

Interviewee: Katherine Aguilar,
Interviewers: Sarah Abraham, Aaron Hall
Date: March 15, 2023
Place: Worcester, Massachusetts
Transcriber: Sarah Abraham



Overseen by: Prof. Cinzia Pica, Assumption University

Abstract: Katherine Aguilar, founder of K Sense Co, was born in Cuisnahuat, Sonsonate, El Salvador in 1994. She later moved to Los Angeles, and in 1995 to Worcester [MA], where she still resides. She has lived in various neighborhoods throughout Worcester and was educated in Worcester public schools. In this interview, Katherine discusses the struggles immigrants face in the United States, struggles not only as children, but as adults as well. She talks of the challenges she faced in growing her own business and becoming part of her community. She also elaborates on her successes and involvement in the community, and why she thinks it is important, as a woman of color, to give back.

Quote: I would honestly say...be patient and be kind to yourself. You are figuring things out as a teenage girl...You are processing things...and maybe going through a difficult moment...I take in interns now and constantly am reminding them...you are not an island. You, as a human, you need connections, and that's really what helps you grow...It definitely takes time to get there, to build the confidence to just own who you are. But I think all of my experiences and seeing inequities for myself, for my family, for other immigrants, that's always just driven a passion.

SA: My name is Sarah Abraham and I'm here with Aaron Hall and Katherine Aguilar in Worcester, Mass, and it is March 15th, 2023. We are completing a city-wide 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 Woman's Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on women's health, education, work, politics, and community involvement. We want to focus today on your experiences with work. Thank you for your help with this important project. Is it okay to record your oral history today?

KA: Yes, of course.

SA: Okay, so we're going to start.

AH: Okay, so what is your...Where were you born?

KA: I was born in a small town called Cuisnahuat, Sonsonate in the country of El Salvador.

SA: Okay.

AH: Okay. And have you ever been married?

KA: No, thankfully not.

AH: So, you have no children, okay? And what cultural ethnicities do you identify, like your family background, you would say?

KA: Yeah, so I identify first as a Salvadorian woman. Here in the U.S. that's more just like a Latina, person of color. Caveat, I do have children, I have three dogs that are my babies.

AH: Oh, most definitely, you can never forget the babies. Most definitely... Could you tell me just a little bit about your parents?

KA: Yeah.

AH: Kind of like your upbringing, like what really made you like, kind of the person you are today?

KA: Yeah, of course. So, my childhood was great, lots of trauma though. So, my parents had me extremely young, my mom was 16 years old, and my dad was 19.

AH: Oh, really?

KA: And just my birth story is interesting because I was born in '94, I was born in a small village, so there was absolutely no, like, medical care really, it was just like a midwife type of thing. And I was actually born feet first, so my mother and I both almost died. But I like to share that with people because I believe there is a greater purpose for my life.

SA: Great.

KA: And then my dad... shortly after I was born, I was brought to America when I was about nine months old, just me and my mom.

SA: Very nice, very nice. So, when you came to America, did you move right to Worcester? That's where you've lived...

KA: So, as soon as we came to America, I actually landed in Los Angeles, in South Central L.A. That's where my grandmother resided, and still lives to this day. I think we stayed with her, I think three to four months, so about 1995 was when I actually landed in Worcester.

SA: Oh, very nice. Where, where in Worcester were you? Like what neighborhood were you in?

KA: Our first apartment was on Main Street, kind of near where the McDonalds is located. And then, thankfully, my mother's aunt, my older sister--- her older sister, bought this building that

we're actually in in 1997. So, this building here on Vernon St. is really special because I've lived in every single apartment in this building, except for the third floor.

AH: Really?

SA: Oh nice.

KA: So, I grew up in Main South, between Main South and Vernon Hill.

SA: Very nice.

AH: And you would say, like--- what changes since you've been in Worcester for a good amount of time, like what changes have you seen in Worcester over time? Like, negative, positive, like that have affected you or, like, the people around you?

KA: Yeah, I think growing up in Vernon Hill area, especially for like elementary into like, early middle school days, I think most of the people in this neighborhood were immigrant families. So, that really established who my friends were growing up. I always had a wide variety of diverse people in my circle. So, that's definitely helped me as a person grow. It helped me in high school, helped me in college. But I've also seen the economic growth in the city. A lot of people, you know, talk about Polar Park for example, that has developed in the last few years. But a lot of people, you know, weren't around when we had the mall downtown, you know, the Centrum [DCU Center]. So, it's been really nice to see the city grow in different neighborhoods, redevelop itself. And, you know, I love that Main South, especially near Clark [Clark University] area is, is expanding with businesses and stuff, and a lot of them are minority- owned, which to me is amazing. But I have also seen some of the negative impacts of the gentrification; the rise on rents that we're experiencing now in 2023 so... goods, goods and bads, you know?

