

Interviewee: Anne Marie Murphy
Interviewers: Katie Ben and Tara O'Donnell
Date: March 17, 2023
Place: Clark University, Worcester Massachusetts
Transcribers: Katie Ben and Tara O'Donnell



Overseen by Prof. Melinda Marchand. Clark University

Abstract: Anne Marie Murphy received her bachelor's degree in English Literature from Bowdoin College in 1982, started working several film industry positions, and did some freelance writing for local newspapers. Later Anne Marie went back to school to earn her degree in Critical Studies of Film and Television and started her own company called Eastern Script, the first script clearance house outside of Los Angeles county. Anne Marie came to the city of Worcester, and started volunteering at the Worcester Historical Museum Library. During the peak of COVID in 2020, Anne Marie wanted to explore the women working in the Worcester corset industry and took the free time as an opportunity to do so. Anne Marie struck gold on information of women working in Worcester and is now publishing a book, *City of Corsets*, on the many women business owners and seamstresses throughout the late nineteenth century to early twentieth. During this interview Anne Marie shares her experiences in childhood living in Brussels and how they shaped her personal and professional life today.

KB: So I started recording.

TO: Okay.

KB: Do you want to start?

TO: Sure.

KB: All right.

TO: Okay. So, this is Tara O'Donnell and Katie Ben interviewing Anne Marie Murphy and we are conducting this interview for our oral history class at Clark University in conjunction with the Worcester Women's Oral History Project.

KB: So do you want to tell us a little bit about yourself? Like a little bit of an introduction for those listening?

AM: My name is Anne Marie Murphy and I moved to Worcester in the summer of 2017 and not long after that, a few months after I got here, I stopped at the Worcester Historical Museum and found it interesting and ended up doing some volunteering there over the first few years. And as a consequence of being affiliated with them and volunteering there, I became aware of the corset industry here in Worcester, and I realized that no one had ever written anything about it, and very little was known about the industry except for the main business that everybody knows about, Royal Worcester Corset [Company], which has been written about quite a bit. So that is how I got involved in this project.

KB: Well, thank you. So we're just going to start sort of from the beginning and get some background from you. When and where were you born?

AM: I was born in a blizzard on December 11th, 1960, in Arlington, Massachusetts.

KB: Okay.

TO: So could you tell us anything about your parents and anything about your childhood, in Arlington?

AM: I was born in Arlington, but we lived in Waltham. I had three brothers and a sister. I still do have all four of them, thankfully. And, you know, I was going to grade school like you do until fourth grade when my father announced that we're moving to Europe. This was in 1970. He had an opportunity to move his work to Brussels, where NATO's headquarters is. He worked for a company that evaluated bids that were submitted to the Defense Department. The computer aspect of it. So see, like Raytheon and a bunch of other companies, they're all going to submit bids for antiballistic missile systems. So my dad would be the first one of the many people who would look at the computer aspects of it. So he had an opportunity to move us to Europe and he thought it would be great. And so we went. So we spent two and a half years. We lived in Brussels. I learned a little bit of French, but I think that was a real turning point for me. Big picture, because we didn't have a television for two and a half years and we spent a lot of traveling time together and a lot of reading and I was already a pretty big reader, but I really got my forever link to books, I think, during those few years. Then we moved back to the States. We moved to Arlington, Massachusetts at that point, and I went to high school there and went to Bowdoin College, graduated in 82, and I got an English literature degree. So does that bring you up to where you want to be?

KB: Oh, yeah, yeah. You can share however much as you want about your parents and childhood.

AM: Okay. Oh, my mother. I should talk about my mother too. She is also a big reader and has been listening to me tell these corset stories. Ad nauseum, [laugh] since I started on this project. So she's been a big fan and a huge supporter of the whole thing.

KB: Yeah. Would you, you were saying that you were, you know, reading a lot of books you didn't, that was kind of , you know, your first time, really going out and doing all that. Would you say that that sort of sparked a flame in you to like then pursue literature as a major and everything? Or do you think it was something else that led you to that point?

AM: Well, I was also surrounded by readers like my two brothers are big readers. My dad was always reading, I have memories of being a little girl sitting on my dad's lap after supper. He'd come through the door at 5:30, we'd have supper and then the 6:00 news would be on. And so he would sit in his chair with his pipe. Back in the days when you could smoke a pipe and put a five year old on your lap, [laughing] and I'd sit on his lap and he'd watch whatever the 6:00 news broadcast was with the newspaper in front of him. So I was just surrounded by information about the world, world events, the newspaper, you know, I'd help him turn the page. So I think that process and that way of learning about the world was part of my growing up, and so I absorbed it.

KB: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Did you feel encouraged or supported or really inspired by any particular adults in your youth?

AM: Well, my parents, of course, you know, they're always a big role. There were teachers who were really supportive. I had a great English teacher in high school. I had him for two years, junior and senior. He was fantastic. He was really strict, set sort of a really high, high bar. And he could see what you were capable of and he would really push you. So he was a good person for me to have at that point in my life. And then I had a fabulous professor at Bowdoin who was in the English department, but she was the film professor. So that was where I sort of started down that path, which I took for a while. Her interest in film became really infectious, so I ended up working on some projects with her, and some of them were writing projects and some of them were actually production projects as well. And she was always very encouraging. Very encouraging, especially about my writing.

KB: What kind of projects would you guys work on?

AM: Oh, like for example, I had the chance to do an independent study my last year at school and she said, "Why don't you look at this Leni Riefenstahl film and do some writing about it,"

like the Triumph of the Will and the one about the Olympics that she did just, you know, just spend, you know, four or five months learning about this person and reading and writing and watching and see what you can come up with. And that was pretty much what graduate school was, you know, two years of watching movies and writing and reading and thinking about them and how they affect people.

KB: So, yeah, it's the.. you would say like I don't know if this is, this isn't on my list or anything. But what would you say in critical thinking, what's the difference between thinking about literature and thinking about film? Like, would you say that there's a difference in the way you're processing and analyzing information?

