

Interviewee: Allison Chisolm Hansen
Interviewers: Dane Myers-Adams, Elizabeth Kayetesi
Date of Interview: November 13, 2014
Location: Assumption College



Overseen by: Profs. Christine Keating and Leslie Choquette, Assumption College

Abstract: Allison Chisolm Hansen was born in New York, New York in the early 1970s where she attended Chapin High School. Allison met her future husband shortly after college and later had two children with him. By the age of 24, Allison found her way to Somerville, Massachusetts where she resided for nearly two years. In this interview, Allison speaks of wonderful journey and path she took to get to the position she is in today. Living and working in many different places such as New York City, London, and Worcester, Allison shares many of her important past times that molded her into the woman she is today. She discusses the challenges she faced in building up a successful business as a self-employed woman in the workforce. Allison elaborates upon the importance of family businesses in her life and gives advice to future women entrepreneurs. In this interview, Allison also touches on her experiences as a young working mother and the changes that she witnessed in the Worcester/Greater Boston area over the years.

DM: So the first question is, what is your full name including both maiden name and your married name if applicable?

AC: Allison Chisolm Hansen

DM: And where were you born?

AC: New York City

DM: Do you have children?

AC: Yes, I have two children.

DM: What are their names, boy or girl?

AC: Catherine is a girl, she is 23. William is a boy, he's 19.

DM: Ok. And the next question is what cultures or ethnicities do you identify your family with? Like your family background.

AC: I am a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant and I think they call them WASPs [laughs]. My family came over from Scotland in 1747, so we were busy fighting the English in this

battle of Culloden in 1745. And we were supporting Bonnie Prince Charlie so we were not on the right side of history; it was time to find a new location so we found South Carolina.

DM: Well, you actually answered my next question, which was about telling me more about your parents' life.

AC: Well those weren't my parents; my parents were not born in the 1700s.

DM: Oh no I was saying... [laughs].

AC: So, my mom is from Baltimore and my dad is from New York. His dad came to New York, I think after he finished studying law. So, in the early 1900s my dad was born in New York at home in 1924. They didn't hospital births quite yet; his little brother was born in a hospital. Yeah, he was born at home.

DM: Besides New York, have you lived anywhere like during growing up besides New York.

AC: Well, not in my growing up years. I am a native New Yorker and I lived there until I was 24. Then I moved to Summerville, Massachusetts and I lived there for—no wait, yeah, 2 years till '86 to '88 and then I got married and then I moved to England. And I lived in London from 1988 till early 1990 and then I moved back to New York until 1992 when I moved to Worcester.

DM: Sounds like a journey.

AC: I've been around.

DM: [Laughs]

AC: And then we left Worcester and in '95 my son was 12 weeks old and we moved to England for a year. My husband was doing research in Cambridge.

DM: Can you describe what your neighborhood was like? Like a very diverse neighborhood or.....

AC: Growing up?

DM: Or...

AC: Or where I live now?

DM: Growing up, living either or...

AC: Growing up I lived on the Upper Eastside of Manhattan. It's called Carnegie Hill. I did live on a hill [laughs]. I lived north of 86th street so some people thought that was not as desirable of an address, but it was amazing. I mean I was a block from Central Park. The Guggenheim Museum was down the street; the playground was on 85th street. The Metropolitan Museum was on 82nd street, it was, it was a nice place to live. Of course growing up you have no idea, I thought people with backyards like my cousins in New Jersey, they had it great, they had a house. They had stairs when you want to make the slinky walk down the stairs? I had to go to the fire escape to do that, I didn't have stairs. And I sure didn't have a backyard so I had Central Park but Central Park was not in great shape back then, it was sort of falling apart in the 7'0s. The city was bankrupt so it was a nice backyard, sort of, 800 acres, but different.

DM: Do you have any family members that live in Worcester area? At all?

AC: No we moved up here solo. My husband's cousin lives in Grafton and his aunt lives in Lynn which isn't exactly anywhere near Worcester, but no, my family is down in New York and his is in Philadelphia area.

DM: Does that have a great effect on you, not being around like your family as much?

AC: Well you get used to it. It's not great but my husband is a professor and you go where tenure track jobs are. If you can find a tenured, a position that could lead tenure, it's important to be able to move. So that's what we did, we came to Worcester because he had a job offer from WPI [Worcester Polytechnic Institute].

DM: During your time living in Worcester, like have you seen a change drastically? Or noticed any change?