AH: Right, and as a woman of color, you know, like you stated, like, what are some challenges that you see, like, women around this area that face consistently that should be changed and that should be, you know, taken, like, to like a higher-up or like, brought to light, or you know just really focused on?

KA: Yeah, no I think as a woman of color, and you know like I said, even just my childhood journey to get here... We are very resilient people. You know, women of color, Latinas and black women especially, we, I feel like we get--- we've got to kind of carry the load of the world sometimes. And as the oldest in my family, I carry a lot of that load for my family, but I also carry a lot of the load, I feel like, for the community. Because sometimes, they, they want you, especially for me, for example, right like... My mom had me so young. I'm a statistic, you know, I was supposed to be a statistic, excuse me. I wasn't supposed to finish high school, I wasn't supposed to go to college, you know. Those opportunities that I created for myself were a lot harder to achieve just because of my starting point. And for women everywhere, especially women of color, it's harder for us to, you know, go get an education, and to further that

education. I would definitely say those are some of the difficulties, but I also want to acknowledge that, you know, within my community and the women that I have met here in Worcester especially, we are able to uplift each other. We are able to support each other because we understand, you know, just by looking at each other, just by our skin color, like, we've had it a little bit harder, as immigrant women. So, it's also been nice to find people who understand what I've been through.

AH: Yeah, most definitely.

SA: So, along that line, your community that you were talking about, what characteristics do you think define that community? Along with like, the resilience that you were talking of?

KA: For me, I think growing---coming from El Salvador, it's a really developing country. I wouldn't want to say poor as much anymore, we're... we're slowly getting up there. But you know, when I left, it was on like the tail end of a civil war there. So, that's definitely made an impact on how I view the world. If you ever get the chance to go to El Salvador, you'll experience it. People will have nothing but will still offer you something. And that's something that's been ingrained in me since childhood. My parents have always--- we are giving back clothes, we're donating food, we're donating our time, so I surround myself with community members that are also doing that. I'm super involved in Pride Worcester, I'm super involved in the League of Women Voters, trying to help get civic engagement and education out to, you know, younger people. So, those are really the women that are in my tribe. They--- they're kind of focused on that kind of stuff.

SA: Very nice, very nice. Kind of talking about like your upbringing and how you were in L.A. for a little and then you came to Worcester... So, I know you said you went to some--- the Worcester public schools, could you name a few of them for us?

KA: Yeah. So elementary school, from kindergarten to middle of 6th grade I actually went to Vernon Hill School right up the street, and that was a really great experience. I think they were probably one of the best at the time, from, from my understanding, I feel like they had a lot of resources for like arts and culture, and even just like some of the things the teachers would try to teach us were really great for...I felt like in this community we had a lot of immigrant kids. So, that was really, really impactful. For middle school I actually went to Sullivan Middle School. That was a little bit more of a stressful time. Middle school is so rough, and I'm thankful I was able to do it without social media. Because I feel like there was still bullying, there was still all these things that kids are going through now, but it's probably way more amplified through the internet. High school was also a little bit of a journey. I went to Worcester Tech [Worcester Technical High School] for the first two years, and I was in the hospitality trade. But because no one in my family had graduated high school at that point, I was hyper focused on having to go to college. And at that time, Tech was really more focused on the trade. I believe now they're a little bit of both. So, then I switched over to Doherty Memorial High School. That's where I graduated high school and there I found really great supportive teachers and programs that I think, and I

credit them honestly, for getting me into college and past it. They helped me with, like, college essays, they gave me, like, waivers for the applications and stuff, so it was really great. Love Doherty. Go D-High!

AH: Now you mentioned, like your support groups and your networks, like what mentoring was like, really important to you that kind of like, stood out to you and like, kind of made you like stay focused on like the goal and the path that you had set for yourself to, not only surpass high school, but also surpass college, and therefore like, throughout your future?