AM: Well, there are very different ways of telling a story. If you're talking about fiction in terms of reading and writing literature, that category, you know, it's, that's a tough question.

KB: I'm sorry. I'm just interested.

AM: I think. Well, you obviously interact with the product very differently. You sit and you watch a movie. A lot of the work is done for you there. They're speaking at you. There's music they've composed, you know, thousands of frames of information for you to look at. So obviously it's a massive visual experience. Whereas, you know, reading is a visual experience, too but it's just you and the word on the page. So I'm not really sure in terms of the critical process. You have to take a different approach. I mean, I know that a lot of people say, "Oh, you know, the book versus the movie, the movie never does a great job." Well, they're just a completely different way of telling the story. You know, a movie can't tell as much of a story as a book can. You know, you can get into huge amounts of detail in a book, but filmmakers have to be really efficient with, you know, the details that they include. They have to make a lot of decisions about what comes and goes from a book that they adopt. So that's an intriguing question, though. I need to think about it a bit more.

KB: Yeah, I was just curious. I don't know if you were, you know, getting my degree in literature this really helped me and X, Y and Z and the way I interpreted and then got my degree

AM: Well, I guess for both processes, you know, you're trying to figure out what's going on with the story and you're looking at the craft of it, trying to decide did this style of delivery suit the story? What was the overall emotional effect? You know what? So they're similar in that way. In that way, you know, they're both storytelling. And so you're evaluating, you know, how efficient and how good and effective the storytelling was. So I think that they have that in common.

KB: I think that's a wise answer. Sorry.

TO: I want to circle back to when you talked about living in Europe. So you said you didn't have a TV. You're spending a lot of time reading. So I guess kind of in two parts, do you think having kind of like this lack of television sort of impacted the way you felt about film later on? Did you feel this connection to it?

AM: Oh, that's interesting.

TO: I mean, I guess the second part is just European history. How do you think of things? Because like being in Brussels, you're surrounded by world powers and it's a very exciting and a very old place. So I just think you're kind of more involved with history than in the U.S.

AM: History and also, it opened my eyes to the rest of the world. You know, I wasn't in a suburb of Boston anymore, and I wasn't going to be in a suburb of Boston for my entire upbringing. I was now in a world capital in a European city. And we traveled constantly. My parents had our station wagon shipped over and seven of us, there were seven of us we would all get in the car. We'd go, "Let's go to Holland for the day, let's go to France for a day or two." So just that expanded sense of like what's around you, and in Europe, the scale is so different. You know, parts of this country, you have to drive for like 8 hours just to get to the next state. In Europe, you know, in 8 hours you could come through a few countries, each of which has centuries of history. So that blows your mind a little bit. The other part of your question, and I'm trying to go back, what was the first part?

TO: Oh, just not having any TV.

AM: Right, so I remember we were there for a full year and a half before we went back to the States to visit. And I remember being really jealous because we got dumped at my cousin's house, my mom's sister's family, we were really close to them, and they knew everything that was going on in the world. My cousins, everything, everything. The Brady Bunch up to the Partridge Family. All these, they knew the theme songs. They were immersed in pop culture, and I was so out of the loop. So it was more of a treat for us in that way, to have TV. And then when we did move back, I was really selective about what I watched. Really selective. Like I remember a really great memory. My dad and I would watch Monty Python's Flying Circus on PBS like this, which happened like early to mid-1970s when it was first broadcast here. So, you know, definitely a bit more high-brow 14 year-old television viewing [laughing]. I'd say so. Yeah, that did change things. And I think when I got to high school, my high school was a half a block from Mass Ave. in Arlington, on which the 77 bus stopped and brought you

into Harvard Square. So back in the seventies, my parents didn't care if I got on the bus. I went to Harvard Square by myself after school as a 14-15 year-old. So I would go in there and I discovered, this is really when I discovered movies, I discovered the old Harvard Square Theater, which was a massive old one, screen velvet curtain, daily changing double features. You know, cinema, [laughing] you're not going to the movies. You're at a cinema. You know, there's you know, we've got a couple of, we've got *Casablanca* and *Have and Have Not* or maybe the next day we've got *Bridge Over the River Kwai* or just like the whole body of classic cinema. So I started watching movies heavily in high school. Yeah. So being, I think that's separate from Europe, but I think maybe being away gave me more of a "I needed to just jump in and catch up". Feeling so, Yes. [laughing]

KB: So, long story short. Yes, it did change. You were talking about how you would take a lot of trips with your family in Europe. Did you go to see historical sites or was it just...

AM: Yes, yes, constantly. Oh, it's a beautiful Sunday. Let's go visit a concentration camp.

KB: Sorry, I'm laughing. I'm just, that was...

AM: I know. I mean because that's what you're going to do over there. I mean, "Let's go up to Brugge and watch a woman in period clothing make lace by a canal," you know, you name it. We did it. We went to France, we went to England, we went to Scotland, went to Wales, we went to Holland, we went to Germany, we went to Italy, Switzerland, Austria, I mean, and multiple times so and it was just seeing one thing after another, you know, seeing all the, you know where Hitler's Alpine home was, was a military hotel in I think it was, I forget what town that was in in the Alps. But, you know, there's just history all around you. In Europe it is sort of hard to avoid.

KB: Yeah.

TO: Can you tie a trend, maybe one of those historical sites or something there piquing an interest in your project now?

AM: Well, I guess when you go to visit an historic site, you want to find out what happened. What happened here? Why is this place important? Why do a lot of people come here looking at this? And that's very similar to the book. I discovered that there were 130 corset businesses in the city over the course of 120 years or so. What happened here? Like, what caused that? Why were there so many? So it's when the questioning mind kicks in. How did this happen? What can I learn about it? What were their lives like? Those definitely relate to spending your childhood going to foreign countries and learning about new places. I think those tie together. Yeah.

KB: That's really, genuinely that is a great experience that your parents gave you guys, the fact that, you know, you can just travel around and yeah, learn all of this history that, you know, is European history, but it's also world history, humanity as well. And so..

