.

RUDOLPH: But you were in Brockton; it was in Brockton.

LAVARNWAY: We were in Brockton. We were here. We had moved here. I had never been to any of the satellite campuses that were previous to that, West Bridgewater [*clears throat*] and some of the other places. No, this was the campus; soon after I came, they started Phase Two, so the administration building got built and the field house and the fine arts building and the liberal arts building and a couple of the classroom buildings, so when I came, there was the Business

Building, Science Building, the T Building—which was then the Engineering Building, and our building.

RUDOLPH: The Student Center Building.

LAVARNWAY: The Student Center Building, where all the administrators were as well. So we all saw each other every day.

RUDOLPH: Mm-hm. Other people that I have interviewed have talked about the camaraderie of that time period. How it was a campus of young people and that things were different than they are now in that way. Did you find it that way then, too?

[0:09:10.0]

LAVARNWAY: Yes, because I was one of the young ones at the time, I didn't think that much about it and I look back on it now; we were young and it was the seventies, so we were reflective of the social changes that were happening. Some of them were good; some not so good. But we were all growing up, and there were some older faculty here. The Dean of Continuing Education was Phil Pergola, and he was not even thirty years old yet, if you could imagine. Carl Kowalski was an assistant dean, and he was about the same age. So there were a lot of young administrators and faculty and teachers and staff people and counselors and we used to have a lot of parties. Students had beer blasts in the cafeteria. I think the drinking age had to have been 18 then. Men ran the college. It was a very white college, run by men. Women were hired, which they entered the work force but were not paid at the same as men were paid. As the seventies progressed into the eighties, that began to change. Peg Norris was hired to run the women's center and I really learned a lot then about women's issues and things that were going on, and there was a lot of divorce happening then. People, women, were feeling the freedom of getting out of relationships that were difficult and so there were support groups for them and programs for single parents and—

RUDOLPH: For the students who were here?

LAVARNWAY: Yeah, the students who were here. But, you know, the whole social trends of the seventies and early eighties obviously were reflected in our students but our staff as well. We didn't know everybody.

RUDOLPH: You didn't know everybody?

LAVARNWAY: We pretty much did. I was in the classroom buildings a lot. I knew—I wouldn't say all the part-timers, obviously, but I think I knew the vast majority of people who worked here. But again, the president was at the other end of the hall, so we saw everybody.
[talking at same time]

RUDOLPH: Everybody came through here, pretty much. What were the students like when you came to the college? You had mentioned that a lot of students were single parents, had started to become single parents at that time, these were just the—

LAVARNWAY: Yeah, but typically, we were a suburban community college. Students were mainly white, middle class, coming here to get started on their education. Some were in intermural programs. The LATCH program was starting—began to get going for students who were not traditional college students who needed extra help. The Veterans Center. So there were things that were beginning to change. The students might have been better academically prepared because they didn't have the same social problems and issues that are happening now. They just weren't faced with the same problems. But I think young adults are similar in so many ways. Like any age group is similar, they brought the same things, but our students didn't have the same problems with the economy. Their parents weren't drug addicts then. We have a lot of students with a lot of problems now that come from the family. Parents' don't have jobs and students struggling to get jobs. But the economy wasn't such an issue then. I don't think students worked as much as they do now.

RUDOLPH: Mm-hm. And perhaps families didn't either, maybe.

LAVARNWAY: Probably.

RUDOLPH: You perhaps still had some one-paycheck families. The mother stayed home.
[talking at the same time]

LAVARNWAY: Yeah. Oh I think a lot of them, yeah.

RUDOLPH: What do you think brought students to Massasoit at that time period?

[13.17.5]

LAVARNWAY: Well, I think probably the same reason that brings them now. They want a chance at a better life. We're certainly reasonably priced in getting a college education or getting started before they transfer. We're a safe place for a lot of people. They can view

themselves differently and get a fresh start here. We have young kids right out of high school coming in who never saw themselves as being college students and are very successful here. I think a lot of kids come we find out because they haven't really made any plans, and at the last minute they can come here. Oh, summer's over—what am I going to do? *[JR laughs]* And we're a good place for them.

RUDOLPH: You mentioned a couple of people: Peg Norris, Bill Pergola, Carl Kowalski. Who were some of your other colleagues here?