KA: Yeah, I honestly would say it...At first it was always teachers, you know? It was always like, a teacher that would see like, I was smart, you know. Thankfully I was always like, a really avid reader growing up, so I think that really helped me. But it was really the guidance of teachers at the beginning that were like, “No, you know, you’ve got to go to college, college is what helps you get a better paying job.” And you know, seeing my mom work in factories and like, retail jobs all her life, and like, come home so over- tired, that really motivated me to want to get a step further. And then during college, during undergrad, it was really just different professors at that point. I remember one of my professors at UMASS [University of Massachusetts] Amherst, for my Public Speaking class, she had actually shared with us that your story is so important, and so impactful, that anyone will want to listen. So, during our first Public Speaking class, when we did our first speeches, I gave my immigration story, and I had every single person in that classroom crying. So, from there on I learned how impactful your words and your story really are. And as a woman of color, as a young woman, who’s kind of had to work while during undergrad and all these things, from there it kind of became work moms that would kind of take me under their wing and be like, “Girl you need to get life insurance, you need to do this, you need to do that.” So, it’s really just been a different, different chapters have had almost different mentors, but I try to preach that to other young girls now. I take in interns and stuff now and I constantly am reminding them like, “You’re not an island. You, as a human, you need connections to other people, other organizations, and that’s really what helps you grow.”

AH: No, that’s beautiful. It’s crazy you say that because I feel like with the--- Because I saw your website, and I saw the candles and stuff, was that like your first job? Like was that kind of like your, you know, your- you get what I’m trying to say?

KA: Like how did I get to that point?

AH: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

KA: Yeah, so. So, I actually, like I said, I worked almost all of undergrad, full-time jobs, in a bunch of different industries. I’m what they would call a typical millennial job hopper, like I’m there for 18 months and then if you’re not giving me enough more or enough like, kind of pizzaz, then I’m out of there. So, I had graduated college in 2017, I had worked as a recruiter for about two years, and I actually got fired. And then the candles were kind of my side gig type of thing while I was looking for a real job, a real job. And I did it, you know, as I was looking for a job

for a couple of months, almost a year. I was interviewing places. I would do a couple rounds of interviews and I wouldn't land anything, which for me was really, really rare and like, hard to process. So, then I made the realization, you know, maybe I'm just meant to not work for anyone anymore. I'm just kind of meant to take all those skills learned in all my different jobs and see how far I can take this. And that was in 2019 that I made that decision, and here we are, almost four years later. You know, we're still going at it. But I was really inspired by the candles, to cut the bottles and repurpose something. At the time, when I had gotten fired, like right before, I was reading this book called *The Big Pivot*. And it was written in 2010, and it was talking about how in over the next 15 years, businesses are going to be forced to, to look for sustainable, renewable resources because of global warming. And as we've seen with such a weird winter, people are kind of opening their eyes up to that so that, that's how that started.

AH: Yeah, that's cool.

SA: The candles, did they just start as your side gig or did it like... When you started doing them as your side gig did they have a deeper meaning- or like value to you or...?

KA: So, I, I think even without like homing in on it, I knew that I had something, you know what I mean. Like my big goal for K Sense overall is to have a couple of different stores where it's like a, like a mini-Target, and everything in there is sustainable. And you don't, you know, you don't have to worry about it, that's why my business is called K Sense but its' short for common sense.

AH: Right.

KA : So, I want people to walk in and feel like anything, you know, like we're doing, anything that we're putting out there, you don't even have to think about it, it's just common sense. You know you can trust us, you know it's good for the planet or the community and in one way or another, so I think that's, that's really where I like have made that focus even without like having a 10 year business plan, because I feel like my business plan changes every six months it's, it's been, it's been an interesting ride for sure, yeah.

SA: And the business plan now? The business plan is a few stores or do you have something else?

KA: I would like to have a few stores in the future, yes, but I've almost also tweaked the idea what my store looks like. So, I want it to be a store where you come in, you could get my candles, you can get other household or body wares, but I also want to create safe spaces for communities as a part of my store. So, I want to create like a space where people could almost come and like co-work, like a cafe where you could come and shop. You could also just come hang out, or come kind of use some of our resources or equipment. I am looking right now for the right space in Worcester to start it here and see if I could copy-paste it in other like, not big-big cities but like mid-sized cities. You know what I mean?

SA: Right now, are you, are you still located--- do you still have a store location?

KA: So, right now where we're in right now, in my home studio, this is where I do everything, where I hold everything, and I actually do mobile market pop-ups. So, I actually have two this week and I have one on Saturday with the Food Habit. I have one Sunday at the Poets Cauldron. So, right now we're just doing different pop-ups, but we're also doing workshops. So, I've also expanded to not only selling finished candles, I have people come in almost like a paint night, but you're making the candles. You get to sand the bottles and get the whole experience of it.