AM: And it's also related to the United States because so many Americans have a Western European background. So you're seeing American history. When you go to Europe, you see everyone's forefathers or many people's forefathers. Yeah.

KB: Yeah. Was there any historical events that when you were traveling around like that specifically fascinated you in your childhood? Something that you really remember? I know obviously going to a concentration camp, that's a really big one. I don't think a lot of people forget that. But I was just wondering...

AM: There were many, it would be hard, I'd be hard pressed to single any one out. I remember as a, you know fifth grader being really impressed with the Anne Frank house that really resonated, being that age thinking about what that person's life was like. That person who was so much like me. I mean, was she 15? Do you remember?

KB: She was like 14 or 15.

AM: Just like early teens. And I was just a few years behind. So that one resonated with me. You know, any situation like that where you can see yourself and the person you're reading about, it becomes more personal and more meaningful.

KB: Yeah. Do you think, seeing those events, you know, impacted the choices you made, within your education and your career?

AM: The traveling, I got the travel bug for sure when we moved to Europe. I definitely did because I've always been pretty adventurous, even as a tiny kid, I was always like, you know, wanting to know stuff, wanting to do things, very busy, very active, inquiring. But I remember my parents when it was time for me to apply to college, they had a bunch of Boston schools they were kind of pushing on me. [laughing] I didn't want to go to Boston schools, I can walk to Boston from here I want to go somewhere different. There's so much to see. I always had that feeling and my third year in college, I went out to California for a year for school. I made my first road trip across the country while I was in college. I just love traveling always. I've got the bug. I mean, I haven't traveled as much of late for various reasons. But I do like to travel. Yeah.

TO: Okay. So like in Arlington, was there kind of a significant local history that you connected with? Or that you found interesting? Or...

AM: Well, Arlington, in the 1700s during the Revolutionary War era, was known as Menotomy. And Menotomy was on the path of the Minutemen as they headed up to Lexington and Concord. So that's the big historic focus in that town now is, you know, the Jason Russell House, which is a very old home right on Mass Ave. that was there at the time, and you can go and put your fingers in the bullet holes in the, in the staircase with the bullets that, you know, this big musket bullets that the British had fired into the house. That's the main, I'd say the main historical narrative in Arlington is around the Revolutionary War. But there's other stuff going on there, too, like Cyrus Dallin, the sculptor that lived there. I'm trying to think. And I didn't live in Arlington for so long, maybe six years I was there. I was there for junior high school and high school. I don't know about other things. In terms of history in that town that resonated with me so much. I just know of the Jason Russell house because that was pretty much the only historic home in the town that you can visit. So you could go at it every year or two and check it out again and put your finger in the bullet hole. [laughing] Look at the old time stuff.

KB: Yeah. Did you have a good relationship with school? How did you feel about school?

AM: I loved school. I love school. Lifelong learner. I've always loved school. I never had trouble getting my schoolwork done. No one ever had to tell me to do my homework. I just. I just did it well.

KB: Was there any particular class that gave you a hard time?

AM: Math. Yeah.

TO: Yeah, [laughing]

AM: Thank God for my friend Joan, [laughing] back in the day when you had to call your friends at school to get homework help. I would park myself on my parent's bedroom floor by the phone extension with my geometry homework in front of me. My friend Joan would walk me through all those proofs. "No, no, no. Back up, back up. [laughing] Yeah. Math. I mean, I did okay, but it did not come easily.

KB: No, you. It's a different way of thinking, especially with the way you think about history and literature, and then trying to switch the brain over to math.

AM: I've got the word mind. I don't have the number mind.

KB: No [laughing]

AM: Although I've managed to deal with numbers effectively. I mean, I've been a business owner for 30 years so, you know, if there's not enough money, you need to make more money like that kind of math makes sense to me. You know, we need more money to cover payroll. Where are we going to get the money? You know, that is very grounded, practical. But the abstract math was hard for me, proofs really were tough.

KB: I don't even know what proofs are. So, you're a step further than me.

AM: Yeah.

TO: When you were in high school, did you think the trajectory of your education was going to go where it went? Or did you always know you wanted to be an English major?

AM: I figured it would be in that category. I was. I was like the newspaper girl, high school onward, you know. In fact, I started the high school newspaper and I, yeah, they didn't have one before me, so I did that. I was on the newspaper in college, and writing's always been part of my life.

TO: Yeah, it's very cool.

AM: I still have very close friends who I worked on the college newspaper with. Very close friends. It's awesome.

KB: Yeah, that's, I was just going to say that it's really nice to stay in touch. Yeah, kind of a little bit off topic. But with your project with *The City of Corsets* have you always liked fashion?

AM: [laughing] I am so not a fashion girl.

KB: Really?

AM: Fashion is not my jam.

KB: You could never tell with that top.

TO: I was going to say you're very coordinated.

AM: Well, it's all right. I can clean myself up, but hanging around the house, I'm just, you know, I'm low down, old clothes, wearing the same things for 20 years. You know, I am, if you gave me a choice between spending the afternoon at a high-end mall or going to the woods, there wouldn't even be a question in my mind. The woods.

KB: The woods

AM: The woods. Yeah. Not big on fashion. So it is I do see the irony in my selection of this topic, but quite frankly, I think that there are other things that were driving my interest. I think a big piece of my interest in these women came from my own business experience running a business for 30 years. And I could totally relate to what these people were going through, and I could see where people were having challenges as I pulled information out like, Oh my God, she's moved the business again. She's at her fourth address in three years. Like, my heart went out to these women.

KB: Now you're mentioning, we are recording and you keep mentioning, you know, your business that you've had for 30 years. We've talked on the phone and you've explained your business to me that you from what I understood, you took, you did a lot of licensing for allowing people to use certain products or things within a film.