LAVARNWAY: Well, Dr. Musselman was the president when I came. Phil Sheppard who is still here was assistant to the president then. Gerry Garvin and Trudy Collins were friends of mine; they were counselors. Gerry Reese started the day I started and he became the Director of Admissions. Jack Otis was my boss, who was Assistant Dean of Students. Roy Simmons was the Dean of Students. Maureen Thayer and Elaine Stewart and Chris Dymont, who were counselors went onto different things at the college, but they came in and we were good friends. And Elaine Stewart, oddly enough, was from northern New York and had gone to school near my hometown, so we have a lot in common. Bruce Langlan was Athletic Director and had been for years. Peg Donovan became the Dean of Students after Dean Simmons left, and we've remained friends ever since. She's been retired for many years now, and we still stay in touch. I still see her. I've really made such wonderful friends here.

[15:18.5]

RUDOLPH: It's a good group of people; still is. It's a good group of people. What part do you feel the college plays in the community of Brockton and the surrounding towns?

LAVARNWAY: Well I think Brockton helps, for one thing, it helps the local economy. So the better our students are educated, the more money they make and the more money in taxes they pay, and they help in the economy. I also think they help because they have opportunities and they can see more opportunities and spread that. They can be good ambassadors for our college. We have a senior citizen group that comes in from the community. We have a senior choir and orchestra, so a lot of people come in. We have community service courses. We have work force development. We help educate the local work crew. And we have people coming in to walk. We have Cardinal Spellman students coming in to use the track. So I think the community does know we're here and the theater brings in a lot of people.

RUDOLPH: What do you see as some of Massasoit's biggest accomplishments in the time you've been here?

[0:16:32]

LAVARNWAY: Well, I thought? a lot about that. I think our work force, the growth we see in that, we have new programs. We became a Green institution. We recycle, we garden, we promote recycling. We've reduced our paper use. We have a new science building coming up, promoting the environment. But I think the most important thing is our students. We affect their lives. We give them opportunity. Their lives are improved because of us, and those of us who see students can see that happening. We affect a lot of lives, so whatever student comes in, we affect not just their life but the life of the people in their family.

RUDOLPH: Mm-hm. Around them.

LAVARNWAY: Yeah.

RUDOLPH: That's true. What do you see as some of the college's biggest disappointments?

[0:17:28]

LAVARNWAY: Well, we've never had a woman president.

RUDOLPH: Ahh! Right.

LAVARNWAY: We almost did one time.

RUDOLPH: Did we?

LAVARNWAY: Yeah. Just like the country, we haven't had a woman president. I think we were really late getting into technology [*clears throat*]. I think we required a lot of money and a lot of changes in our own work force and that didn't happen for a long time. A faculty member who knew a little about computers was going to head up and, you know, ill-prepared, administrators who didn't really know where to even start, I think in the beginning. But we were kind of late coming to the fair in technology. And of course, not now. We very actively have a large number of online courses and everybody has a computer, and we're all computer literate now to varying degrees, but I think that was a big change that we needed to do. Our satellite campuses. I think Canton was slow to take off. But Middleborough is taking off and that's

really good, so, see a lot of growth happening and new things. But, yeah, I do think technology was—

RUDOLPH: a big one.

LAVARNWAY: Yeah.

RUDOLPH: What are the most difficult problems that you faced at the college and what were the outcomes?

[0:18:58.6]

LAVARNWAY: Well, I always like to have a say, and I like somebody to listen to me, so sometimes I have trouble getting heard. And as a young woman, I think that was the case as well. But I've been lucky mostly to have very supportive bosses. But the biggest problem that I had is that we were trying to promote health by having condoms on campus. AIDS was everywhere; it was rampant. Gays were suffering, and we really needed to promote sexual health, and it was falling on deaf ears. So, I really pushed hard, but I didn't have a lot of success until the Public Health Department gave us condoms for free and the fight was over.

RUDOLPH: So you think it was that they weren't going to be free?