AH: That is awesome. So, the path that you've chosen, looking back do you see like, like any pros or any cons that you either of you like to change, or like to maybe like do all over again or you just or- like you know I'm straight with what I just--- what, what I've done the path that I've chosen and everything that you know that's come along with it?

KA: I know it's typical to kind of hear, but it's really, really true I've honestly... You can't really regret anything that's happened, you know. I definitely look back... I'm like I wish I would have done things like a little bit different, or I would have made you know, slightly better choices. Or like maybe the people who are around me at that certain time, you know. But as you get older and as you have more and more experiences, you know within yourself and with other people, because you just kind of learn to accept every part of it as a part of the journey. Not to quote my favorite girl, Miley Cyrus, but, "It's all about the climb." It's all about the journey to get there. So, no I, I don't regret anything. There are moments that you know, were more difficult to kind of get over but thankfully lots of, lots of therapy helps with that.

AH: Amen.

KA: But, but no, no regrets here.

SA: Glad to hear that. For, I know you talked a lot about like being involved in your community and that type of thing... This shop is solely run by you, or do you run it with somebody else?

KA: So, I have one part-time employee, who is one of my youngest cousins in my family right now. And then I have an intern through Worcester State [Worcester State University] who will be with us all summer. So right now, it's mostly part-time employees and interns. For the most part it is me doing almost everything, but I do get assistance with manufacturing. Sometimes at pop-ups, my, my part time employee, Allison... We're actually going to start... She wants to focus more on marketing and behind the scenes stuff, so that actually makes me really excited that I get to show her the little bit I know and have learned and also kind of see where her creativity goes. So, that's been my favorite part of... I've had a couple of employees, too, when I was at the shop, but it's always just been part-time girls. Typically, they're high school- aged, some college-aged, and they come in for a certain amount of time, more seasonal, and we kind of work on projects together, which is really great.

SA: Yeah, no that's really nice. Could you talk about some of the projects that you guys have done?

KA: Yeah, so my intern last season, Amaras, she was so great. She wanted... And I also work with the girls to kind of teach them what they want to learn about. You know, I don't want to just give you an assignment and expect you to be happy with it. I feel like most people get more excited to learn and do something if it's something they're already interested in or are curious about. So, with Amaras, what we did last semester, she did research on new product packages we could do. So, we're hoping to launch them for next month. We're going to do some horoscope candles that she did research for, to make sure like the scents align with each Zodiac sign. And we're going to do intention candles with certain crystals. We're even doing full moon workshops. That was something that she had kind of suggested, starting in April. So, she was... She clearly really liked astrology, so a lot of her projects are focused on that. But it's, it's helpful because all the research she was able to do, I'm able to kind of just take that and implement it and kind of run with it. And then my intern is going to be starting with us in the summer. She's actually looking for more, more networking, like she wants to learn how to create a network. And she also wants to learn more about public speaking and presentations. So, we're definitely going to focus on that, whether we're using social media platforms or whether I'm helping her. Maybe we'll put a panel together of local women. So, there's a couple different things that, that we're, we're focusing on for the summer.

SA: Very nice. The bottles that you use, I know you talked a lot about like sustainability and how you got your inspiration for them. Where do you get these? Do you collect these yourself?

KA: Some I collect myself, but this is just the beer bottle side. There's that one, there's like a whole hallway over there with them. Ninety percent of the time they're just donated to me. Strangers, friends, people who work at bars and bought a candle once and they're like, "Girl, I'm bringing you all these." I'm like, "Okay bring them." Thankfully you know I, I'm able to organize it well. But some of these, as you can see, I have like, a couple hundred of them. There was a donation from the Bridge [The Bridge of Central Massachusetts], like a community center, and they had cleared out and they found all these random old bottles, so they brought me like a huge donation. So that's really nice. That was like a year and a half ago and I'm still working through it. But yeah, most of it's just donations from people in the community. They hear that I'm doing something with what they were ready to throw away, and they bring it back so...

AH: So, you would say like recycling, like that's like something you'd take pride into, right?