AM: It's related to that. We prepare what are called script clearance reports, so we read through a script that's about to become a television show or a movie, and we pull out a list of every character, name, every business name, every product name, all the people who are being discussed, and we essentially put together a report that the lawyers can look at to see which story elements are going to be a problem. So if you're accidentally identifying the only person in the state of New York who's a lawyer by the name and your character is a lawyer and an ax murderer, we're going to find this out for you and we're going to give you some other names to use instead. Same process with business names. Say the ax murderer spends his evenings at the local cocktail lounge, and the cocktail lounge is called, you know, Lickety Split, and it's in New York City. So we want to make sure that there's not going to be a business in New York City that will feel identified and file suit against the production. We also tracked down rights holders. So this is close to what you were referring to, say the script says, "Enter the bedroom of a teenage boy." His bedroom walls are covered with superhero posters. Okay, so every one of those posters has one, two, maybe three levels of copyright in them. There's the copyright for the graphic designer for the poster. There's the copyright for the... I won't even get into the whole long list,

but we track down contact information for all the copyright holders so that production can then contact them and get everything signed off on.

KB: So a production team usually hires your company to do this service for them?

AM: Yeah. Yeah. And the other thing that we do, they're called title searches. So we'll be contacted by a project that has a certain title, say, you know, "Six Chairs Around a Table" and they say, "What's out there that's close to our title?" You don't want to release your movie with the same title as something else that's about to come out or something that has a trademark registration for Paramount Pictures. You know, so we go through a long list of entities like film and television productions, publishing, radio, plays, trademark registrations, copyright registrations. What's out there about your titles? So some of these reports are like 30 or 40 pages long.

KB: I was going to say it seems like a lot that goes into it.

AM: Yes, it's very detail oriented and intense deadlines. Yesterday, everything is yesterday. It's nonstop. Yeah. So that has given me good skills for project management for a book, for sure.

KB: Yes. How big would you say your facility is? How many people that like on a team does it take to do these services for a production company?

AM: One person reads a script and does all the work.

KB: Really?

AM: Yes. Well, there are seven of us right now. So, you know, someone comes in, we put it on the schedule, and when you come in in the morning, you look to see what needs to be done that day and you just grab it.

TO: How did you gravitate towards the business side of film, with your background in English and Film and Literature?

AM: Well, I finished college with that English degree I told you about, and then I jumped around at a bunch of film type jobs in the Boston area. I was a manager for a few different movie theaters. I worked for a film booker. I did some writing, like movie reviews and stuff. I was the manager for a small production company, they had a lending library of their titles that I sort of was the person who, you know, sent them all, got them in and make sure things got checked in

case you need production assistant help if they were shooting something. So I worked on just a whole bunch of different film industry jobs in Boston. But I got to the point where I felt like I had sort of plateaued. So I thought, I'm going to go back to school because I'm definitely interested in the film industry. And so I applied to graduate school. I ended up going to UCLA, to the film school there. And so that was two years, it was a critical studies degree, it was watching a ton of movies, writing, writing, writing, lots of writing. We had to do production classes as well. We had to do screenwriting class. I mean, they made sure you had great sympathy for everyone you were about to be writing about. You know, you need a lot of humility. If you're going to be a film critic, you need to know what's involved in making a movie. It's a difficult job. So the more you do it yourself, the better equipped you are to talk about other people's work and it helps you to stay grounded, I think. So when I finished that degree, there were so many things I could have done. I applied for a lot of different jobs, and there was one that I came across that sounded interesting, and it was doing this work. Reading scripts because I love the research, I love the research, finding stuff out, the digging and reading, just reading all day, finding stuff out. Deadlines, reports. It just seemed like a good match for me. So that's how I ended up doing it. I didn't start out to be a business owner.

I did this for a company in Burbank, California, right like two blocks from the Warner Brothers lot. So I lived in Southern California for about five years, and I worked at that job for about three years. And I decided that I didn't want to stay there and I was going to move back to New England, and I thought, there's a massive underserved market, and that is everyone making movies outside of L.A. County. Like no other company, provided the service outside of Los Angeles. And there's production everywhere. New York, Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, I mean, everywhere. Some cities have a bigger community than others. But I thought, I'm going to give this a try. So I called it Eastern Script, and that was 30 years ago in September. And it was just me for years, just me doing the reading and the writing, but you learn the business stuff as you go. Like I said before, you know, we don't have enough money, what am I not going to pay this month? You know, that sort of thing or, you know, we have a lot of money, what should I do with it? You know, should people get raises? Should we buy these things? You know, the money stuff. So that's how I got into the business part of things. Just by jumping in.

KB: So with your business background, and your most recent project that you've told us, you started a couple of years ago, you said you started it during COVID right?

AM: The book?

KB: Yeah.

AM: Yes.

KB: So is there anything that you learned along the way of being like an author, a researcher, a businesswoman? Key things that you would give out to those also trying to do the same?

AM: Well. When I started this project, I didn't know it was going to be a book. So I started looking and I started finding stuff and I found more and more stuff and I decided I'm going to just write, I'm going to just start writing it, to write one little profile. And then I thought, well, maybe I should put some stuff at the website, set up a website. And one thing led to another. And the website had enough material at it that people were saying to me, "You know, this should really be a book, there's so much material here." So had I known that at the start, I would have done things differently, especially around the images, because for the last few months I've had to go back to the beginning, the images that I first found to use at the Web site. And, you know, quite frankly, I didn't get detailed permissions for using stuff for the website. It's easy to fix something at a website. You just remove the picture. But a book, not so much. So if I had known three years ago that this was going to become a book, I would have kept extraordinarily detailed notes about where the image came from, what the rights information was at that page, the URL that I got it from everything I'm having now to go back to do that. It's not rocket science, it's just time consuming. So that's one thing I would have done differently. And if I do work on another book, I'll be very mindful of that or even another project, because we know now what can happen to these projects, they can turn into books. So that's one thing I would do again. Another thing I learned, I guess I already knew this, but people are so generous with their time. Just amazing. Like strangers. Complete strangers. You know, I'm doing this project. I'm looking for information about, you know, for example, about that Madison, Ohio thing. I must have emailed with this guy, Chuck Reed. I must have emailed with him, I don't know, five, ten times back and forth. How about this? How about that? And finally, at one point he emailed back, he said, "Well, how much information do you want? Do you want a lot?" I said, "Well, you know, as much as you want to share." And he said, "Okay, give me a little bit of time". And mind you, this is a person who's got a full-time job somewhere. I'm not his job.

