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Ann-Marie Mires was born in 1956, and grew up in a small town in Connecticut. After twenty-two years of education, she received a doctorate degree in anthropology. Since then, she has been involved with the Worcester community for many years through her work as a forensic anthropologist. During this interview, Ann-Marie discusses the struggles she encountered as a woman in the workforce, and how being a mother and a successful scholar is a difficult balancing act. She says, “And I was nursing my child and she said, “Now this,” she pointed to him, “This is going to be your great accomplishment, not that, your dissertation.” And I’ve always just tried to keep that in mind. Being a mother is actually more hard work than archeology.” She reflects upon the importance of family and the choices women are faced with when prioritizing their life in terms of family and career. Some highlights in her career include becoming the first forensic anthropologist for the state of Massachusetts, uncovering the remains of Whitey Bulger’s victims, and finding the body of Molly Bish. Currently, Ann-Marie serves as Director of the Molly Bish Center at Anna Maria College, program director of the Forensic Criminology program, and also works there as an adjunct professor. She also is director of a non-profit agency that’s mission is forensic archeology recovery with a focus on finding missing and never-been-found children who were abducted in the ‘70s, ‘80s, and ‘90s and she is the former Forensic Anthropologist for the Massachusetts Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

AMM: So, it’s my understanding that this is going to take 45 minutes?

NTC: Yes.

LT: Yes.

AM: Maybe a little bit longer? Okay. Alright.

CD: Alright, let’s get started. So what is your full name, including maiden name and married name, if applicable?

AMM: Okay, Ann-Marie Wagner-Meyers and Wagner is my maiden name.

CD: Okay.

LT: When were you born?

AMM: I was born [laughs] [] 1956.

NTC: Okay, and do you have any children? And if so, do you have any grandchildren as well?

AMM: I do. I have a son; his name is Gilbert. I named him after my father. And he is 24. And I have a stepson.

NTC: Mhm.

AMM: And he- his name is Wayne Grazi. And he is my partner's son and we have grandchildren by him. Two girls; Maya, who is six, and Kiera, who is four.

LT: Wow. [laughs]

AMM: Very cute, yes.

CD: What is your partner's name?

AMM: Nicholas—Nick Grazi.

CD: Nick Grazi.

LT: Alright, what cultures or ethnicities do you identify with? Like family background.

AMM: Mhm. I identify with my father, Gil Wagner. German. And I identify with my mother's Irish heritage. We were told that we were a wee bit Irish, and it ends up I'm 75 percent Irish on my mother's side.

LT: Wow.

AMM: So, it was at a time when Irish was not the best...

NTC: Mhm.

AMM: ...thing to be in New York, so they sort of pushed down their Irish and brought up the Welsh and the English. But I identify with German, Irish, Welsh, and English. And American, of course.

LT: [laughs]

AMM: So.

NTC: And could you tell us a little bit about your parents?

AMM: Yeah, I would be happy to. My father was a chemical engineer at Pfizer Pharmaceutical, and he, I think, was pretty instrumental in kind of, nurturing me along as an anthropologist. We used to go places, drive places, go down to see his mother, my grandmother. And we would spend a lot of time in the car driving from Connecticut to New York. And I love my father. I think I was the apple of my father's eyes, the youngest girl out of nine kids. So, had a special relationship with my dad and he was also extremely good at math and science, so he was great for chemistry homework in high school...

CD: [laughs]

AMM: ...which was always challenging. My mother was a phys ed [physical education] professor at Connecticut College. And so, I grew up with professional parents, but my mother was quite remarkable for her time period. Since I grew up in the '70s, I grew up with the woman role model who was working and she had gotten her master's degree in 1942 in physical education. And so, it was very acceptable in our house to pursue whatever occupation we were interested in, especially what we were interested in and what was our passion. And my mother and father shared the duties of the household which was pretty uncommon at the time.

LT: Right.

AMM: And she had a full-time job teaching and she also coached the swim team. So, she was all over New England traveling with the swim team as a phys ed professor, so.

CD: Wow.

NTC: It's amazing.

AMM: Yeah. Very good stock.

ALL: [laughs]

AMM: Yeah.

CD: Did you grow up in Connecticut?

AMM: I did.

CD: Whereabouts?

AMM: I grew up in Ledyard, Connecticut.

CD: Oh, okay.

AMM: Where the casinos are.

CD: [laughs]

AMM: Never knew where they were, but it's also—I grew up in a small fire district within Ledyard, called Gales Ferry, which is on the Thames River.

CD: Okay. I'm from Tolland.

AMM: Oh, okay.

CD: So yeah. And my family, my grandparents have a lake house in Griswold.

AMM: Mhm.

CD: I don't know if you know the area [laughs].

AMM: Yes, Griswold is really close. Yeah, yeah.

CD: So do you live in Worcester now?

AMM: I do not. I live in Gloucester, Mass.