LAVARNWAY: Well, they didn't want us spending state money on condoms; that was one reason. They didn't want condom machines in the men's rooms because what if a member of the Board of Trustees went in and saw them. There were a million reasons why but basically because we had conservative, white men as administrators who couldn't understand the social changes, I think. It was hard. And it's hard for anybody to change from the way you were raised and what values you think are important. But AIDS was the biggest change that's happened in health in modern times, and it certainly impacted me, my job. It impacted Massasoit. We had a young student come to speak to the student body who had full-blown AIDS at the time and had Kaposi's sarcoma, and he had pneumonia, and he was sick as a dog, the poor kid. And he died soon after, and I had said to my husband I was really worried about having a student speak because I thought it was going to be a problem, and that was back in the Ryan White days, and kids were—

RUDOLPH: So this was kind of late. This was in the nineties, probably? Late eighties?

LAVARNWAY: In the eighties. And one of the Massasoit students, the first one said, “You got what you deserve.” And I thought, Oh my worst nightmares have come true. And then a faculty member stood up and said, “Well I’m glad our student said that because it’s out in the open now. Let’s talk about it.” So this young man answered all these questions and there was a lot of fear. We had [*clears throat*] the women here were nervous having their children in daycare. What if somebody had AIDS? What was going to happen to them? Our athletes were worried: What if somebody had AIDS and they were playing sports? And of course, there was the whole gay issue that went along with it then because gays were the first group of people that were exhibiting AIDS. So that was really a hard time. But it worked out.

RUDOLPH: It worked out.

LAVARNWAY: Yeah.

RUDOLPH: I saw you still have condoms in your office.

LAVARNWAY: And we see a lot of people coming in for condoms. And I think the other thing that went along with that was that we had to learn how to support the gay and transgender lesbian community and Gay-Straight Alliance started at school at that time. And we did the AIDS Walk. I think we’ve learned a lot.

[0:22:31.7]

RUDOLPH: Then that has been a big change? [*talking at same time*] A big change. And do you think Massasoit has handled that quite well over the past, say, decade at least?

LAVARNWAY: Yeah. Well I think now social statements are much less, you know, it’s totally different and for young people today, I don’t think it would be easy for them to understand what it was like—

RUDOLPH: Back then. It is long ago, isn’t it. Some of them are students who weren’t even born yet.

LAVARNWAY: No, they weren’t born yet. And our administrators were, you know, middle aged men who were just were very disapproving and that’s the way they were raised, and so it was a hard fight. We showed movies in classes. I can remember taking condoms to a classroom only if there were girls in there, not a mixed crowd, and we had a lot of AIDS education films we would run. I took one home to show my own family at Thanksgiving one year. My parents

were interested. They just—they had no idea. I think it was illuminating for them as well. But our society has changed a lot culturally. I mean it really had to. AIDS was very difficult.

RUDOLPH: I'm going to move on to the question. Do you have anything else that perhaps I didn't mention here about that first group of questions that you'd like to talk about?

[0:24:09.4]

LAVARNWAY: No, I think you had mentioned one of the other things about comments I want to make, and I'm finding the college is in a state of great flux and change right now, and we're kind of like a ship that's lost its mooring a little bit. My compatriots are mostly retired, and new people are coming in with very little knowledge of the history of the college or very little interest in that. I think once they get their feet wet and they feel the commitment to the institution more that hopefully that will change, but yeah, I think we're in a time of great change and I just have faith that obviously things will work out, but it's hard to watch sometimes.

RUDOLPH: Quite a large group of retirees are those who have been here since the beginning or close to the beginning.

LAVARNWAY: Yeah.

RUDOLPH: And you were here near the beginning.

LAVARNWAY: Near the beginning and when I started, a lot of the people who were older than I, they're gone; they're dead. We see their names in the paper and it's like so much of the history is going.

RUDOLPH: Well, hopefully, the project that we're working on right now will help those new faculty members, new staff members, see the history of the college as you have seen it. And maybe that will make it a little bit easier.

[0:25:43.6]

LAVARNWAY: Yeah, we don't have big Christmas parties any more. And we don't have a lot of the social things that we used to do that families would even be involved in.

RUDOLPH: When did you see that change? Is that recent or is that something that's gone with certain administrations? [*talking at same time*]

LAVARNWAY: It's got to be fifteen years or so, yeah, I think administrative changes and I mean some people, some of our presidents have been very people-oriented—Gerry Burke, for example, knew everybody, and we were very active socially in those days. And other people just aren't—it's not their personality, it's not their interest. Some staff will lose interest, but, yeah, it's different. But everything changes, Jennifer.