KB: Yeah.

AM: A few weeks went by and I went out to the mailbox one day and there were two envelopes there that were too big even to fit in the mailbox. They were like the nine by twelves packed to the gills. Close to a hundred pages. He had pulled the property records for every single owner of both of the properties that her family owned. Every deed with, with the handwriting on it. Like I saw her handwriting for the first time [gasp]. And so this is a complete stranger. This is one of many examples of this sort of thing. People are excited about projects like this, and this

was an interesting project. People are like, “Wow, that's fascinating”. Local people are really interested. Yeah, there was a woman who did some property research for me in Worcester; I had gone to the Worcester County Register of Deeds website to try to figure out if Mary Bowne, the owner of Ivy Corsets, if she owned her property that she lived in from the teens to the late twenties. Because one of the things that was discovered was that some of these women, who were self-employed, the corsetieres—the small proprietor people on Main Street—they made enough money to buy their own homes. like, before World War One. As a single woman.

KB: Yeah.

AM: That blew my mind. And I thought, I wonder if she owned her house, too. So I started looking at the website and I found the website really difficult to navigate. I emailed with the woman who ran the office. She told me a few things and I tried to walk through. I was like, “I'm just going to hire someone.” I hired a few people to help at junctures where it just seemed like a waste of my time to keep, you know, banging my head against a wall. So she said, “Oh, we don't provide that help service here at the office, but we have a list of like ten or 15 title examiners who you could contact and they could help you.” I called the first person on the list—I actually emailed them. “Sorry. Too busy.” Next person. “Yeah, I know. Can't help with that.” Next person. “Yeah, I know. I'm fully booked, like for seven months.” I mean, literally the fifth person I contacted, she said, “Oh, my God, this is fascinating. My aunt or mother worked in one of those clothing factories in Worcester for years.” It wasn't a corset factory. It was like a different clothing manufacturer. She was taken by it right away. She said, “Tell me what you need. I'll take care of it.” Refused to take money from me. So that was another great lesson from this is just how generous people can be. Very generous.

KB: I'm so honestly surprised by that answer. I don't know why. I'm just like, that's not usually the thing that you hear that people are generous with their time.

AM: I found a lot of people who are super generous with their time, which is, you know, very heartwarming.

KB: Yeah, definitely encouraging. Can you tell? This is our first interview.

AM: Do you want to hear about the book?

KB: Yeah. Yeah, we would love to.

TO: Sure.

AM: How much time do we have?

KB: We have as much time as you want. No worries.

AM: So I started with curiosity about this woman because I saw that Ivy Corset sign, and I heard that the Ivy Corset factory was owned by a woman, but I couldn't find out anything about her... like, nothing had been written. And I thought that was weird. Kind of awful. It's all about the men.

KB: Yeah.

TO: Yikes.

AM: In the introduction to the book, I talk about the Worcester Historical Museum's library. Have you guys been in the museum?

KB: I think we have--I have.

TO: I think I have.

AM: It's worth checking out. It's a pretty interesting place. It's not too big. You know, an hour will do it. Yeah, at the most. But there's a library attached to the museum, a research library, and that was where I did most of my volunteering. They have a shelf in that library of all the business luminaries of the city. Here's all them hotshot, big shot, money bags people. Not a single woman on a shelf, in none of the books [raps on desk with fist]. Which really made me mad [laughs].

KB: Yeah.

AM: So, that was another reason I kept going, because I thought this woman really had a tough row to hoe. The corset manufacturing industry was run by men, ironically...

TO: Yeah [laughs]

AM: ...But she realized, then started using this in her advertisements, that women were interested in buying corsets that were designed by a woman. And she was a premier corset designer. She worked herself up from small town Ohio. That little teeny town I told you about, that's where she started. Then she went to a bigger town in Ohio, Springfield. Then she moved

her mother and her sister to New York City, and she had a corset shop in Soho for a couple of years, right around the turn of the century, 1899, 1900. And then she showed up in Worcester a few years later as a saleswoman for Royal Worcester. And that year, later that year, she opened her factory and she ran that factory for 60 years. So I thought it was a story worth telling. And as I kept digging for information about her, I felt, look at all these other people, look at all these other accomplishments. There were a lot of women who worked at the big factories in the city who got sick of working in the big factories and thought, I'm going to do this on my own and I'm going to try it. I'm going to just find a cheap place downtown. And many of these people were on Main Street, right in downtown Worcester, and some of them were in business for over 30 years. Which I thought was also amazing, because when we talk about, you know, business history, it's always about the men. And I have a great photograph from when Mary's company was really getting off the ground. She had, like, a sales staff. She decided she was going to open up a chain of shops that sold her corsets and they spread across the country. So that was sort of visionary. But there's a great photo of one of her salesmen, Jack Reidy, at a long table, twice as long as this, [gestures to table at which she is seated] at a posh hotel like 1919 or something, 1918, -19. And this table is surrounded by men, and they're dressed to the nines: tuxedos...

TO: [Laughs]

AM: ...White scarves, the china crystal glasses. They're all looking over at the camera. And these men are the Corset Club of New York City.

TO: No way

KB: Isn't it scary to think about, like, how much history is just...

AM: Yup.

KB: ...hidden.

AM: So at the end when I'm sort of summarizing things, I discovered that there's a couple—there are some people who design fashion here in Worcester right now, and they've got their own businesses similar to the corsetieres, you know, like one person operations, you know, working 50-60 hours a week at their rented place with the dog at her foot...

KB: [Laughs]

AM: ... You know, going out to get coffee every now and then just to see the rest of the world. But a strange coincidence—one of the people making fashion in Worcester right now, she has some corsets among her product lines.

TO: Oh

AM: There were a couple of people who had corsets because there is sort of a thing now.

KB: Yeah, they're coming back to trend.