KA: Yes, 100%. So, for me, it's like repurposing the bottles into candles, I know you saw the plants earlier, I also put plants in them as well. I also have done glassware for people where you know, it was their favorite set of beer and you know, I just made them some glasses. So, we're always... That's the products I manufacture and that's how I'm focused on it. But the other businesses that I bring into my team, or my website, my pop-ups, they're also focused on

sustainability. So, one of my jewelry makers, she actually makes jewelry out of sea glass that her and her family collect in Newbury, Newburyport. And she's a 13 year -old girl. She just decided she wanted to start doing this. Her parents help her, and she's been in my shop for eight months about now. And that's... It's just nice to be able to support them, and kind of motivate a younger, younger woman trying to get into this business. Well, she is in business, not getting into it, but she's in business. And then I have artisans as well. So, I have these ceramic plates that get painted by hand by my uncle in El Salvador and they're just plates that like, people were ready to throw away. So, we bring those into the shop as well. So, we try to also...Our cards, for example, they're printed on recycled paper, or they're printed on wildflower seed paper. So little details like that, with the people I bring in as vendors as well, they're focused on sustainability in their own way.

SA: You've talked a lot about like your family and your community and just like, women of color and women in general, how do you feel like that, aside from like who you employ and like, where you sell from and like, going through a city... how do you feel like you bring that to the forefront in your business? Like all those things that seem so evidently important to you.

KA: I think we do a really good job of sharing what's important to us, our morals as a business and as a business owner, just you know, what I run on as a human. I think over the past, maybe two years now, I've really honed into how we share the story, how we present online. Thankfully, I've had a lot of interviews with the local newspapers. I've been on a lot of podcasts as well. Most of the time I feel like I'm half talking about everyone else and then a little bit about me. But that's just kind of the way I am all the time. I'm always trying to uplift whoever's next to me through that, my actions, and my words, I feel like my community has uplifted me and they're more prone to, to share that news article with people. Or you know, I've also been able to get some awards and distinctions here in the city so that also helps, too. But it's always just me kind of being hyper-aware and hyper-conscious of it. Because as a woman of color, as the...And sure, I'm a little person. I'm 5'1", I'm brown. My hair can be kind of frizzy sometimes. I've had to, I've had to own that all my life, you know. I didn't all of a sudden become a brown woman, so I think those experiences, being the youngest in the room, being the only person of color in the room, being sometimes even the only woman in the room, I've had to be comfortable with being uncomfortable so much, that now I'm kind of just like, "Nah, this is me, this is me all the time. You're going to hear about it, you want to talk to me, you're going to hear the whole thing." So, I think that's how I've done it.

SA: Okay, great. Great, thank you.

AH: In terms of the awards and stuff, could you speak a little bit about that? And like, kind of like what process led to that and everything.

KA: So, last year I actually won Pulse Magazine's, I think it's like 15 People to Watch for 2022. What year are we in? So, I won that at the beginning of the year, and I was actually nominated for that by a colleague at the market. She has just seen the work I've been putting in, she's my

work wife actually. And she nominated me because she saw the work I was doing. She saw like all the other, you know, entrepreneurs I've been trying to support. Because a lot of the work goes unseen, you know. A lot of times people don't realize, yes I, I do all the things, but I'm also on like three or four boards. And then on top of that, I'm helping my family. So, she saw all of that and she nominated me for that and that was really great. It was really great recognition. And then from there, later on I actually won Worcester Business Journal 40 under 40. Which to me was amazing because I didn't even know that award existed until I went for a coworker back in 2016, I think it was, or 2015. But a coworker had won it, so the office bought a table for all of us to go support that person. So, that was the first time I even had heard about this award you know, and 90% of the people that are the alumni are older, white men. It's, it's harder to see women, it's harder to see people of color, let alone women of color. So, I walked into that room and again, this was, this was a long time ago that I walked into that that award ceremony, and I said to myself, "I want to win this award before I turn 30." At that point I didn't know what it was going to be for, but I had said it in my mind, "I want to win this before I turn 30." And I don't know if it was because of the Pulse Award I had won earlier in the year, but I had a lot of friends who nominated me for that because of all the things I was doing. And I won, and to me I, I want to highlight that I won but I also won alongside eight other women of color. I don't know if that's like the most they've ever had in a class, but just me looking at the previous classes, I definitely feel like it was. And I was also able to take my group photos with two women in the community who are my personal friends and my cheerleaders, Vanessa Calipso and Dominica Peron, actually who is running for City Council so if you guys are voters... So, it's been nice to like be able to get these recognitions, but not only win them alone you know, I'm winning them with the people that I'm doing the work with. And it's just even a more motivation for us to continue moving forward. Because when you're doing community work sometimes you know, you're --- you're working so, so hard and there are times where you know, something happens or someone says something and you know you do get discouraged, but thankfully I have my ladies lifting me up too.