CD: Okay.

AMM: So, I had asked if that disqualified me and they said no, if you work in Worcester.

CD: Okay.

AMM: So, I am sure we will get to why I work here [laughs] when we get into more of my occupation, but I work in Worcester.

CD: What types of neighborhoods would you say you lived in?

AMM: Grew up in?

CD: Grew up in. Live in now.

AMM: And also now, pretty rural. My parents relocated in '63 when I was just a child from

New Jersey to Connecticut. And we thought we were going from the big city into this, you know, rural vacuum, you know, [laughs] even when I was seven I was like, “Wow this is really like country.”

CD: Yeah.

AM: And it ends up that that’s what I preferred, actually. So, grew up in a fairly rural area and enjoyed that. Not much of a city girl. I like to go to visit, but not much for large crowds and too much activity and so, when I had to relocate from UMass [University of Massachusetts] to take a job in Boston, I found myself looking for a very similar environment for my son who was four at the time. And so I ended up in Gloucester, because it was on the water, a fishing community, mixture of all different classes of people, and it wasn’t too fast. There was enough community, so, I self select for more smaller communities, I think. Especially so near the water.

ALL: [laughs]

LT: So the next question was, what was the neighborhood like generally? Um, we kind of already answered that.

AMM: Okay.

LT: So we will just move onto the next one.

AMM: Okay.

NTC: And if you were not born in Worcester, which we’ve just established you weren’t, so when did you arrive, I suppose? It says how did you come to live in Worcester, but we’re...

AMM: Okay

NTC: ...just going to change it to, how did you come to work in Worcester instead?

AMM: So, I was working at the medical examiner’s office. I’m a forensic anthropologist by training. And so I suspect we’ll review that when we get into my work history. But I had been reduced from a full time position to half time. And I had recovered Molly Bish and as a forensic anthropologist, I had gotten to know Mr. Bish, John Bish. And he and his wife had worked and helped set up the Molly Bish Center on this campus [Anna Maria College] as a place to, you know, advocate for missing and murdered children, as well as, to develop best practices. And we were at a conference together and he said, “I’ve got to get you on the phone with the director of the Molly Bish Center and I want you to go work there.” So, in the middle of the conference, while we are sitting there with like 300 people, he handed me the telephone and told me it was the director of the Molly Bish Center. So I interviewed with her [the director] and came to work here. So, that’s how my relationship with the college started. And that was back in 2006.

NTC: Very good. Okay, so um...

AMM: Want to just skip the rest of those questions?

NTC: [laughs] I was going to- I think we can probably skip down to maybe just these, the last three- 14, 15, and 16. I think those are still applicable.

AMM: Mhm.

LT: So what changes have you seen in Worcester over time?

AMM: I've seen the revitalization of- I'm not sure, I think it's the Kelley Square Area, down by the Compton Collective. What is it, Birch Tree Bakery? Or Birch-something, bakery. Anyway, they've just done a revitalization of that whole area and I think it was pretty, downtrodden. And this, this summer I actually went to one of the outdoor free concerts they had there outside. And so, just oh, you know, seeing Worcester sort of come into its own in terms of the arts and revitalization, and the changes I've seen over the last 10 years.

NTC: And, what distinct characteristics make Worcester the place it is, in your opinion?

AMM: I think the history. I had also worked in Worcester years ago, in Worcester Common as an archeologist. And many people don't know but underneath, you know where Worcester Common is, the green space and buildings around it, there was a cemetery there back in the 1850s. And it was on the outskirts of town, but as the town grew, the cemetery was sort of was in the middle of town, and the town fathers decided to dig a big section of the cemetery. So they basically covered it, laid all the tombstones down and covered it with about two feet of soil and turned it into a grassy common and started grazing cows there. So, I was at UMass working on my doctorate and doing archeology and we ended up coming to Worcester because they did some testing and found the cemetery. And so as we did the historic research, we ended up finding out there was a cemetery down there. Most of it had been moved, but in the 1960s, when it had been found when they were building the road, but back in 1994 we came back and removed a number of inhabitants in the cemetery. And they had six-foot granite slab stones that had been laid down, and so it was the first time I had dug somebody up where I knew when they were born, when they died, what their names were, right?

NTC: Wow.

AMM: Very unusual, right.

LT: Right.

AMM: You know, most of the time I deal with unidentified materials, not somebody with a tombstone. So it was really interesting. But Worcester has a really, really rich history. And so I got to know it as an archeologist, but I've also been asked to speak at the [Worcester] Historical Society because of the archeology and forensics. So I used to come to Worcester a lot, just as a lecturer. So, that's how I know Worcester, really historically.

CD: Okay, what do you think women's experiences in Worcester have been, generally?