AM: Yeah, you know, it's a red-carpet thing. It's like, you know, if you go to a fancy party, you might want to impress. So guess where her shop is?

KB: Is it Main Street?

AM: It's in the Ivy Corset building.

TO: No way. Oh, that's so cool.

KB: Do you include that in your...not to spoil it.

AM: Oh, yeah. When I interviewed her, I was so thrilled to find a corsetiere who, finally, I could interview.

TO: Yay.

KB: That's really cool.

AM: So I spoke with her for a while. So that's the end of the book, is an interview with her. And then the very final paragraph, I just sort of imagine how the industry would have been different if all these women had been at the same table. Edith Salgstrom, the corsetiere who had a 32-year shop...Mary Bowne, who ran that factory for 60 years. I profile a woman who was a medical doctor in Worcester in the 1800s...

TO: Wow

AM: ...Who was an ardent anti-corset spokesperson on the lecture circuit. There was a woman named Lavinia Foy in the mid-1800s who was a patent owner and designer of corsets in the city,

went on to become a millionaire, died allegedly the richest woman in Connecticut when she died...

TO: Oh my goodness

AM: ...How she made so much money from her patents and licensing. So I just imagine at the end of the book how different the industry would have been if all these people had been sitting at that table instead of all those men in their stuffy shirts [laughs]! So that's a big part of the book, too, is just, you know, telling the women's story because they don't get told as often as you might like.

KB: You might hope.

AM: Yeah, yep

KB: That's really a beautiful ending.

TO: It is.

KB: I would really appreciate it when the book is out and everything, let us know.

AM: Absolutely. Now we'll have to get you guys on the mailing list.

KB: Yeah, I know. We talked about that. I'm waiting.

AM: So, the book—so the book is, it's profiles of different women. There are four chapters about Mary Bowne, the Ivy Corset Woman, and then there's a chapter about Edith Salgstrom, who was a corsetiere, about Emma Kemp, who was a corsetiere, about May Cosgrove, who was a corsetiere. There are two chapters that feature buildings in downtown Worcester, the Burnside Building and the Slater building, both right downtown like two blocks from City Hall. Each of those buildings had seven different corset businesses in them over the years, so I profiled every single corset maker in the building. There's a chapter about labor conditions in the industry. What was it like to work in the factories? How did it change? Was labor involved? Was labor involved in Worcester? I like that chapter. I find that part to be really interesting. I went to a few archives to do some digging. And one of the best things I found for the book was that the Schlesinger Archive at Harvard, which is all women's history, it's a fascinating place. There were a bunch, of course, related files there, and I emailed them and asked them if I could come in and take a look. And one of them, and I don't think this letter's ever been published, there was a letter

from a young woman named Jenny Malasky, and she'd written to the Women's Trade Union League in New York City. They were a small group of women, early 20th century, who were ardent labor activists, and they would find young women they recruit. You know, "Tara, Katie, head over to the Madame Irene corsets and tell them you're a stitcher and get hired for the next two weeks." And then these people would infiltrate and they'd get the union word out [laughs].

TO: Oh my goodness, wow

KB: Wow

AM: Pretty cool, right?

TO: Yeah.

AM: So this, this young woman, Jenny Malasky, there's a letter from her to the Women's Trade Union League describing in great detail the horrific conditions at the corset place that she's working at. It started out there, 30 people working there. There's now 150 in this, like, narrow building.

TO: Oh my gosh

AM: And I can just imagine how crowded it was. They would start the day. The guy would walk in on the chalkboard, he'd write the rate of pay for the hour, for the day, and as the day progressed, he'd keep erasing it and dropping the rate of pay.

TO: Oh my god

AM: So you would have no idea how much money you were going to make that day...

KB: No

AM: ...Until the end of the day when you realized you'd made nothing, essentially. So this girl said, please, please help us unionize in here. This is the most oppressed industry I've ever worked in. Sad. Yeah. So anyway, I found some good stuff like that too.

KB: Was there anything that, like, you were really surprised to find in your research? Because it sounds like you have a really well-rounded book, so I'm sure you kind of had to, like, reach all over the place.

AM: Well, I know this sounds naive, but I was truly surprised at the depth of the greed in the corset industry. Appalling. So you—you two are working at the factory. And I already told you about the rate of pay thing that's going to happen to you. You have to buy your own thread...

TO: What?

AM: ...And you have to buy the thread that you're going to use that day.

TO: Oh my goodness

AM: And you have to buy it at factory rates. You can't buy any old thread. You got to buy...

KB: Their thread?

AM: ...Thread from the company store. You two have money taken out of your paycheck for the person who washes the floors and for the lights. Furthermore, any time you're stitching along in that machine and a drop of grease from the sewing machine gets onto the fabric, you're fined.

TO: Oh my gosh

AM: Every grease splatter you get fined for. These women made nothing. I was—I was really shocked by that. Pretty jaw dropping. That took a while to change.

KB: How long?

AM: Well, in Massachusetts—Massachusetts has been a very progressive state in terms of labor and health and safety stuff so early in the century before World War One. The state convened a minimum wage board. It's a right. We're going to put a group of people together, different group for a bunch of different industries. And those people are going to go in and investigate and they're going to find out how much everyone's getting paid, and how that compares rates, you know, to other places around the country and to other industries. And we're gonna—we're gonna set a level playing field. We're going to set some minimum wages in the state. So that first inquiry happened before World War One. And then the union organizing that was happening in Worcester also was happening before World War One. And then after the war. When the war began, obviously all bets were off, like all the factories were converted to wartime manufacturing. Even the corset factories were making, you know, parachutes and knapsacks and anything that needed to be sewn during the war. In Massachusetts, the minimum wage board set some standards. And I think that took a lot of heat off of the factory workers and the factory

owners. And the other stuff slowly, you know, union—unions and labor got concessions, you know, more of the thread stuff, no more of the fines for the splatters, you know, just a lot of work from a lot of people organizing and advocating.

KB: Yeah, well, I can just tell that you fully have involved yourself into this project, it has been like...does your family...what does your family say? When you tell them...