SA: So, you won the 40 under 40, which is obviously, congratulations, a great accomplishment. How do you feel like you kind of almost got your foot in the door per-se? Because I feel like sometimes when you're doing community work, or when you're just doing work like, hands-on work yourself... something kind of more of like a heartfelt thing, people... I feel like you almost have a more difficult time like, getting yourself out there or like making like a real... like an impact to the point of you're getting all this recognition for it. So how do you feel like you've got your-yourself like, your foot in the door out there?

KA: Like, not to just be vague about it, but I think it's just, just being me, just being honest. Thankfully, you know it definitely takes time to get there, to build the confidence to just own who you are. But I think all of my experiences, and seeing inequities for myself, for my family members, for other immigrants, that's always just really driven a passion . Once I became a citizen at 17 years old, I registered to vote that same day. And I went and I voted for Barack Obama with my mom and we both... It was the first time either of us were able to vote and he won. And for us, and this was his second term, for me you know that moment, that leading up to

that, being able to go and be a part of the voting process, I think that I say it with other immigrants, it's probably just a really big immigrant thing, just felt so big. It felt so nice to feel like I had a voice and that was the first time I had felt that, you know. I had spent some of my childhood being an illegal alien and as a child that's just, you know, it just kind of messes with you a little bit and how you relate to other people. As a child, I couldn't freely say I was born in a different country because you're not sure who's listening and what they can do and how that could affect your family. So I think my experiences have really driven me, motivated me, and sometimes even just the hard points of it have, have angered me so much that I, I know I need to fight for those people who maybe don't have the voice, who maybe don't have the intellect, who didn't have the education to put their frustrations into the words that people can digest easily and say, "Oh let's take action." You know I, I do a lot of reading, I do a lot of research. I'm constantly learning, I'm constantly involved in a lot of different communities, seminars, summits.

AH: As you're talking, you can just like feel your energy and your drive like as you're saying, you can just feel it. I just want to know like, how do you keep that going? Like how do you... how do you just like you know what I'm saying? Like it's just like, it's like in every segment that we've talked about you, it's just empowering and it's just like so encouraging how do you keep that going and moving forward?

KA: One of my business mentors right now, he actually like questions me all the time. He's like, "Katherine, you are so small. How do you just keep on going?" And I tell all my friends all the time, "I'm like the Energizer Bunny but like times two." I think it, it just really goes back to seeing my mom raising three kids in the city being on food stamps, getting from public assistance. Like all of those things, seeing her struggle, and then talking to my friends and being open with them as we were growing up and knowing like it wasn't just my mom, you know what I mean. And like, even sometimes, I lived downtown for a couple years during the pandemic, and it was so sad to see like when people would come out and you know like the drug issues, or like people being homeless because of the rise on rent and stuff. And all of those those sad things, you know sometimes, sometimes I get sad, and sometimes I lose my motivation. But then I get inspired by a podcast, or I get inspired by a new book or an interview of someone who, who's continued going further, who has maybe had a difficulty a little bit more than mine. And I think I just find inspiration from the world. I'm also sometimes maybe a little critical of the world, like I know. Also, I try to make it funny sometimes, too, so that's probably what helps. But the world is literally on fire, that's what I say. The world's on fire all the time and you just are able to control what's in front of you. So, I think that's kind of what keeps me going is I see, whether it be a young girl sending me a message on Instagram or something like, "Hey you're..." I think also the universe sends me those signs, too. Because I think it's happened to me a lot like when I feel dismotivated or I'm ready to quit because it's, it's been a few times, especially during this damn pandemic. There'll be a young girl that just randomly messages me on Instagram, or there'll be someone who sent me an e-mail like, "Hey I heard you're doing this. How can I help?" And I think the universe just, just sends me those people and those messages at the right time, and it's kind of like okay. We do a little bit of crying, I call my therapist, we play some Beyoncé, and we keep going.

SA: So, I know this new line you were talking about, you said you're doing it in Pride Worcester?

KA: Yeah, so these are actually the official merchandise for Pride Worcester for the queer coalition here. I'm on the board as like the executive admin, and I'm also like CKatherine; that's my position as Katherine but K Sense, my company, is the official business partner with Pride, so we're able to sell these shirts for them, and then the money goes back to Pride Coalition, the festival, and some programming.

SA: So, what are you doing through that, like, when's that coming?

KA: So, the Pride Festival in Worcester is actually really unique. If you guys have never been or heard of it, it's actually in September because we, we are kind of a college town. Yeah, so we don't do it in June, and everyone else is doing it. We wait till--- it's actually a two-week long pride starting September 1st to the 15th, the festival will be September 9th downtown Worcester, but yeah with the work that we're doing there we're doing different programming besides the festival like last year. I actually organized a sober event. We did sober candle making, which is something that you know the queer community is really looking for a lot of them due to trauma and family things, dealing with substance issues and that's something that you know I, myself, have slightly had issues with so I, I totally understand where people are coming from there because you know when you grow up with a difficult childhood, sometimes it trickles into adulthood.