AC: I wouldn't say it's drastic, but I mean we got here in '92 and there was no train service to Boston at all so the trains came in '94. That was a big difference, but I mean all the highways have already been built and all that. I mean the stuff that's happened since then is they put more signs up on the roads 'cause they had city manager that was not from Worcester so Tom Hoover thank you very much. I mean they spent years talking about how Worcester is on the edge of something big and it's been on the edge for 20 years so you know [laughs]. I think the city—it's the biotech park that was growing. I worked at UMass for two years so they were all excited about that and it's still growing and it still has companies coming out of it but they're small. It's a city with an inferiority complex you know, compared to Boston and they're trying to get over it. You know, it's a gut-always to go; it's a college town and it's only beginning to start acting like a college town. I mean you guys are college kids; do you ever go downtown Worcester, do you travel around the city at all?

DM: Um I try to. [Laughter]

AC: Well that's good, I'll give you credit for that 'cause that's not all that typical and they've come up with reasons to get students to leave campus and actually be a part of the city. So I am seeing that shift, very, very slow shift, but Gateway Park is cool that use to be an industrial wasteland and had an old warehouse that sold supplies when I first moved here and that's all been cleaned up and there's some spiffy new buildings and a hotel so that's progress, you know if you can convert old industrial land into something more useful that won't poison people it's a good thing.

DM: To touch up on that, if you had to describe Worcester as like what makes Worcester, what characteristics would you use?

AC: Well Worcester is gritty. I mean they're still suffering from when the *Wall Street Journal* called them the utility closet of the northeast but it's got a nice urban vibe. I think that coming from New York, I didn't see right away here, but because there are people here from every country on the planet, I mean there's 84 different languages spoken on the Worcester public schools. I think it's got a lot more to it than some people are willing to give it credit for, so if you live here and you actually seek out some of the more interesting diverse parts of the city you know, you get out of your own neighborhood. There's a lot going on here, you just have to look harder for it, it's not like served up on a plate for you.

DM: Sound good. I'm gonna jump to the education questions if you don't mind.

AC: Sure.

DM: So exactly where did you attend school?

AC: Well, I went to the same school for 12 years in New York. I went to an all-girls school called Chapin and then when I graduated from there I went to Princeton University and I was an English major there in the American studies program. They didn't have minors they called them programs.

EK: Yeah [Laughter]

AC: So that was the end of my education, I got a bachelor's degree and that's as far as I went. It's all been on the job training since then.

DM: What were your challenges in education?

AC: Well, it was interesting. My freshman year I had to take some science 'cause they had science requirements and I almost flunked physics. It was not easy, if a professor won the Nobel Peace Prize one week from Princeton. And so they cancelled the quiz that

week so he could tell us why he won the Nobel Prize, it had something to do with particles spinning or something.

DM/EK: [Laughter]

AC: So there was one less chance for me to fail a quiz and I think that helped make it a D not a F.

DM: [Laughter]

AC: So that's when I realized that perhaps science was not my calling and that was supposedly the easy physics class because it didn't require calculus. I should've taken the one with calculus 'cause I already had that. But really the biggest challenge at Princeton is the senior thesis. You have to do an independent project your senior year and I was trying to be smart and you do a—you do two smaller ones your junior year called JP's/Junior Papers. And so I took one of those papers and made it a chapter out of my senior thesis, but I spent an entire year studying American writers from the 1930s and looking at their social impact and 'cause they were socialist back when not everybody knew exactly what Stalin was doing in Russia. They had to sort of fantasy vision of what the Soviet Union could accomplish. And so I was reading history and English and politics you know, to get a sense of the period and do literary analysis and this thesis that had to be submitted the earliest deadline of any departments. We had to turn it in in March and it was I guess about 75 pages, but so that was independence scholarly research that was a huge, huge challenge. Nobody was happy senior year in the spring, you just didn't want to talk to seniors, but I had a carrel in the library, I could check out books too. I had a workspace to go to which was helpful, but that was definitely the biggest challenge and I got it done. You know if you could get that done then you can get this done too [raises her book]. She says pointing to the book she just published.

DM: [Laughter]

AC: But yeah that was definitely the biggest challenge. Everyone had to do it though I mean so you couldn't whine and feel special.

EK: Yeah.

DM: I can't imagine. Seventy-five pages that's a lot.

AC: Yeah, well and that was I mean, that was on the short side. Some of the people in the Woodrow Wilson School is like a political analysis. The people who really wanted to work in Washington went there and their theses generally were like 150 pages so 75, lightweight.