RUDOLPH: It changes. Yes, it does. I'm going to ask you some questions now that have to do with your position here, and I'm excited about these questions. Hope you are too. Being a college nurse seems quite a bit different from being, say, a school nurse in K through twelve. Can you tell me what a typical day in college nursing might include?

[26:49.5]

LAVARNWAY: Well, I think the biggest difference before we kind of start on that when I talk to women who do school nursing versus college nursing, it's the amount of paperwork they have to do because they're working with children who are minors. I work with young adults who are not minors, so that takes a whole lot of responsibility off the board for me because they're allowed to speak for themselves. But every day is different, and that's why I like my job. We never know who's going to walk in the door. Or what they have, what they need, what, anything. We just don't know. I had a staff member come in a couple of weeks ago, and I thought, This man is so sick. So, you look at him and say, Now I'm dealing with somebody who really needs—I need impress upon they really need a lot of medical care. But sometimes kids come in just for aspirin or condoms. We have over-the-counter things. We always have sick visits. People coming with colds, they want aspirin or they want information. A lot of them are doing speeches or they just need to know information. We have lots of brochures, so we do a lot of that. I have meetings, we may have a sick call in another building on campus. Every day is different.

RUDOLPH: It can be different. I've sometimes heard the ambulance. Are you involved when the ambulance comes to campus?

LAVARNWAY: Yes. But not as much as I used to be because now campus police are first responders and they have taken some of that responsibility. We work well with them, yeah.

RUDOLPH: Being right around the corner from each other.

LAVARNWAY: Being right around the corner, yeah.

RUDOLPH: Why do students most often come to you?

[0:28:38.1]

LAVARNWAY: They need help. They're sick and they need information or they need somebody to take care of them. They come for information. We have over-the-counter meds, we have condoms. We do lots of health education. So students coming in for something, we start to talk to them, and the conversation can go into other things, but they just need some help.

RUDOLPH: Now students who come here need to have insurance in order to be a student.

LAVARNWAY: Full-time students.

RUDOLPH: Full time. So do you have students who don't have insurance and might use you as their medical care person?

LAVARNWAY: Yes. Yes. Less so now. I know Mitt Romney tried to shed himself of his label being the healthcare program, but once that happened, more and more of our students had insurance. Yeah, we see students with no insurance. And they don't have any money for health care. And it's such a huge problem. So we are a first stop or only stop for some of our students. I think we save a lot of money for—we tell people, Don't go to the Emergency Room; this is not an emergency. You have a cold. Or, You need to go here; this is where you go for this; you don't go to the Emergency Room. I think we're a good resource for students.

RUDOLPH: Yeah, yeah, I'm sure we are. Now your office is involved in a lot of student outreach. You have posters in your area, I see, new posters all the time, depending on the time of year. [*talking at same time*]

LAVARNWAY: We just had one stolen.

RUDOLPH: They inform the campus of health issues. Your regular presence in the cafeteria promotes wellness, and your office's cooperation with the Red Cross is something that I've seen as well. So, can you talk about these and other issues that are specifically related to college students and how students accept your office promotions?

LAVARNWAY: Our goal is for the promotion of health and adopting healthy habits and a healthy lifestyle. We need students to be healthy if they're going to be successful in college. So

that is our goal. So we can't treat every student here, and we can reach them more easily with posters and brochures and information. We're in the cafeteria almost on a weekly basis doing something, and students love it when you do something. Not just information, but if you do sun screening. We check their skin for skin cancer. We have agencies come in and an agency will come in and do a glucose and cholesterol screening. Or they'll come in, will do blood pressures. If you do something, students love it. It's always free. Students don't know much about nutrition. They don't know much about their sexual health. They don't know much about sleep and their overall health, so we really try to teach them a lot about staying healthy, getting healthy, helping their families get healthy. They're always interested in nutrition.

RUDOLPH: I find that fascinating. I think I learned a lot from my parents about good health, but I'm wondering if today with medical being so expensive, even with insurance, that maybe our students didn't have the opportunities that some of us had in the old days when our parents either had insurance because everybody did. Or I wasn't from a family living in the inner city whose parents didn't have a job, so do you think that is what the reason is?