AMM: Well, that's a little hard for me to say generally, but I think, you know, it's always seemed to me that it's been a good place for women to work and live. And certainly, there certainly seemed to be enough initiatives. And, like I said, many of the historical societies and archeological societies that had me come speak were almost exclusively women. So, I find that sort of in general, that women tend to be sort of the keepers of some of the history, and like to reproduce that by, you know, having social events around that. So, it seems like it's a good place.

LT: Where did you attend school?

AMM: So, I have a lot of degrees, so...

ALL: [laughs]

AMM: ...Do you want me to sort of just run through them?

LT: Yes.

AMM: Okay. So, I went to Ledyard High School in Ledyard, Connecticut. Then, I went to University of New Hampshire in Durham from 1974 to 1978. Then I attended the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville and received my master's degree from 1979 to 1982. And then, in 1985 to 1996 I attended the University of Massachusetts in Amherst and received my doctorate, all in anthropology. All three of those degrees are in anthropology.

LT: Wow. So, it pretty much says name of the schools. [Referring to the question sheet] Uh, did you pursue any educational programs or vocational training? And then name the programs if, applicable. And then we'll just go on the the next question.

AMM: Okay, I've also done special training in forensic and things like that.

NTC: Okay, so we have already established that you did attend and graduate from college. Multiple times, which is very impressive.

AMM: [laugh] Thank you.

NTC: And so we're just going to go on to- what were your challenges in education?

AMM: That's a good question. And like I said, I did look at these and so I was thinking about that one. Well, you have to understand that the time I went to school, it was still—archeology and anthropology are very well inhabited by women. In other words, there were a lot of women in those fields. And like in any profession, even still, you don't have a lot of women in the higher degrees or in the higher paying jobs or in the high echelon of organizations. So, I would have to say, that probably the biggest challenge was trying to break through that glass ceiling. Which on many levels in the '70s and '80s and '90s people felt had already been broken through. So, it was there in very subtle, in very subtle ways. So, you know like in terms of pursuing my master's degree, there were a lot of male graduate students. So, I found myself many times, the only female in a lot of the archeology classes that I took. And I did good work, I worked just as hard as everybody else, but in one class in particular struck me. Everybody else got A's and I got a B+. And I thought, "Hm, this is interesting."

AMM (continued): So, you know I think there were things like that throughout my education. I grew up in a household where your ability to do something was what you were judged on. Not whether you're male or female. We grew up with a very good division of labor, so there was never any surprise or, you know, we were always allowed and encouraged to do things. So, I think that it took—and I think it's still taking the world a bit to catch up to that same, you know, standard, if you will. And so, there were very subtle forms of discrimination. Whether that was in my ability—I was a very good leader. And I was a leader early in high school, I was the vice president of my class, and then president of my senior class. And I always took leadership roles. And I think that was probably the biggest challenge, is that there were just some subtle undertones that you were always sort of working against this, well, you know, nobody really said it, but you know kind of for a girl. And, of course I was also very—what's the right word, aggressive and somewhat—and very confident in my ability. And I had to be competitive, because graduate schools are very competitive. And for teaching assistantships and jobs and things like that. And so, I've been, it's probably no surprise that, you know, that's interpreted as pushy and instead of assertive, it's aggressive. And so, those were always challenges for me. I have never had any trouble speaking my mind and expressing my opinion. And certainly, that is what grad school is about, is learning how to do that well. So there are always those challenges, I think for women and I felt them particularly, and sometimes so subtly that I didn't really realize what was going on, because I grew up in a household where I was encouraged and I never saw any barriers and I had those leadership positions early. And so, I would always be kind of taken aback by that. So I'd say that's probably the biggest challenge that I encountered.

LT: So upon finishing your formal education, what did you see as your options?

AMM: I felt that by getting my PhD, I had worked for a number of years with a master's, and saw the limitations. So, I knew that by going back and getting a PhD, that that would open a lot of doors. And it was also a credential that no one could take away from me. And so, I knew that my options were increased tenfold by getting a PhD. So, it allowed me into the arena of running projects, the archeology dose that I was talking about. I could be a principle investigator on a

grant proposal and you can't really do that with a master's. You have to have somebody with a PhD. And so, I won't say my options weren't limitless, but my options were certainly wide open in a field that I had chosen to pursue and so it was just a matter of what I wanted to pursue. And I wanted—and I've been working all along so when that happens, you know, it just helps you move further down that path that you are already on.

LT: Right.

NTC: And what support networks and mentoring have been important to you?