EK: (Laughter)

DM: Upon finishing formal education, what exactly did you see as your options coming out?

AC: Well, with an English major that was an interesting story actually. I went into career services and I took one of those tests that was like the Myers Briggs test to figure out, you know, what am I equipped for. You know what would match my personality and it came back that I should be a 1st grade teacher and that was like the last thing on the planet that I wanted it to be.

EK: [Laughter]

AC: I mean I love kids you know, at that point I didn't have any, but I just thought dealing with them all day was really not a great career idea for me. So once I started finish crying in the career office realizing I had no idea what I wanted to do and clearly they had no ideas for me either. I started doing something called information interviewing where you talk to people in whole bunch of different types of jobs. And that helped because they hadn't all been English majors, but they've been involved in writing and I remember I talked to in house the guy who wrote the newspaper that was handed out at Princeton to administrators, staff and you probably have something like it here at Assumption. So I talked to the editor of that and he's like, "Oh well, there's all these different things you can do if you know how to write." And that is the one thing about English majors do have going for them is that they do know how to write. And I said, "Oh ok that's interesting," and then he pointed a typo on my resume. [Laughs] Like ahh thank you very much.

EK: [Laughs]

AC: So it's like you won't get hired by anybody if you use that.

DM: [Laughs]

AC: I'm like, "Yeah, ok, that's good advice, thank you." And then I talked to some family friends and one person was involved in public relations and she sat me down and said there's marketing, there's direct mail, there's advertising, and public relations involves writing about companies and you need to tell the media about what the company is doing. But there all these different directions you can go like oh all different kinds of writing that sounds good. And then she introduced me to somebody else who told me some more about the work that she did for a particular company, she was in house doing marketing. I was like, "Oh alright," and then she introduced me to her boss who ended up being a client of an agency that I then applied for in New York and they made me do a writing test and they said here you need to write a press release here's the event. I had no idea what a press release was, that wasn't part of my major so I got a textbook out about public relations and it had a great little model of press release there so OH GOOD! I can

figure out how to write press release. I turned it in and I got my job. So I had to figure [it] out. There wasn't like at Princeton was a career office that said, "Oh English majors you need to know about all this." I basically had to figure it out myself, no one in my family had to do something like that before that kind of work so they were no help. But it kept me in New York too, which was good.

DM: [Laughter]

AC: Save some money where I could find an apartment I could afford.

DM: That's my plan.

AC: Yeah it's what you got to do.

DM: So did you have any like support networks or mentoring that were like specifically important to you?

AC: Well, I have to say, in the firm that I worked in I had some great friends at the agency and that we worked together but we were all sort of lower level people together. It was really—I didn't really have a mentor, but there was somebody who basically pointed work my way once I moved up here. I had met her—so we moved here in '92, I met her in about '97 and she was one of the first people—I started my business in '96, and she was one of the first people that said, "Oh I have ideas for you. I could use you as a writer." And so she was like a funnel for work for me and I think she understood what I could bring for her clients where she would come up with sort of the employ communications program and then certain pieces needed to be written to support that. So she was definitely a mentor for me because she was helping me identify the kinds of work that I could do. So, and then I found a couple of other people like that along the way who understand what I do and, you know, sort of not throw work my way but introduce me to opportunities. But I haven't really felt like I had one major career mentor, you know, it'll be nice if I had a grandmother or something that could've told me all about it but they both passed away while I was pretty young so that's one thing I've missed I think if I had stayed corporate, if I hadn't gone and started my own business. I might've found someone in the structure and I think corporations generally are trying to come up with systems to encourage women to move up the ranks and I opted out of that when I decided to go on my own. So, you know, I may still find a mentor I don't know.

DM: [Laughter] What other jobs have you had throughout your career?

AC: Well they've all been writing jobs. I think I was really fortunate in the sense that I figured out after I finished crying that writing was what I wanted to do and there was the question of figuring out what kind of writing so I worked at the PR agency and I got to write about corporate financial stuff 'cause that's New York. And then I quit and moved to Boston 'cause my boyfriend was up there. He was in a graduate program at Harvard

so we moved to Summerville and I got a job with Harvard University. On a temporary basis, they said we will just try you out and they had a newspaper sort of like that in house one I was telling you about at Princeton. They had one that's called the *Harvard Gazette* and it's published basically by the administration for the faculty and staff and maybe the students look at it occasionally. So, they had me as a reporter so I was writing about the—they just turned 350 years old so I was covering that event. I'd never really been a journalist before so I was winging it. They'd say, "Oh there's a new professor here go interview him," or "Somebody had written a book, write about that." So I did a lot of different kinds of writing and then after ten weeks they said, "Okay fine, we'll put you on payroll." So I was a writer for this newspaper for two years. So, that was exciting and then I got married and moved to England and so the agency that I'd been working for in New York had a London office so I got in touch. Never burn your bridges.