LAVARNWAY: Well, economics certainly plays in education a huge part of that. There's so much information out now about medicine. When we grew up, people didn't know the same things we know now. Things are changing now. I'm just reading an article about butter and meat are good for you again. [*JR laughs*] Telling me not to overdo it, but all this fake food people are eating just is what's killing us. So everything does change, but we're always surprised how little they know about sex. Now, they were actively participating, but they don't know much about it.

RUDOLPH: And we're talking not about teens for the most part. We're talking about—

LAVARNWAY: We're talking about young adults, so eighteen to twenty-four or five. So we do a lot of education. Have you had the talk yet? And some of the kids will laugh and say, We've already had the talk. So we do a lot of education.

RUDOLPH: But they are quite open with you?

LAVARNWAY: Yes. Well, yeah. Not everybody, but yeah.

RUDOLPH: Drugs, both legal and illegal are a big part of young people's lives today. Do college nurses play a role in helping students with this issue? What is our campus policy on that?

LAVARNWAY: Well, we don't see a lot of students here because of alcohol and drug problems. They have them. They have a lot of alcohol and drug problems, but that's not why they come and see us. So we do try to do some promotion with our posters and bulletin boards and things. We have an Alcohol Awareness day. Some students will come in and if they need help, we get them to the Advisement and Counseling Center and get referrals made for them. They might come in stoned, but that's not why they're here. They don't come in looking for help for that.

RUDOLPH: They come in for another reason and you notice it.

LAVARNWAY: Yeah.

RUDOLPH: Massasoit's athletic department offers teen participation in several sports. What role does the nursing office play in this?

[0:34:31.1]

LAVARNWAY: Not as much as we used to. We used to be very actively involved in the athletic department because we did all the preliminary physicals for the varsity athletes. The rules have changed. The NJCAA says the students cannot try out for a sport anymore until they provide proof they've had a physical exam. So we're totally bypassed for that now. So we see students who are athletes now in normal ways: first aid or if they're sick or if need information about insurance. But, we don't see the athletes the way we used to. We're much more involved with the Advisement and Counseling Center now than we are with the Athletic Department.

RUDOLPH: Interesting. Do you take part in providing any kind of services at games?

LAVARNWAY: No. They have a trainer there. They have to hire somebody to come. No. And the games are always held when school's not in session, so it's nights and weekends. No, no. Students will come here with counseling issues because they don't know where else to go. We have a school nurse, and they can start here, so we do a lot of referrals to the counseling center.

RUDOLPH: Now, I do recall as well that you used to provide services for not just students but also for faculty and staff in the way of giving flu shots, things like that.

LAVARNWAY: We do. We try to promote the health center as a student health center because oftentimes people would take advantage. We're here for staff if they want to come in to get an aspirin to get through the day or if they need some first aid, that kind of thing, or information. But we have seen people come in and want to take a medication supply for their household or they want to bring their children in to see me, and so we try to discourage that and obviously we see people off the street, so it's not like we're not willing to see everybody, but it really is a student health center. That's how we really try to promote it. But we're here for everybody.

RUDOLPH: Okay. Tell us about the nursing staff on both the Canton and Brockton campuses. I know that there is a nurse over on the Canton campus as well. There is not one down in Middleborough as far as I know. Do you foresee any staffing changes in the future? How would you envision the Health Services Department's future?

LAVARNWAY: Well, we're all Registered Nurses. Kate and I both have our bachelors' degrees. We've both done some graduate work. Maryanne is a graduate of Massasoit Community College Nursing Program. She and I have worked together for close to thirty years, I think. She used to work at night, and now she's on days. Because I'm retiring, I'd given it a lot of thought what's going to happen to Health Services, and I would kind of lie in bed at night and plot out the future and I realized it isn't up to me. I have no say what happens. When I'm gone, I'm gone. I can make recommendations and I can hope what happens. Only ten community colleges now have health centers. I certainly hope that we continue having health services here at Massasoit because I know we provide an invaluable service to students and staff. We know we do good work and we see the results of the work we do often. So I hope that that's seen, but I had to say, "Ellen, accept the fact. It is not up to you." [JR laughs].

RUDOLPH: How is the office over at—the Health Services Office in Canto different from this one?

[0:38:33.4]

LAVARNWAY: Well, they have obviously fewer students, and Kate works part time. So she's on a ten-month contract and she works only until 2:30.