AMM: That's a good question. I've always had a good strong support network of women. I have to say girlfriends, and professional women. As I moved forward in the field, there were a number of women I worked with which I think made it easier working in the field in archeology. Again, I didn't run into the barrier, the gender barriers because I was mostly working for women. And sometimes it was a double edge sword because a lot of women, and maybe you'll touch on this in your class, but a lot of women have worked really hard to break through. And so they sort of—as we used to call it in my women's studies they would take on a structurally male persona and sort of be part of the work force. And so it was important to be mentored, but also be a mentor to women that I was working with and coming up through the program with. There were also a lot of, not a lot, but I had male professors that were extremely important in terms of mentoring me. And just helping me get a foothold to see how things work. I'll never forget, first paper I gave at a conference when I was getting my master's, my professor he taught skeletal biology or bones. And I looked at some material that I was going to present at a conference and so I wrote my paper up and brought it to him because he wanted me to practice in front of him. Not before he took out a red pen and like bled all over the paper and then I got to adjust it and then he said, "Okay give it to me," with my slides. And so, we had that you know it was a slide projector back then, you know. It wasn't PowerPoint and so I had to coordinate it and write what I had. And it's just—and I will never forget that. He took a lot of time with me. He was very kind, but critical which was important. And it kind of just put me on my feet, gave me the confidence. He said, "You know, you want to walk up to the podium, you want to make sure you don't—before you get the paper. So you don't trip. You want to see if there are any wires." Just little things. And he said, "If you get disoriented," you know, because when they turn off the lights, of course you can't see anything when you're up there. And he was just so helpful. And I have to say he was probably the most significant mentor I had. And then when I pursued my PhD, there were some of my professors that ended up being on my dissertation committee. And we developed very close personal and professional relationship because I had a child by then. And so, they were, you know, they would, you know, have my son over and he was just little and it was just a really good environment. But it also taught me the value of being a mentor and I had also, I just can't call them mentors if they're bad, right? I mean I had bad role models. I worked for people that really exhausted me and the students that worked for them. And I said I would never do that, I would never. But I learned from other people what I saw as their mistakes.

NTC: Equally as important. [laugh]

AMM: Yes, equally as important because I've had lots of students now as both a professor and as a director and along the way when I was at the medical examiner's office, I ran an internship program. So, I had a lot of students and I learned a lot of do's and don'ts along the way. And mostly in terms of how they made you feel and what you learn from that. And that goes a long way because, as you guys probably know, you're pretty impressionable at that age and you take a lot personally when you probably shouldn't. We all know later that we shouldn't, but takes a lot to figure all of that. Your 20s are a very informative yet confusing phase. Yes?

NTC: Yes.

LT: Yes, absolutely.

AMM: Yeah, so...

CD: Agreed. [laugh]

AMM: It's important to have good role models.

NTC: Yeah.

LT: Yeah.

AMM: And people that are willing to help you. So...

CD: What was your first job?

AMM: [pauses] Hmm, so I would have to say I was an intern for an archeologist. So what that means is I traveled all over New England doing archeology on contract. So if there was a sewer project, or somehow government, state or federal money was spent it was up to the Massachusetts Archaeological Services at UMass to send archeologists out to do testing. So what was great was I had a degree and I also had a lot of experience with digging up skeletons and delicacies of what's involved in that and so I traveled all over New England doing that. So it was great. They put you up, they give you a per diem and you got paid a really—to measure it with your experience of fairly handsome even today, 17, 50, 20 dollars an hour is still a good, solid chunk of change to do archeology, which is like really fun. Travel all over the place. So I got to say that was probably my first job.

LT: And then what other jobs have you had? And then what do you do now?

AMM: So I was a research associate in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Louisiana State University, as a research associate to a forensic anthropologist. And he ran a lab. So it was my first experience in forensics because I couldn't get work digging up skeletons and looking at skeletons

archaeologically. It was 1982 and “Reaganomics” had kicked in and a lot of the money that was in historic preservation was gone, literally overnight. They couldn’t repeal this historic preservation laws but they could repeal the money. So, I had graduated with a master’s degree, was all set to go out and work doing what I was trained to do, no work. So I went in to introduce myself to a forensic anthropologist that worked at Louisiana State University and said, “Do you need anybody to train your students in the lab or look at skeletons or anything?” And he said, “Actually I do.” And so that where I started doing forensics and I didn’t even know what forensic—in fact in 1982 there were no forensic shows and I was like, “Well what are we going to do?” “Well we look at people that are beyond recognition by normal means.” And so I said, “Well what does that mean?” He goes, “They send us stuff decomposed, burned or skeleton.” And so for three years I did that with him, learn how to do that. He was the one that was very aggressive and very vigorous researcher. But he kind of burned up with students and everything I wrote, he published. But I learned a lot. I learned a lot from him. I learned how to run a business in forensics because once you take on a case and start working on it you basically produce a report, that stands in perpetuity, forever. And that report is used. However, whoever you give the report to is usually law enforcement, the district attorney’s office depending on who that is. And so that’s very important. You don’t just go look at skeleton and then you’re done with it like archeology, there you know, they might be someone’s loved one, identification is important.