DM: [Laughter]

AC: And so I said, "Don't you need anybody?" and they said, "Well, maybe on a temporary basis." I'm thinking this is starting to sound familiar. We'll try you out, you know, and it turned out the person who was running the London office was planning to leave and starting her own business to compete against that agency. But once she left there I was, they didn't have to move somebody over from New York and pay moving cost and everything. Let me do it so I ran the office, it was me and secretary for about a year and a half. And so I was writing stuff for American clients that had British or European locations and so I was the face of the company in London for that period of time 'cause it would take at least that long for them to get some senior-level executive relocated and moved so I could've sort of hold down the fort. And then my husband basically finished the research he was doing on his dissertation and we moved back to New York and so I transferred within the agency to the New York office. And which was helpful 'cause my husband was still doing research so I was the bread winner...

DM: [Laughter]

AC: ...and so then I was doing back to corporate and financial PR. I worked on banks, investment banks, mutual funds, um one environmental consultant that would help you learn how to be green and a designer that was trying to create more green like shop fronts and products and sort of advised that way so that kind of work. And that was going great that was—I was getting promoted, I was moving up the ranks within the group I had been assigned to, and then my husband got this job in Worcester so I said, "Okay, I guess it's time to move...."

DM: [Laughter]

AC: ... "because I had our first kid at that point. I was using the feeble maternity benefits they have in the New York state. You're given six weeks of disabilities, you get some

pay, but not much and you have to declare yourself disabled even though you seem to be perfectly capable of waking up every three hours to feed that child [laughs] and all that other stuff. So, they were really good about managing my return to work after my maternity leave so it was great to have that history with that company. And that was a crazy time, I know this is jumping ahead to your other question, but my husband was an adjunct professor, teaching at City College of New York in the Bronx and so he would take the subway to teach his class, come back, and I would like hand him the baby and I would run to work and so like..

EK: Wow

AC: ...I had to come up with 30 hours a week to qualify for healthcare so I would work like 1-7 and then the next day would be like 9-3 because then he had to leave for class and I had to get home for coverage. Because the daycare wouldn't take her until she was 6 months old and I could only have maternity leave until she was three months old. So New York City is not exactly known for its advance daycare practices or at least not in the early '90s. So, that was really flexible 'cause that three month period between when I came back and when I could put her in daycare was crazy and my boss was like, "I don't know when I'm gonna see you, but just reassure me that you're gonna be here and get your work done." And I'm like, "Oh yeah, but just different hours." So, that was flexible but so they got me through that and then he got the job about a year later to move to Worcester so then I came up here and that was fun. I moved up here and I said I'm taking some time off. I've had enough with this billable hour craziness so I basically took a year to figure out Worcester. Get lost on all the roads, we had to buy a car, we didn't own a car in New York. Who has a car in New York?

DM: It's much more often now.

AC: Maybe in Queens but..

DM: Yeah.

AC: ...you want to park it in Manhattan it's like renting a studio..

DM/KE: [Laughs]

AC: Its crazy or you can spend your life doing alternate side of the street parking. So we moved to Worcester bought a car. He started teaching at WPI and I took a year to figure out what I wanted to do next because corporate and financial PR is not a big industry in Worcester. It is in Boston, but I really didn't want to commute, that is not a good commute with a kid, with a daycare center that closes at 5:30. Doesn't work, so I ended up finding a job at UMass Medical Center. So I switched from corporate and financial writing to healthcare and they're like, "Can you manage this?" and I'm like, "Yeah I think I can figure it out." So 'cause I was writing about what they were doing in the

hospital and what they were doing in the medical center and if someone was doing high-level research. Like I remember writing an article for the magazine on gene therapy. The readers of the magazine were not scientists, the readers were people who would want to give money to the hospital or were interested 'cause it's a state medical school supporting the school you know legislatively or whatever. They didn't need to know all the high level science so it had to be able to take what the scientist were saying and translate it into something that the rest of us could understand so I was able to do that. That was 'cause I been taking all this financial stuff nobody understood and tried explaining it in regular terminology...