RUDOLPH: Does she tend to have the same issues over there as you have here?

LAVARNWAY: Pretty much. Yeah.

RUDOLPH: And she's not planning on retiring any time soon is she?

LAVARNWAY: I can't speak to that. I don't know.

RUDOLPH: One often thinks nurses stay in their offices and do health-related things. You, however, do advising. You have co-taught Freshman Experience classes, and you serve on campus committees. How do you see this as part of your role at Massasoit?

LAVARNWAY: Well, I see myself as an active member of the college community. I see myself as an educator. I am, in fact, a certified teacher. And contractually, I have to be involved in community work and doing community service on campus. I've always liked doing other things. I like to see students in a way different from them coming to me because they need me. I always enjoyed Freshman Experience classes because we saw students in a whole different way, and they saw me in a different way. I meet new people, I hear new ideas. They hear mine. I get to stay informed on campus issues. I always liked it. Student Services people bring a different point of view to the table on committee work, and we hear different points of view as well. I think it's very helpful.

RUDOLPH: To explain to the people who are listening, Student Services is one arm of the college and then the faculty and instruction is the other arm.

LAVARNWAY: When I started teaching what we called Freshman Seminar then, it was set up so that a staff person, a counselor, me, some other staff person on campus, and a faculty member would co-teach these classes. So we learned a lot from each other. I taught with different people on a yearly basis—*[talking at same time]*

RUDOLPH: And who did you teach with?

LAVARNWAY: Well, I taught with Laura Yellen once or twice and Linda Thompson, who was a business teacher, and I taught with Mary Leo, who was a part-time teacher from Canton. So I was able to meet people who taught in different areas, had different disciplines, and different personalities in the classroom and used different styles of teaching, and I used to a lot of the stress management kinds of parts of it, time management, and it was fun. I've always liked doing other things.

RUDOLPH: They're talking of revamping the College Experience, which is a spin-off of Freshman Experience, and so I'm wondering if those kinds of co-teaching opportunities will ever appear again.

LAVARNWAY: I'd be surprised, but it would be great. The program was a Title 3 grant that was established to keep students in the liberal arts and the business programs to help them adopt some career plan because students were leaving and they didn't know what they wanted to do. And both of those programs, and that's really how we got it going.

RUDOLPH: But even in Freshman Experience, not all of the students took the courses, did they? Or did they? It wasn't a required course.

LAVARNWAY: No, it wasn't required. We had a student who worked at summer orientations to encourage other students to take the class. Now it's required for students who have to take developmental classes, so that's who takes what's now College Experience. [*talking at same time*]

RUDOLPH: Being a librarian on campus can be lonely in my position. There are few of us, and we each are involved in different aspects of librarianship, and I can imagine that being a nurse on campus is similar. Would you comment on your association with other community college nurses and how that has affected your job here?

LAVARNWAY: Well, we meet two or three times a year—we stay in touch if somebody has an issue. Maryanne and Kate and I are in touch here at Massasoit. I think we try to be supportive of each other because we're all we have, the other nine colleges. We email a lot.

RUDOLPH: Do you find that the issues over the community colleges are pretty similar?

LAVARNWAY: Yeah, because I think eventually young adults are young adults, so they bring with them the same kind of societal problems. And it's not like Greenfield doesn't see the same problems we're having in Brockton anymore. Used to be a much more rural school and different issues. The nurse at Greenfield when I came was an extremely proactive health educator, and I have such fond memories of the nurses who were there when I first came and had been doing the job, and Esther Frenauld[phonetic], her name was then, was the first nurse in the system. She was from Cape Cod and she had started community college health services.

RUDOLPH: She was it and the others followed.

LAVARNWAY: She was it. That's right. And she and I worked together for years.

RUDOLPH: Now you have a pretty good sized space here. This is a very large room with space so that you can do exams and things like that. So do other community colleges have similar services areas or does it vary?

LAVARNWAY: This room happens to be large, but this used to have three different functions to it: the Health Services secretary was in one part of it; the students used to make their own signs; and then the student newspaper was in here as well.

RUDOLPH: At the same time?