So I did that for three years and I decided that I would go back to school. Because I wanted to be able—with a masters I was limited. And I wanted to do what he was doing, running things, getting projects and so I came back to UMass and I was a teaching assistant, graduate student working on my doctorate. And I ended up setting up a consulting service because within the first week of being at UMass, so this was 1985, we were contacted by the medical examiner’s office in Boston, and they asked if there were any students that looked at skeletonized remains, forensically to profile it because it was an unidentified skeleton. So my major professor who was one of my mentors at UMass said, “Sure I just accepted this girl from—just came up from Louisiana, she does forensics.” So he basically got me into his office and said, “I’ve accepted this case.” I said, “You didn’t accept it for free did you?” Because again, once I look at something now I’m beholden. I mean I took-did the report. So I said, “Look,” and he said “Yeah I did tell them we’d look at it,” and I said, “Let’s do this, look at it. Let’s do the whole analysis, but from here on out, I’d like to charge.” So I set up a consulting service. So that was really my second job, besides being a teaching assistant, teaching courses. And for eleven years I consulted with the medical examiner’s office. I did ten, twelve cases and the criteria was they had to be skeletonized for me to accept them at UMass because they couldn’t process bio-hazardous material, which means tissue, and if the case—if it wasn’t for a victim or if it was someone who drowned and was decomposed, I would travel to either Springfield, Worcester, Boston, or the Cape and work on the case at the office.

So I did that for eleven years and then in 1996 I went on the job market, PhD in hand, and a four year old. And so I was applying for academic positions and had interviewed for several doing skeletal biology—ancient skeletonized remains—really what I wanted to do. Once I went back to school I kind of said, “You know that forensics was nice, but I don’t really want to do that, like full time.” I really want to get back to the kind of museum work, if you will. Looking at collections, and doing research on collections and things like that. And then I ended up doing

forensics when I got to Massachusetts, so in '96 I said, "Okay." So I started applying for academic jobs. I thought I'd like to be a professor, teach this stuff, do research and I got a case that brought me into Boston. And I had looked at a bone about six months earlier and I had told the police that it was fresh. That it was not that—there was more of the person out there and that they should probably look into that because the bone was fresh. Well six months went by, nothing happened. Well I get a call from the medical examiner's office that a body has been found in an area that is being cleared, bulldozed. So I said, "What's the address?" It's the same address as the bone I looked at six months earlier. No one ever followed up. So I went, I took a recovery and yes, a skeleton. A man had been bulldozed with a bunch of trees. So I had to separate it all out, all at the medical examiner's office.

So when I was finished with that, I went up to the office, the chief medical examiner's. I said, "You know, there's a lot of stuff that's being missed here. And there's a lot of opportunity for me to train police on proper recovery. And you know, you should really hire me full time [laughs] because there's so much I can do for you." And they did. So from '96 to 2009 that's what I did. I was the forensic anthropologist for the state of Massachusetts. And so I am very proud that I helped create that position and we essentially had it recognized as a union position with the Massachusetts organization of scientists and engineers. So it was a recognized position, full time. And I was, you know, basically able to run an identification unit within the medical examiner's office and do my forensic anthropology, and teach police how to do proper archeological recovery. So the big highlights of my career there were recovering missing and murdered children like Molly Bish, who went missing in 2000, [in Warren, Massachusetts] I recovered her in 2003. And I also recovered the remains of Whitey Bulger's' victims. He had killed six different people and buried them throughout Boston. And when Kevin Weeks, who was his lieutenant, turned state's witness in 2000 as the drug enforcement agency and US attorney and state police built the case against Bulger while he was on the lam. His main lieutenant turned against him. I don't know if any of you saw the movie *Black Mass* or read the book but it's all about that story and an FBI agent and he were good friends. So he told Bulger when he was going to get caught. So he goes on the lam. Well a couple years later they convince the lieutenant to flip on Bulger and got the location of these six different bodies, which were contained in four different graves. And so over the course of a year's time, I did multiple excavations. And then he was on the lam so we wrote the up, analyzed them. There were four men and two women. The men had all been shot and the women had been strangled. And they were all skeletonized and buried very discreetly and very deeply so no one would ever find them. And that's what was so important. There were no—there was nothing on him that they could make stick. And when they found these cases, it brought the whole house of cards down. But, again, he was on the lam. So not until 2011 is he caught. So he goes to trial in 2013 and I testified against him for about seven hours on the stand, four hundred items of evidence.

NTC: My goodness.

AMM: Yeah so that was really the highlight of my time. And I was no longer working there, but again, that highlights the point that I was making earlier. Once I do a case I'm held in perpetuity. So if I pass or I'm not available that stands as the record. So my expert witness testimony—

transcript is about this big [holds hands apart to show length] because that's all the reports. So there were four binders when we'd go to court. The two days we went they wheeled them in because of all the pictures and all the evidence and the analysis. And so I went back, I was called back as a witness and you are a public servant, even if you don't work there anymore so it's my duty to go back and testify, which I was more than happy to do against him. So in 2009 I leave the medical examiner's office but in 2006, as I mentioned, I had been downsized to half time in 2006-2009. So I had looked for work and I ended up coming here and working as a researcher's associate at the Molly Bish Center part time. Just a consultant and I started writing grants to help them develop programs and training, best practice with the police, etc. and so I also started teaching as an adjunct professor here [Anna Maria College].