AC: ...so I did that and that was '94 to '93-'95. And then I had my second kid and my husband got this post doc to go study in Cambridge, England. He got a National Humanities Grant which are pretty hard to get so I'm like fine I would leave my Massachusetts state job and move my 12 week old overseas. You know and the first kid was four by then and so we had an overseas move and I couldn't work in England. That wasn't allowed, but I could freelance kind of sort of 'cause I already knew WPI's alumni magazine and editor, I had done some freelance work for him during the year that I really wasn't working, but I was working a little and then o I did a little work there, but that was basically a year I was watching my son grow and living in England which was a lot of fun. I'd do that again in a heartbeat and if you want to meet people, have a baby in carriage. That's the way to do it. [laughs]

DM: That was actually going be my next question. Like what was it like in England? Like experiences..

AC: It was really interesting because obviously people have certain stereotypes about Americans and I was living very much in a community in Cambridge 'cause my daughter was going to school so I was meeting the other "mums" that also had kids in school. And the nice thing about England is they have this deal if you're a mom you get a child allowance, you get money. It's basically enough to cover diapers really. It doesn't really, it's not a big amount of money, but the government helps women stay out of the workforce for a year or two. And they also set up these things called The National Union of Mothers and they would have playgroups. So I would have places to go and other mothers to meet because I had this baby that was sort of an entrée into the community so that worked out really well and I was there long enough 'cause we were there for a whole year that they would start talking about Americans. And I'm like, "Remember I'm American," "Oh you're not like that." I was like, "Well, that's very nice to hear. Thank you." So clearly I had gone native while I was there and I came back and had a little bit of a British accent and my kid, my daughter, "Could we cut the grass now." [in British accent]

DM/EK/AC: [Laughs]

AC: It lasted about three weeks. She started kindergarten in Worcester and the accent was gone, but that was really fun living over there because I didn't have to work and I could just, you know, sort of insert myself into the community and try and figure it out. Meanwhile my husband was busy doing his research and you know communing with other academics.

DM: Sounds like an experience.

AC: It was.

EK: The good thing was that you were really flexible to do all those things.

AC: Right exactly! Because of his job and it wasn't a big grant that he had, but it was enough we could get that done and boy did we have a lot visitors that year.

EK: [Laughs]

AC: Nobody wants to come to Worcester but if you're in Cambridge. England.

EK: That is true.

DM: So besides work, what were your primary responsibilities in terms of housework and childcare?

AC: In which period of time?

DM: When you lived in England, when you were in Worcester, New York...

AC: I mean in New York I remember when my daughter was born, there she was and they poop pretty soon after they're born and I basically picked her up and handed her to my husband. And I'm like, "Okay, it's time for you to learn how to do this." So he was very involved right from the get-go so he changed her first diaper. I figured I'd be on the feeding side pretty much full time until I went to work so I got to nurse her which meant most of the work was mine, but he stayed home about three weeks for the first kid. And I remember when he's like, "I have to go to the library now," 'cause he was still writing his dissertation when she was born. And she tried to give him an extension 'cause he was almost done and she was about two weeks late, but you know babies can only wait so long and he went off to the library that first day and I just thought, [sighs] "OH! [laughs] This is all on me now." So that was a bit of surprise, but you know, he's been very good right along. I don't feel like—I never felt like it was all on me. The one thing he still doesn't do a lot of is grocery shopping. Something about the coupons and the deals he would just go in and buy whatever and I would be like, "Noooo!" And if you say that a lot of times, they are discouraged to do it. I think it's really important to train him but at some point, you start saying I might as well just do it myself. I mean he cleans more than

I do, because I started my business when my daughter just started kindergarten and William was two. The childcare part was on me. He might help her get to school or something like that, but I was there to meet her at the bus and I did have him in child care two days a week initially after I just started my business and I wasn't going to get anything done otherwise. The after school time was on me. But then they both started playing soccer, and you need two drivers if you have two kids going two different directions. So he was in there, I wasn't like left all alone.

DM: I think it is good that you both shared the responsibility, being in a women's studies class, we are always talking about how a woman has always been the one to take care of the child.