SA: So, you're very active in the community. Do you feel like you're active? I know you talked about voting. Do you feel like you're active politically? I know you're in with the queer community and all of them, but do you feel like you're active in like, like, are some of the boards that you're on are they related to politics?

KA: So, I'm, I'm on the board for the League of Women Voters in Worcester. I'm also the committee chair for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion/DEI. So, that just...I started in May of last year. So, with them, I'm able to promote...We do voter registrations as a group. They do civic education projects and showcases with some students at Forest Grove Middle School. They also go to the naturalization ceremonies when people become citizens and register them to vote. We also do panels and lots of things with local politicians. I'm also now kind of seeing like the other end of it because I mentioned my friend is running for City Council, so I'm a part of her kitchen cabinet, she calls it, and I'm just helping her with events. But it's been interesting to see like how much money people need to fund in order to have a successful campaign, and what the door knocking is going to look like, what policies and stuff you want to focus on. So, this is my first year really kind of seeing that behind the scenes which has been really interesting and fun. Then I'm also on another board called the Young Professional Women's Association of Worcester, and I do community outreach for them, so through that, I was able, with another partner on the board, we were able to link both my League of Women Voters Board and my YPWA together so they're doing a leadership panel at the end of this month so I'm, I'm involved in a few different places.

But I feel like I'm also strategic about where I'm involved and like who can work with who and to make even better for the community.

AH: It's always about the bigger picture at the end of the day, most definitely.

KA: Yes, and now that you said that... I also--- I hate operating on ego, so like, even though I'm getting this recognition, and you know we're doing these interviews, that's why I try to highlight everyone else because I don't want people to think, "Oh she thinks she's doing it all because..." I'm not you know. I'm, I'm just a small piece of the puzzle, and I think that's what helps us.

AH: Most definitely.

SA: No, I think that's really nice.

AH: In terms of like religion, how has that really played a role in your life, like as a whole?

KA: I think for me I've had a little bit of a spiritual journey for sure. I grew up Catholic, as most Latin kids do. I feel like I did my first communion all of that things, and then my mom actually had some issues with alcohol once I was like adolescent middle school ages. And then, you know, we weren't really a big church family. I went mostly with my great- grandmother. She would pick me up and kind of take me to keep me out of trouble. But come those difficult years from my mom and I was also getting bullied at school because middle school girls were just mean. Yeah, so it was like a weird combination at that time, and I was feeling really lost. I was actually like really, really depressed as a young girl. I even at one point considered suicide. It was just really, really hard. So, my aunt at the time was born into a Christian Church, and she saw my light was dimming. So, she invited me to go with her and I became super religious. I became like a Christian beautiful child, Angel Saint of God type of girl for almost a good portion of high school. But then I went to college, and my freshman year of college I wasn't 100% sure why I wanted to be, so my advisor was like, "Just take all the {???) like you know do all the things." So, I took sociology, anthropology, psychology, and world music theater. So, I took all these classes that then started sparking my brain and then I was at a {???. I was like, "Wait, education and history and they're saying all these things about religion and then religion and then religion is saying all these things about what's going on in the world." So, during college I was almost in a conflict. I was like, "Do I keep following these church teachings that I've been following the past few years or do I go and immerse myself into education and history and what people are actually feeling and experiencing?" So, I was very much of a divide since college. I still go and I would say I'm a Christian. I'm a part of a new vine church that's local here but I don't, I don't go that often anymore just because church itself confused me. But, myself spiritually, I like to say I'm spiritual gangster because I will pray for you when you ask me to pray for you. I will pray for myself. I'll pray for the world. I'll blast gospel music so just really like get the emotions going and flowing and to feel like the presence, but I'm also somebody who listens to astrology readings and tarot cards and sometimes people think it's a conflict. Yeah, so that's why I'm like... I'm, I'm very unique in my spirituality because of the journey I've, but I, I

pray a lot so...It's guidance, I seek guidance from the upper higher powers because 90% of the time I don't know what I'm doing.

SA: Yeah, so what, like when you get to those moments and you're really not sure what you're doing, and you talked about battling depression when you were a teenager, what keeps you going? Is it solely the religion now? Is it your drive in for work? What would you say you were really motivates you?