So in 2008, I'm working here half time, I'm working at the medical examiner's half time; I apply for a full time teaching position here. So I got the position in criminal justice and I started teaching full time. So I had the full time teaching, stopped consulting at the Molly Bish Center, and kept working at the Massachusetts Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. In 2009 I left there completely, and continued up until last year as an associate professor of criminal justice and last year I took on a new position as an administrator and staff person as the director of the Molly Bish Center. The director of the center, which was very nice, and also the director of forensic criminology, which is a parallel major to criminal justice. So I'm the director of the academic program, I still teach as an adjunct. So I teach my forensic archeology, forensic anthropology, and a number of other criminal justice courses. And I'm the director of both the programs.

NTC: Wow, that's really amazing.

AMM: Thank you! You thought this was going to be a short interview, right?

CD: You have a lot of credentials!

NTC: No! I just love hearing about things like this so it's very interesting to me. Thank you for sharing everything with us. So this is kind of-I guess we kind of addressed how you came to do this work, so Chelsea, do you want to move on to question 25?

CD: So, how did you get interested in doing all this and what does this work mean to you?

AMM: Well it's funny, because I sort of fell backwards into it. Really the forensics—and I tell my students that because I teach all these forensic courses. And lots of kids come here because now we have instead of criminal justice they can major in forensic criminology, which means they probably don't want to be a cop or a corrections officer, but they want to go into some aspect of forensics. It won't be forensic science, but it will be some aspect. So there's a lot of support positions in forensics like working in a district attorney's office or working with victims. Okay? So that's what really—so I kind of fell into the forensics kind of backwards because I was looking for, again, work in archeology. And so the forensics was one thing. I've always wanted to teach. And I've kept my hand in teaching from 1996 on. I always taught one course at a

college, like every semester. So either I taught at the law school in Boston, Southern New England or New England School of Law. I taught at UMass or I taught someplace.

So what it's meant to me is a great deal. A: the teaching's extremely important, because that's where you get to bring all this experience to bear, but you also get to impact the next generation, or the next several generations in my case, since I've been at it for quite some time. And not just students, but also police officers. So the work—when I was working actively as a forensic anthropologist, what I had to realize and as I've kind of mentioned, the police didn't always know the best way to handle things, especially if they were archeological and really decomposed or, you know, scattered. Molly Bish's remains were scattered over thirty-five acres. And we recovered that because of the systematic recovery techniques in archeology that I can apply in that forensic context. So it meant a great deal to me, to bring all of that every time I went to a scene because I knew if I wasn't there the next time, they knew what to do or they'd call me, "Dr. Miress, do you mind walking me through?" I couldn't get to all the scenes because when I worked for the medical examiner's office, I covered the whole state. I was centered in Boston, but I might get called to the Cape. And while I'm on the Cape doing a recovery, I might get a call from Springfield. They might have something over there. So many times I would say, "Well we did this. Remember when we did that *blah-blah* that time?" "Yeah, yeah!" "Remember how we took the pictures and we did the map? And I had you map everything?" "Yeah." "Do you think you could handle that? Do you think you could do that with your team, you know your crime scene recovery?" "Absolutely!" I said, "Could you send me the map? Could you send me the pictures?" "Absolutely." And then they would send all the materials in, and then we would have all the chain of custody come—that's really important, okay? Here is all the documentation and here it is, which we learned, again, in the Bulger cases. All that documentation was, you know, when this was dug up we know where everything was and we can account for everything. So it was important on that level, to be doing what I call best practice. And in my field, in archeology and anthropology, I pulled those sciences into forensics, very early.

So I was one of the groundbreakers, if you will, in establishing this. So like I said, a lot of the now forensics, you can dial any channel and there's a forensics show. Its either true crime or it's, you know, fictionalized crime. It's entertainment, the dramatized series. And it's really important for that to be accurate. And so, as a practitioner, it was really important that we got it right and what we were showing people on the news because of all the cameras were there, was good stuff, the best practice. And so, that was really important. In addition to that, there's a whole other piece, I would say the whole—the other fifty percent is the victims and the families and the survivors. And now I get to address that fifty percent, exclusively as well as education. But even when I worked at the medical examiner's office, the last thing I wanted was for the families to have to deal with the bureaucrat. Our policy is, such and such. And that's how it was. I worked with a lot of people that were paid to uphold the rules and we would get families in there—there was a policy that you had to identify, visually identify a homicide victim. The family. If in fact they were identifiable. If they weren't then they came to the identification unit and either myself or the forensic dentist or the police would work to obtain the identity, and we would confirm it. But if they were visually viewable, we had to get the families in there. And so that was an extremely important and gratifying part of what I did was to make sure they met a human being on the other side of the glass. And its rough stuff, you know? I mean if it's a child

that's died of SIDS [Sudden Infant Death Syndrome], that baby still comes in, up to two years old. We investigate that. And that family's put through the scrutiny because we have to determine—the police have to determine, if in fact they're responsible for the death. And people are in a very delicate state and it's a very hard thing to do.