AC: It was part of our marriage counseling, when we got married it was a woman minister marrying us and she did the training and I think she got pregnant so she couldn't marry us she was going to have a baby. But she took us through the part where she said you need to make sure that the jobs are interchangeable. It is not like always do the dishes and you always take out the trash. It needs to be swap off those jobs. And that was really good advice. I mean it is so basic but good to hear from a minister. He did travel though, the thing about WPI is they have these project centers and so students can go away for seven weeks at a time for one of their terms and you need a faculty advisor, so several different times when my kids were growing up he would go to a project center so he would be gone for seven weeks. That was hard. That really was not as easy as I thought it would be. The older they got, the easier it got. I remember my daughter was in fifth grade he was in first grade that one was really hard. He was in Thailand they have a bank center so it was so far away I couldn't just call him it was a thirteen hour difference that was where you know one of those situations where I agreed like ok you can go it's important for your career and you would be able to have all these international experiences but that was particularly tough. It depends on how old they are but no complaints on that really.

DM: How did you balance different priorities, responsibilities, rules and interests in your life? Was it hard?

AC: [laughs] Very! Especially when you got your own company, I mean I have work during the day and if I have meetings during the day, what am I going to get the writing done? So sometimes it happens after dinner at my house and he is like, "You are going back to the computer after dinner?"]Cause my office is in my house which is dangerous. some people set up their offices off sight just in order to have that separation, but it was so helpful over the years where I'd be home for the after school stuff that I just kind of got used to it. Now both my kids are out, well temporarily one is still in college. I'm still struggling to balance the work coz when you're self-employed it is really hard to say no to work so I have a lot of projects right now and I have to remember that oh yeah I need to have some time to have dinner and oh yeah I have a conversation with my husband and I do some volunteer work in my church. I'm the co-president of United Methodist

Women co president, job sharing. The previous person had done it solo and she is retired and she had no time for it. But we are both self-employed actually, with the other co-president so we have to divide the work and I sing in the choir. I'm on a couple of boards one local and another out of town so those are constant but they are interesting and they get me out of my comfort zone, when you're working by yourself you don't have coworkers so they get me out in the world. And one of them is the Worcester Education Collaborative right in the thick of it is Worcester going to educate children to the high standards and get people to move to Worcester and recognize the quality of the school system and the economic developments so it's always a balance but there is a meeting coming next week and they are like, "Can you come at 3:30," we have to do a half hour business before he actually shows up so I have to essentially stop whatever I'm doing at 3:00 that day and do I go back to work after that, well maybe depending on what else I need to get done.

DM: What do you think are the pros and cons of the path you have chosen?

AC: Pros are I'm independent I have flexibility I have far more control over what I do and what I don't do most of the time. Cons are I'm independent in the sense that I don't have a regular paycheck. I'm not part of a corporate structure. I'm not part of any sort of ongoing professional development—it's all on me. So the tradeoff of flexibility is that sort of structure. One of my clients is—about fifty percent of my business is Siemens and boy they are structured, but I look at it I would never want to work in a house like that. It's just too much of the same thing probably but also you just have your accountable for some things that you have no control over and there is always in house office stuff that I just manage to avoid completely. I understand that I could probably make more money and have maybe less stress I don't know if I was in a regular paycheck job, but I really enjoy what I do and I don't know that that would be the case if I was working for one company and doing more of the same over and over again. So [sighs] the price of variety.

DM: When you think about the choices you have made throughout your life how do you feel about individuality in particular?

AC: It's hard, the decisions to be self-employed was really a big one. Because really from a women's studies perspective I was stepping off the career ladder at that point, I wasn't going to be part of an ongoing organization with precise paths or world of opportunities to be promoted, but I think I've taken on more responsibility in my own job and I've had to learn about a lot of other things that I wouldn't necessarily. Like managing QuickBooks and having to promote yourself 'cause no one else would do that and if my computer goes I'm the IT department, I'm the CFO, so I think that was probably the biggest choice. It was interesting my high school had asked me years ago, "Did you feel like your opportunities were constrained when you came out of school when you graduated in 1980?" I was like no. Actually there was so many choices that was paralyzing in sort of—I was trying to figure out what to do with my English major.