LAVARNWAY: Well, they would take different times. And I'd come in in the morning and there was often the heavy odor of marijuana in the air [*both laugh*]. But we need the space. As you can see, it's full of storage. We have two beds for students to sleep on. The part-time nurse and the part-time secretary have desks in here, and we're just full of storage units for all of our information.

RUDOLPH: I'm going to throw out a question that I didn't tell you about before. Would you tell me about the Lunch Bunch?

[0:45:53.9]

LAVARNWAY: Well the Lunch Bunch—I'm a wanna-be librarian, Jennifer. [*JR laughs*] you {??} the librarians, and we talk a lot about books. It's gotten smaller as the years have progressed, but a lot of faculty used to come in and the librarians and me and the staff people in our building. We solved a lot of problems. Former presidents have come in and we'd give them a lot of information. We solved world problems. We discussed a lot of student issues and faculty issues, union issues with faculty. Often would complain about one of the administrators or others, and it's been a nice group and supportive group. My husband died and then I was sick, and I had friends that I knew when I would come in that were there to support me and help me through the day and get me where I needed to be. Yeah, the Lunch Bunch is always—it's always great. You meet new people.

RUDOLPH: Always been there.

LAVARNWAY: Yeah. It's gotten much smaller.

RUDOLPH: Yeah. Do you think it's from people retiring?

LAVARNWAY: Oh totally. Yeah. Yeah. And I don't think faculty take the time to come over. They eat in their own buildings.

RUDOLPH: It seems faster paced, do you think here at Massasoit than it used to be?

LAVARNWAY: Yeah. People are busy. Lives are busier. Yeah.

RUDOLPH: What has been your most satisfying part of your career at Massasoit?

LAVARNWAY: Well school nursing is the perfect fit for me. So, you know, they always say, Find something you have a passion for. Well, I wouldn't say I have a passion for school nursing, but it is the perfect job for me, and I was really lucky to find that early on. I went into a program to be a school nurse. I always liked going to school; I liked being in school. People didn't like going to school, I'm thinking, What on earth not? All your friends are here. Where else could you be? I always loved school. I took myself off to summer school two summers when I was in high school because what was I going to do at home? Kids weren't working part-time jobs in those days, and I went to summer school. Anyway, I didn't want to be a teacher. My guidance counselor said, "Just go be a teacher with the rest of your friends." I didn't want to be a teacher, but I liked being in the school environment, so it really worked out for me. I'm involved in the educational process; I've had relationships with coworkers and students that are very important to me. I see students grow. I know we help them. We can help them. We do help them. And they like to come back and tell us their success stories, so even if we tell them, Do this tonight and come back and tell us tomorrow. And they are happy to when it works out really well. Or they may come back in a year. I went to the grocery store, oh I would say a year ago, now, and this young man behind the fish counter said, "Aren't you the nurse at Massasoit?" I said, "Yes." And he said, "Remember me?" and I said, "Well, no. Tell me about yourself." I said, "Oh yeah, I remember you." And so I see him on a weekly basis now, and he told me a couple of weeks ago that he goes to Bridgewater State now and he's made the dean's list for the first time in his life. And he was so happy to be able to tell me. He said, "I've never in my life been on the dean's list." It makes me so happy when I see him. So those are wonderful stories. And you know, if I didn't like my job, I wouldn't have stayed forty years. It's just a very rewarding job.

RUDOLPH: What if that person hadn't told you about this job at Massasoit today?

LAVARNWAY: Yeah, I don't know. Would I have ever found it. It's like, would you have married the same man if you hadn't met him? [*JR laughs*]. It's hard to say. It's too existential for me. I probably would have done school nursing somewhere, and I like younger children, and I don't know what I would have done, but I wanted to go back to work. I am a worker bee. Staying home wasn't what I really wanted to be doing, so I don't know what would have happened. But aren't I lucky?

RUDOLPH: Aren't we lucky. Yes.

LAVARNWAY: Yeah, it's really been a great place to work. And with the economy the way it was, aren't we lucky to look at our future and say, We have a pension, working for the state. We don't make a lot of money, but there are benefits. But my benefits have been interpersonal relationships. I know that's not important to everybody, but to me it is, so.

RUDOLPH: Well, I think you had talked about some of your colleagues and other people have told me about their colleagues. And I think people that you work with support you; you mentioned that. They support you when not only when you're having problems or in trouble or sick but, in your happy times too.