So I have many anthropologist friends that could never work with the families. One of the—I think one of the reasons people are attracted to archeology and anthropology is because you don't actually have to talk to people. And you're sort of behind the scenes. And I never minded, as an anthropologist, getting along with people is an important thing, but also understanding them. And so I have dealt with people from all different walks of life under the most horrific circumstances. And that was extremely important to me. And then to transfer that to this job, being director of the Molly Bish Center, it's extremely important that I understand the perspective of the victim, of the survivors that are left behind because they in fact are victims themselves, they're just not deceased. And, you know, they're the walking wounded. And when I was at the medical examiner's office I couldn't believe how many people had been impacted by that that you would never know just walking down the street. And so it became a very important part of who I am and what I did, but being able to translate that because I can get up in front of a professional audience at the American Academy of Forensic Science meetings and I can talk about skeletonized remains that are traumatized. I've done all sorts of trauma and had to explain that, on the stand as well as at professional meetings, intellectually. But viscerally, what happens when you're in a courtroom, and you're describing that. Like when I was in a courtroom for the Bulger testimony. Really, really hard to see the expressions of the families and to see their loved ones. They didn't know where their loved ones were for sixteen to twenty years. And to be able to translate what I do into telling that victim's story and also doing it in a way that is respectful so that I'm keeping all of that in mind as the families are looking at me and some of them had to get up and leave, which I totally understand. And to be able to be a voice for those has been something that's just—people say, "How can you do what you do?" and a lot of people don't understand it. And that's, that's physical, that's manual, you know, the nasty part of the decomposition. Yes, but that's physical. It's the emotional stuff and being humane and human and being professional is really important to me. And that we're bringing these kids, these families—most important is bringing them home. And then telling their story.

So one of the things that I didn't mention as one of my jobs is that I also run a nonprofit and our mission is forensic archeology recovery and our mission is try to find missing and never-been-found mostly children that were abducted in the '70s, '80s, and '90s that have never been found and so that caved in to that same desire. Meaningful work that there's so many families, that have no idea. Just recently, the Jacob Wetterling case, was in the news. A boy from Minnesota, that had been missing since 1989. He was ten years old. And through a conviction of someone on child pornography charges, they made a deal that they weren't going to convict him of murder and he gave it up. He gave up the location of the child. And he was able to be returned to his family, as hard and as painful as it was for them to realize that in fact he was gone. They still held out that hope. They now have—they now have his remains. And so it's really delicate and it's really tough, it's emotionally very tough but I have to say it's probably the most gratifying thing that I do.

LT: How have you balanced different priorities, responsibilities, roles, interests in your life, and then what do you think are the pros and cons of the path that you have chosen?

AMM: Okay, well I think probably I'll start by saying as challenging as the past has been, I probably wouldn't change anything that I've done. Balancing different priorities and responsibilities, roles and interests certainly came about more when I had a child. And I had him kind of right in the middle of getting my doctorate. So I found myself finished with my fieldwork, finished with all the examinations and stuff that I had to do before writing the dissertation. So I had a newborn and I was just at the phase where I just had to write the dissertation, just write the dissertation. As my mother used to say, "Are you finished with that paper yet?" [laughs] and I would say to my mom, "It's not just a paper, [laughs] it's a dissertation." Right? Of course that would just trip my trigger all the time, but she was the only one that actually read it. You know, she read it cover to cover bless her heart and anything—she kind of lived through me. She got her master's, again, but I think there was something she was very proud of. She was proud of all of her nine children but I think she was particularly proud of that. Just going on and getting a PhD and that's a huge juggling act. So when I advise my students, I say to them, "If you're going to go on, A: this is a commitment. This is—think of this as a ten year commitment." And people go, "Oh it's not going to take me that long." It took me eleven years. I also had a child in the middle, but part of it is you have to say, "This is what I am going to do. And I'm not going to give up my life. I'm not just going to immerse myself." Because when I did get pregnant, simultaneous with that, we were burying the head of the program at UMass Amherst. It was a woman, and she had given—Sylvia Forman—and she had given up a lot for anthropology and women in anthropology. And I remember rubbing my big belly because I was in the—we didn't have a grief counselor, but we were having a session. We were talking about how this impacted us. And I remember rubbing my stomach and saying, "I won't make,"—because what you find as you go along is that you look at people who have arrived and a lot of them are alcoholics or they don't have a family life or they don't have a personal life at all. And that's how Sylvia was. She never married, she never had any children, she drank herself, drank and smoked herself to death. But was very accomplished and had made inroads for women in anthropology. And she had done it. And she died. She died very young. And it was one of those things that just really helped me prioritize. And I remember having my son and one of the other graduate students who was a mom, had her kids, and then gone back to get her doctorate. You know, was rubbing my legs, and I was nursing my child and she said, "Now this," she pointed to him, "This is going to be your great accomplishment, not that—your dissertation." And I've always just tried to keep that in mind. Being a mother is actually more hard work than archeology. Right? I think we've established that I like to do things well and I think that we all take great pride in what we choose to do but I also realized or had to realize I was a limited good. I couldn't do everything, right? The Superwoman—I grew up with Superwoman on TV, right? Everyone wanted to—and I grew up with a super mom. And I figured nothing was denied to me and so I could do it all. And once I had a child I realized, "Wow, that's going to tangle up." Because there's only a certain amount of energy that I can expend and if I'm tapped out, I can't provide and that was more important. And so it helped me shift my priorities. I had a pretty good sense of priorities before. I was thirty six when I had him