AM: Well, I've got a mom and a sister who are very interested. My brothers are minimally interested [laughs]. Oh, yeah, no, they're thrilled. They think it's great. They think it's great. And it's also been a—it's been a great non-work outlet for me. Like, I've got another direction now, you know, I'm going to be retiring in not too long. I'm 62 now, so I can see the course that my retirement is going to take. I'm going to find my next project and keep working.

KB: Not to like, if you don't obviously feel free, you can deny any questions... but what does the path to retirement look like for you? What do you imagine?

AM: Well, I've already cut back. I'm working a three-day workweek now. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. And I think that's going to help me for a few years. I might go to like half time next year, and that's made a big difference already in terms of...

KB: Yeah.

AM: You know, feeling so sick of everything. I'm not quite as sick as I was before, but when you're at anything for 30 years, you get tired [laughs]. And so, yeah. So, this has been a good way for me to get my brain out of the work environment and also become excited about something else. Another direction that I can go in.

KB: Yeah. And...

TO: I'm sorry, you know, like, do you see after you retire yourself, like pursuing projects of a similar nature?

AM: Absolutely.

TO: Oh cool, okay

AM: I'm looking for my next project now.

TO: Oh, okay

AM: I have a few ideas.

TO: Do you think you want to stay with Worcester local history or..?

AM: I don't know. There's a few ideas I have. I'm just looking for something that I can really sink my teeth into.

TO: Yeah.

AM: You know it when you see it, right? When you see it. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

KB: That's...I always have a really hard time trying to figure out what I'm going to do, too. If you want to share maybe ideas you're talking about, but feel like I said, feel free you don't have to.

AM: Well, I guess I'm going to hold off on sharing my ideas.

KB: That is probably smart. Yeah. I wouldn't want anyone to steal them.

AM: Keep my cards close to the vest [laughs].

KB: Yeah. You got to save them for the right time.

AM: Yeah. Yeah.

KB: So you have, obviously, the business. You've been working on this project. Your family.

AM: Mm-hmm.

KB: Different priorities. Responsibilities. How do you balance all of that in your life? What are the mechanisms that you use?

AM: Well, I get a lot of exercise that I try to do on a regular basis. And when things are getting crazy, I just walk away and close my eyes for half an hour. That's been my new thing the last couple years. I'll just leave where I am, go into another room, and close my eyes and set an alarm for 30 minutes. That, I love to do. And it's amazing how often I'll actually drift away in that 30

minute period of time. But it's like a reset. It's great. I'll go for a long walk. I live on one of the hills in Worcester, so up and down the hill a couple of times that cleans my slate and I always have things planned to look forward to, trips coming up, things like that. I have a daughter who's in high school, so that's a huge focus for me when I'm not at work.

KB: Yeah.

AM: Just keeping her on the straight and narrow.

KB: Yeah. So we haven't really heard too much about your family situation. So you have a daughter.

AM: Yep.

KB: Do you have any other children?

AM: No, it's me and my daughter. The two of us. Yeah. We have an all-girl house.

TO: Yay!

AM: [Laughs]

KB: Yeah, I have a single mom, too. I totally resonate. Are you and your daughter really close because of that?

AM: I'd say so, yeah. Yeah. She's done illustrations for the book, which are absolutely beautiful.

TO: No way!

AM: Oh, my God. They're stunning. She's a very gifted artist.

TO: That's very cool.

AM: And it was her idea last year. She said, "I can help with that book, you know." So I said, "Yeah, what do you want to do?" She said—because she's a really good artist—she said, "Do some drawings for you." I said, "All right, show me what you got."

TO: Oh my goodness.

AM: And she did. And I sent them to the publisher last month and the publisher said, “These are terrific.”

TO: Wow.

AM: Which made her day. You know, when you're 17, you don't hear that from adult strangers very often. So, yeah, she...it's a family project now.

TO: Very cool.

KB: That is so touching. Does she want to pursue art, do you know?

AM: Possibly. She's at Worcester Tech. So she's—do you know anything about Worcester Tech?

TO: I do not.

KB: No.

AM: So, it's the trade school in the city. You know, you get a high school degree and you get a trade degree at the same time.

TO: Oh wow.

AM: You know, there are people who leave there and go to Ivy League schools and people who go off to \$90 an hour welding jobs.

KB: Yeah.

TO: Yeah.

AM: It's great. It's a fabulous school. So halfway through your freshman year, after you've shopped the shops around for some months, you decide which shop you're going to be in, if there's room in it. And she's in carpentry.

KB: Wow.

AM: So she'll finish high school with something like the equivalent of 150 hours of apprenticeship...

TO: Oh my goodness

AM: ...For the Carpenters Union. Well, and she'll also be OSHA certified. So she could, you know, she could probably start doing a carpentry job right away...

TO: Yeah, that's very cool.

AM: Which might be... I'm kind of encouraging her to look into that, even just halftime because as you both know, making a living as an artist is brutal. So that might be something she can keep for herself, for her fun and for, you know, gravy.

KB: Yeah.

AM: Gravy money. Do it on the side. Yeah, it's—I know people who are artists. It's just, it's. Oh, you know, there are ways to do it professionally. You know, you can be a graphic artist, but I think for the type of stuff she likes to do, I think it might be better for her to keep that for herself.

KB: Yeah.

AM: Not have to put the pressure on that skill as her employment. Sometimes it takes the fun out of it too.

KB: Yeah, it really does. And carpentry, we're always going to need that.

AM: Oh yeah.

KB: Trade schools are...yeah. That's fantastic though.

AM: I'm proud of her.

KB: Of course.

AM: I'm proud of her.

KB: Is she graduating this year or next year?

AM: Yeah, she'll graduate in...I think the last day of classes for seniors is May 24th and she'll graduate in June.

TO: It's coming up.

AM: Yeah, it is.

TO: It's very interesting that you're pursuing this kind of very materially-focused project and she's also very into the physical manifestation of art. I don't know, carpentry with corsetry...it's very interesting.

AM: Yes, that's a good point.