LAVARNWAY: They're happy for you. Yeah, that to me is a sign of a real friendship. Because sometimes people can be supportive until they think you're too happy and things are too good and why aren't they, so. But I think to me that's a real sign of when you can enjoy somebody else's successes and happiness.

RUDOLPH: And there are a lot of people here like that can do that.

LAVARNWAY: There are. We've just met some real characters here. A faculty member used to carry a pistol in a holster under his pants. Nobody knew about it; it was totally illegal, of course, he probably had a permit, but it was illegal on campus. And his office mate would knock on the door and say, "Don't shoot, it's me." [*both laugh*]

RUDOLPH: I hope this was years and years ago.

LAVARNWAY: Thirty years ago.

RUDOLPH: Okay, good.

LAVARNWAY: Faculty members would keep a bottle in their file drawer and a lot of funny things would happen.

RUDOLPH: Well, it's its own place, Massasoit.

LAVARNWAY: It's its own place. But I'm sure we're probably pretty much a lot like the other—

RUDOLPH: Just as you were saying that students are the same everywhere. I think we're the same everywhere.

LAVARNWAY: We're the products of our environment and age and the age in which we grew up. So when you're thirty, you're pretty impatient with fifty-five-year-old values; you know. You want them to be like yours. I'm now the older group, and I'm sure they're looking at me saying, Move along, move along. We got somebody new coming in with new ideas. Which is great.

RUDOLPH: Well, it's good you're accepting, too.

LAVARNWAY: Better be. What are you going to do?

RUDOLPH: Are there any things that you would like to tell us that maybe I haven't asked you about?

LAVARNWAY: Oh, there are a lot of things I couldn't tell you about. About the college?

[0:53:37.8]

RUDOLPH: About the college, about your work here, about anything that has to do with your time here.

LAVARNWAY: Well, I think I've been lucky because if you're not a nurse, you don't know how to do the job, so I haven't had a lot of interference from people because they don't know what I do or how to do it. Only other nurses. So I think that's allowed me a lot of autonomy, which I like.

RUDOLPH: You also talked about the variety in your job. I think that is something that is in an educational institution unless you're, maybe, at the top. But I think most people who work in an educational institution see different students every semester, every day, every year, and that's an incredibly wonderful thing.

LAVARNWAY: I know. I go up to the Administration Building and think, Boy I wouldn't want to work up in this building. They see students only who are in there registering or have an issue, but they don't work with students, particularly. They have other work to do. They work in the business office in Payroll, or HR. I think, It's not where I want to be.

RUDOLPH: So they don't get to see the—

LAVARNWAY: I don't think they get the joy out of it or the joy of having— [*talking at same time*]

RUDOLPH: rewards and joy of working with students—see the student that you saw behind the meat counter.

LAVARNWAY: Hey, Miss Ellen. That's what I hear every week. Hi, Dan. I mean, it's so great. Yeah.

RUDOLPH: And hear those success stories.

LAVARNWAY: There are a lot of success stories, you know, and obviously we lose some too, but we've had such funny things happen. When I was talking about retiring, I said, "You know I'll have a lot of funny stories," and Maureen Thayer is involved in so many of them, but really, so many funny things have happened. We just laugh and laugh and laugh.

RUDOLPH: [*laughs*] You don't want to share one of those with us?

LAVARNWAY: Well, silly things like coming to school with two different shoes on. And who are you going to tell. You have one friend you're going to tell. You do dumb things or somebody else does something dumb or a student will say something that really you can't say anything when they're there, but when they leave and you're like, Oh my goodness, I cannot believe I just heard that. And you have to act like you're totally fine when they're there. It's like when you live with somebody. You have commonalities that nobody else understands, so when you work with somebody all the time, then you have those commonalities.

RUDOLPH: Family jokes.

LAVARNWAY: Yeah, family jokes, that's right.

RUDOLPH: Right, right. Well, I want to thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. It's been enlightening.

LAVARNWAY: Thank you.

RUDOLPH: Interesting. And I think that people who listen to this recording will find out a lot about Massasoit that perhaps they didn't know before.

LAVARNWAY: Well, I hope so. Yeah.

RUDOLPH: Thank you very much, Ellen.

LAVARNWAY: Thank you, Jennifer.

[end of recording]