There were a lot of choices out there and I didn't see them closed off in any way greater than I wasn't trying to become an engineer or a scientist and that might have been very difficult and public relations is what they call sometimes "pink color ghetto." I mean there is a lot of women in there, of course the guys are running the front are male but in back in the '80s either it was one of the biggest decisions. And the decision to have children, that's huge because that's going to have a spin off consequences in a number of ways. But it was funny when I was pregnant the first time there were ten others pregnant women the same year. There are only 35 women in the front, ten of them pregnant and Catalyst which is the firm that does a lot of analysis—they look at women in a work force—they did a study on us because they are like ten women this is amazing and they predicted that all of us would come back to work because it was such a fulfilling job and you know the company was very supportive. Well, some of us came back. I came back 'cause I needed the health insurance 'cause my husband didn't have a job that generated much of a health benefit. I mean he was an adjunct professor and that's sort of working for minimum wage. It's what you have to do when you're in academic. But several of them—I was 29, the oldest of the ten were 43. This is New York City, two forty-three year olds having their first [babies], their husbands were as older or older and were doing well, and they had no reason to come back to work. They could hire nannies they didn't have to worry about it so I don't know what the percentage came back, but I think it was maybe half. We didn't quite prove out their theory. As the one of the youngest ones I went back 'cause I needed to work. But I wouldn't do it the other way. She was born in 1991 and my mom had been diagnosed with cancer the previous spring so partly was I wanted my mom to be a grandmother. She's been talking about wanting to be a grandmother since I was about 20 and I'm like, "Enough already please," but I think that definitely if we could swing it we wanted to have a kid at the point where my mom could be a part of her life. So we did. Katie was two and a half when my mom died so she got a little bit of it.

DM: Do you consider yourself active politically?

AC: Not really, if we can start by education sure, but I haven't worked for a candidate or anything like that.

DM: How has religion played a role in your life?

AC: Pretty big, especially around the death of my mom particularly and then my dad died four years later, I think my faith helped me a lot. We discovered when you move to a new place and you want to meet new people at least go to church. And if you had kids in Sunday school you meet people. We did church shopping when we came to Worcester and the church that gave us pie they have just had a fair the day before and I'm like oh! They got me, they won my stomach they won my soul. And it was a church that was more accepting of women and religion 'cause I grew up in a church with women ministers that was important. I think that was really important step for us. And its still, you know, my parents have been gone along time but I'm still an active member of the

church and I think that for whatever reason it threw me a number of stresses where when things just seem the juggle is not working or things are just happening and you feel like the universe is against me part of me just says you know, this is one of the situations where you say, "Okay God this is yours. You deal with that I'm just going to do what I can" and it takes a huge burden away from me to say someone else is going to work on that for me, it's not on me I fill that role.

DM: How do you describe success in your life and how has that changed over time?

AC: It depends on the day. Sometimes success is to get through that to-do list and I have actually done them all and that's pretty rare, but I think initially when I first started working, success was getting out of a cubical and getting an office with a door. That was huge for me because especially when you are trying to write you need somewhere quiet. Success for me more recently has been to see my kids grow up, I mean my daughter graduated and now has a master's degree. She is a full time teacher; she is launched. And she just took me to the Stevie Wonder concert. She got paid, she bought the tickets, she was off that day so I can tell that she is ready to take off. And my son is a sophomore. I still feel like most of the time he is going to make good decisions, but if he really gets stuck, he knows he can turn to us. He was feeling horrible, he was sick and I haven't heard from him in six weeks, but he was like, "Mom, I really don't feel well" and we said, "Why don't you go to the infirmary and you can talk to the professor about the exam you are supposed to have tonight," but they still need parenting to figure out maybe their resources they can turn to for a little guidance but they are capable of making their own decisions. He knows if he is going to borrow a car I'm going to say, "Does it have a designated driver?" He said it before I did. That is long-term, that is success if I have raised two human beings. That's pretty amazing.

DM: Due to your experiences what advice would you give to women and to the future generation?

AC: Be persistent, be polite, don't burn your bridges. I mean I can't tell you how many times I had to come back to people who I had worked for in the past and frankly you run into them if you network at all. I met someone today I haven't seen since I worked at UMass in the early '90s and he knew people that I had worked with in New York before that. So you never know who you're going to run into so there is no down side to being polite to people. It just goes a long way. Persistence is important because I think more so perhaps in Worcester more than other places, you still need to persuade men that you still have value. There are older men that I hang around and I swear they don't see me as a professional woman even though we are in a professional setting. They relate to me as their wife or their daughter. And I have to get past that in my presentation even at my age. I think that women need to persevere. Focus on being the best on what you can do and be the best on what you enjoy doing because that's going to keep you going. But some of the guy stuff you've got to let it slide off your back like a duck. I am so embarrassed that I had to tell my daughter not very long ago, "You know, men

sometimes, pretty often make more than women do in a job” and she is like, “What?” And I’m like, “Yeah, we were fighting for it in the ‘70s and the ‘80s and it’s still not right.” And I’m very sorry that that is still the situation. And really the only way that it’s going to change is if women continue to ask for the opportunities to prove themselves in ways that won’t be discounted twenty three percent whatever it is these days. You have to have a good attitude and hopefully the gender stuff falls away and they focus on what you do, what you contribute, what the outcomes are and the rest shouldn’t matter.