TO: Yeah. I wonder... I don't know. She could...

AM: That is a very good point. They're both construction. Yeah. I mean, the construction of a corset, it—it is so elaborate. It's a very, very long process to make a corset.

TO: I feel like you both probably have a unique appreciation for the other person's work.

AM: That's a good take. I'm going to share that with my daughter. There you go.

KB: Are you excited for her graduation? I know. It's sort of a bitter, bittersweet moment.

AM: Oh, no, I don't think it's bitter at all. Oh, it's very sweet. Very sweet.

TO: Oh, good.

AM: Yeah, she...unlike as I've told you, I was always doing my school work, on top of things. School has not been her preferred place to be.

KB: Yeah.

AM: School's been tough, you know, it's just challenging for her.

KB: It's not for everybody in that way, I think. And the way, I think, the education system designs things, it's just very cookie cutter sometimes.

AM: Yep.

KB: And not everybody can fit in that cookie cutter.

AM: Yep. And I'm grateful that she was able to get into Tech because it's super competitive to get into that school.

KB: It is. Tech schools are very impressive to get into.

AM: And she had...so the way they structure it is you alternate weeks. Academic week, shop week, academic week. So every other week she's not sitting at a desk with expectations and a pencil in her hand, and proofs that need to be done and detailed algorithmic, you know, I look at the math stuff that she has to do and it blows my mind, way beyond where I was when I finished high school. And she's not interested in it. I wasn't either [laughs]. It's hard, you know, it's hard to stay involved and engaged when it feels that abstract and challenging to. So, so I was glad that she had the option to go to a school where on alternate weeks she could actually put her hands on things and pieces, put pieces of things together, build a staircase, and they're building a house not far from here.

KB: Wow

TO: That's very cool.

KB: Her class is building it?

AM: Yeah, just her class. Yeah. Yeah, there are two houses for homeless people in Worcester. One of them is complete, and the one next to it, they're halfway through the second story.

KB: Wow

AM: So she's, you know, through the winter and the snow there at the job site.

TO: Wow, very cool

AM: So she knows enough from her experience of the job site that she has decided she does not want to do that kind of carpentry... stuff that involves outdoors. She wants to do more of the indoor finished work like cabinets and staircases and things... keep out of the -14 degrees.

TO: Yeah

AM: Mhm

KB: Yeah, that's cool. I couldn't figure any of that stuff out.

AM: Mhm, yep

KB: Brilliant

AM: And it'll be handy to have a carpenter in the family.

TO: [Laughs]

KB: I was going to say, now you've got a handyman.

AM: Handy woman. [Laughs]

KB: Handy woman!

AM: Yes, indeed

KB: Yeah, so kind of going off topic a little bit, wanting to get back on to you, even though I love talking about your daughter. Do you have any, like, hobbies or leisure activities that you enjoy? You know, you said exercising, but like something we wouldn't know about you.

AM: The book has really been my hobby.

KB: [Laughs]

AM: Say, what other hobbies do I have? I've been taking violin lessons for a while now.

TO: Ooh!

AM: So I'm trying to play violin. It's probably been five years, so I guess that's a hobby. I do some beadwork sometimes, you know, stringing beads, combining beads, necklaces, bracelets

and stuff. I like doing that. I find that very relaxing. I spend time with friends, family. That's my free time.

KB: Yeah, just the typical

AM: Yeah

KB: Violin, that's very impressive.

AM: Oh, big reader, big reader

KB: Really?

AM: Yeah. I've always got a few books going, usually like a fiction and nonfiction book at same time.

KB: Which one... are you reading anything right now?

AM: Right now, for book club I'm reading something called *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

TO: [Gasps] I love that book!

AM: Yeah, I'm about 100 pages in and it's starting to pick up steam. The beginning, I wasn't sure I was going to make it through, but I'm getting into her groove now.

TO: Yeah, she's a very powerful storyteller.

AM: It's— it's written by a woman who's an academic botanist. She teaches botany.

KB: Like the study of plants?

AM: Yep

KB: Okay

AM: She's First Nation, she's Pottawattamie. So...and she's a mother of two girls. So it's really like the intertwining of those three, how each of those affect her look on life, taking care of her

property, like, she gets into some real minutia. How would you describe the book? It's almost like a memoir in some ways too.

TO: Yeah, she combines different aspects of growing up with, like, “This is what plant I was looking at then,” or “this was growing near my house at the time when my parents were going through a divorce,” or something. So it’s very, very intertwined and interesting.

AM: Yes

TO: And then she incorporates her Indigenous background. She'll talk about different folktales. It’s really cool.

AM: Yes. So I'm reading that. And then I picked up a collection of short stories by someone named Laurie Moore, who I didn't know. Someone had recommended them. I think she got her start at *The New Yorker* in the 1980s. They're good. They're really good. That's what I'm reading right now.

KB: I'm definitely going to have to write down the...

AM: *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

KB: *Braiding Sweetgrass*, when I get the time. The semester gets crazy. I mean, I wish I had more.

AM: Yeah, I know how it is. When you're in school, you can't read for fun.

KB: I'm sure you do! Oh, yeah. So kind of a different question, if that's okay. How do you define success in your life? And has this changed over time?

AM: For me?

KB: Yeah. For you personally

AM: Well, being able to pay the bills is being a success, I think [laughs]. For me, you know, just being able to support myself for this many years. I think part of success is also just happiness. You know, are you happy with what you're doing all day? I don't think I'd feel successful if I were working on things that were driving me crazy and making me stressed. So I think that's a big piece of success for me, is just being happy with what I do every day.

KB: That's beautiful.

AM: Mhm

KB: I really hate to end our discussion, but I just got someone here...

AM: Is someone at the door?

KB: ...Telling us that our time is up, unfortunately.

TO: Oh, okay.

AM: Oh, yeah, it's late. Has it gone for over an hour?

TO: Just a little.

KB: No, we've only gone over 4 minutes.

TO: But thank you!

KB: They came for us quick, but thank you so much.

AM: You guys did great.