KA: For me, what really motivates me to get up, are my dogs. I have three dogs. They're honestly so great, they're the reason I get up every day, the reason I go outside, the reason I'm making sure we're all eating, and then from there, it would be my nephew, my four year-old nephew, Gabriel, probably because I've seen him since birth. I was there for his birth, and I have probably only spent the longest two weeks apart from him in his entire four years of living. I'm obsessed with that kid and just being able to see like the world through his eyes, like he's so curious, he's so innocent, he's so happy. So that really motivates me to try to continue to push for change.

AH: And off of that motivation, like, what would you say to a younger girl like to drive her motivation, to push her to be the best version of herself, and not let worldly views trying to, like, you know, dim her down or like, like take away from her greatness or her brightness? Do you know what I'm saying? Like that, she can bring to the world, you know what I mean, like what would you say to her.

KA: I would honestly say to her to be patient and be kind to yourself. Number one, you have to be patient. You are figuring things out as a teenage girl. You know hormones are coming into play. You might be angry with your parents, you could be angry with your siblings, you know, and you're really just, you're processing things. So, that would be my biggest thing. Be kind and patient with yourself, and also when you're like going through a difficult moment, I know in that moment it's so hard to hear and process. You just have to be patient. It will get better; it doesn't rain forever. Sometimes it rains for a while, and it's a struggle, and you know that you're dealing with mud after the fact, but eventually, you know the sun does come back up, and it dries things out. You'll find a moment of clarity. Especially for young girls, I know they're dealing with so much bullying, family, hormones. It's kind of like that girl that's talking about you in a few years. Remember each other; you know it'll be okay. That would be my biggest advice.

SA: When looking to get into business to follow a similar path as you, what advice would you give?

KA: I would say try to do your research. I was very fortunate in that I went to business school. My degree is in finance, and I have a minor in economics and a minor in Spanish, so for me, you know the numbers and like paperwork, and you know we said it earlier sometimes contracts get me a little nervous. But all those things are really fortunate to learn, the theory of how business should operate before actually went on to operate a business. So, I highly recommend to people,

if you're thinking of starting a business, do your research first. It's so easy to just pay the state \$500, get an LLC [Limited Liability Company], and then go from there, but then sometimes you get stuck. You don't know tax advantages. You don't know what you could put into your business and also like looking out for local resources. Sometimes, especially as a woman of color, especially as a young person, you don't realize there are organizations in your city. Like most cities have a chamber of commerce that are willing to kind of guide you or at least connect you to other people that possibly could help your business. The Better Business Bureau is a really good resource. Here in Worcester, I work very closely with the Center for Women Enterprise, and they're a non-profit group just, you know, continuously putting out webinars whether it's personal finances vs. business finances, how you present yourself online, your branding. I'm constantly getting new information. I'm constantly on webinars. Tomorrow, I have an all-day summit with Yelp for women in business. You know what I mean there, there are those programs that happen. Sometimes it might be virtually, sometimes they might be in person, you know, but just constantly looking for education and resources will help you avoid a lot of mistakes, especially when you're first starting out. Also, listen to advice from other people, like sometimes, especially when you are creating a business, your business is almost like your baby. You know you have to create a mission, a vision, business plans. What is your favorite picture? Like a really good business is finding a problem and the solution to that problem. That's how a successful business grows. You know nobody wants to sit here and do paperwork and Venn diagrams and all those things you almost feel childish doing it, but it really helps you. You know those forms and documents, as you grow and to financial institutions to get funding and capital, you'll need those documents. So, you're better off just doing it from the beginning, looking for resources even if you have to pay for a lawyer to help you do all those things.

SA: Is there anything else that you want to make sure that we highlight in your interview... anything that we skipped over but it's important to you and your story?

KA: I would say maybe, since I was like on the advice track, another piece of advice I would like to share with women, more specifically women who are very much in mind whether you're like the oldest sibling, whether you're like immigrant, whether you're just a person of color, whether you're the first in your family to go to college... That transitional period, many transitional periods, sometimes you feel very isolated, and like I said it is really key to where you need to find your network, your girl group, your support system, whether it be a classmate, or an old co-worker because that's really what has lifted me out of out of the really dark times and really hard times, has been my circle of amazing women who maybe they don't know my entire story you know, maybe they haven't met my family, but they see me, and they see me for my potential for my goals. I would just want to highlight that. Just find people to support you, and at first, it's going to be one or two believers, and then from there, they will find other believers trust me, so that's-that's really what I would like to.

SA: Thank you for your time.