DM: During your time in Worcester have you ever been part of any historical events? Or have you witnessed any historical events in Worcester?

AC: Well, I was in Worcester in 9/11, but that’s not a Worcester based event. It is actually kind of a funny story. I was running a meeting. I had become the president of Society of Professional Communicators and the very first meeting I ever had to run was that day ‘cause it was Tuesday we always meet the second Tuesday. And we were meeting someone from the art museum [who] was going to talk about event planning and I’d heard about it on the radio, but I had to focus on getting ready for this meeting. I had not turned on the TV and some of the other offices called me and I said I think we should just do this, you know, let’s just go ahead. The New Yorker part of me had not yet kicked in to freak out about it all, but I really thought, you know, I’m not going to let those terrorists stop us from having our meeting. Life is going to go on. It was a tragedy and part of continuing to go on the way we are is a message to say, we are not going to let you stop us. So the funny part of it is this is a Worcester story several of the people had parked in that tall shiny building in downtown, It’s Worcester’s one skyscraper, twenty four stories. They had parked in the garage and we got way half through our lunch but the garage was going to be closing because they were afraid it might be a target because remember that day, you might not actually remember that well, no one really knew what was going to happen next. I mean it was New York and oh my gosh Washington then Pennsylvania, you know? What was next? And so to be prudent, Worcester decided they might be a target and would shut their tallest building around so the people had to take their cars out of the garage. But that was my experience. Then I went home and I actually didn’t still turn on the TV. I was interviewing someone for the newsletter I was writing and he’d been on the phone for six hours trying to sort out his computer with some guy in India and he hadn’t heard the news so I had to tell him what had happened sort of as do you still want to do this interview? And he is like yea, sure it was a dentist using a lawyer and I was writing about the lawyer services for him but it was a very weird day but as far as major events in Worcester I remember the time before we declared a war on Iraq there was a bunch of people who showed up at the intersection of the Park Avenue and Salisbury Street with candles. So I’m like ok kids we are all going down you know it’s the least we can do, at least make a stand but that wasn’t really earth shattering. Worcester news, we did survive the ice storms, was it the ice storms of 2008 when we lost power the city, rain turns to ice, ice turns all the branches really heavy and I spent the night listening to branches falling off the trees ‘cause the weight just sheared off the branches, took down the power lines, took out roofs closed roads, it was like ice

cubes all over the road when we woke up in the morning and we had no power and a lot of the city had no power. A lot of the northeast had no power and I quickly learned there is no cooking. When there is no power there is no furnace because you need electricity to tell the furnace to turn on so we survived that. We actually got really smart, we called the Hampton Inn we got a room before it sold out we called like that morning, but that was awful. There were people with no electricity for two weeks. We were lucky with just five days. A friend of ours through the Boy Scouts had a generator that he had from Rhode Island. He got power before we did so we got his generator. I will never forget how happy when I heard the sound of the furnace going on it kind of goes like wooffffff. God it had gotten down to the 40s in the house and of course the ice melted and we had rain. The basement is flooded 'cause sump pump doesn't work when there is no power so there is no need for fooling around in the basement and it's in the 40s and it's just dark. So that was a disaster in Worcester. It's not like we suffered. I wasn't around for the tornado and that stuff, but you talk to people about the ice storm and you still see them their face changes, post-traumatic stress, people like oh that time. There was no school, nothing was operating. I couldn't get a cup of coffee I had to walk to Dunkin Donuts which is like half a mile. So that was—I mean it wasn't a war, it wasn't something horrible, but without power you get basic about what you need very quickly. I think that was 2008.

DM: How about growing up in New York have you seen anything hysterical?

AC: Well New York always got history going on, not just a city I think one of my earliest memories was a blackout 'cause I remember having a candle for dinner. In 1965 New York was blacked out and I was only three at the time, but we had a gas stove so we could cook, but my dad who worked down on Wall Street would take the subway home. The subways were not working, no electricity, so he walked all the way from the subway to 88 Street. He was very tired, but that was a pretty big deal. I remember the day Martin Luther King was shot. That was the day before my birthday so it was in the papers that next day I think I was in first grade. I mean I knew who he was that was a big deal. I'm sad to say I'm not from Massachusetts. I don't remember when John F. Kennedy was shot. My parents were Republicans. It didn't seem to have an impact in their house. But Martin Luther King, that was huge. I knew all the grown-ups were upset and I understood enough at that age to think that was horrible.