so I think it just helped solidify how important it was to be grounded but also that it's more important to raise a child that's responsible and a good—and not just—because I did take a lot of these feminist courses and internalized a lot of that. Used to often laugh that, “How did these men get to be so awful and spoiled?” It's the women that raised them. And I have six brothers and I'm proud to say they all cook and they're active in their community and at home raising the kids, grandkids and that's because my parents raised them that way. So I think much of my life experiences have helped me set my priorities. And it goes back to how I was raised and the parents that I had. And one of those priorities was serving other people, not yourself. So I think that if you position yourself to be of service, then it shifts your priorities. It's not all about yourself. And so you don't have that hunger to always satiate yourself, it's really for a greater good or a common good.

NTC: Thank you very much for sharing with us. We're going to move on to political and community involvement. Um, so would you consider yourself to be politically active and if so, how, and in which ways?

AMM: So I think that yes, I would consider myself politically active and I think that goes down to the personal is the political. It's sort of a feminist perspective that your actions and how you work in the world is a political state. But I got active early. Certainly, I was one of the original tree huggers I suppose in the '70's [laughs]. And my father was very environmentally conscious. We very early in our household we know about global warming. My father was a chemical engineer and developed a composting system for the byproducts of the pharmaceutical production, which is still in use today. But I watched him do that and how important that was. And so I became fairly active as well, environmentally. And I've always been a very small blueprint. Right? You know, recycling and being active in community programming around conservation. I also have the advantage of being in a fairly political job. And so I always felt that I was in service to others. And I was very grateful because I think most people want to do something when they grow up, for the world. And I always felt that I was. And especially when I got to court. But living—and being able to speak for victims—but living an actualized life, I think is an important part of being politically active.

CD: Okay, so what are we doing, religion? Uh, what role has religion played on your life?

AMM: Important. I would consider myself probably a spiritual, more of a spiritual person than a religious person. It's very interesting now with all of the changes and all that's been revealed with the clergy abuse. In the '70's I kind of fell away from the church when I was in high school. And I ended up having a CCD or CYL instructor that had left the church and come back, so he was a lay minister at the catholic church. And he had us read you know, theater of the absurd, *Waiting for Godot*, very spiritual book. And so, as I was questioning my relationship with The Creator, I had this mentor if you will, and so what he helped us to understand, and what I later accepted, was the tenets of the Catholic Church, I just didn't accept the dogma and the political. I knew something was wrong on a real intuitive level and it's very interesting now in hindsight, because what I ended up doing as an adult, pretty much leaving the Catholic Church. But I left

the Catholic Church because I wasn't allowed to marry outside, as a Catholic. And that seemed really silly. And I wrote a three page letter about political activism and being a little assertive, I wrote a three page letter to the Bishop, and said, well my, you know, my fiancé and I, have hiked the Long Trail in Vermont and we really, you know, being outside, it's the '70's right, Earth first, all that sort of stuff, and I said, "It's really an important part of our relationship, the environment, being outside." And I got back a form letter that said, "We don't do outside weddings," and I said, "Well I guess I don't do the Catholic Church." And so we found a minister that was friends with my parents, and it was hard for my folks. But what I was sort of dancing around is, I knew there was something going on. And I came to find out much later, that two of the priests that were at our parish when I was in high school had been moved there because they had abused children. So I know this in hindsight. But during that time, we didn't know anything about that. But I just, like I said, I was going through this upheaval, and trying to understand Catholicism, and I really appreciate having this CYL instructor that basically helped me understand the difference between your spiritual values and what religion you adhere to. And so I'd have to say from that point on, I'm really more of a spiritual person, and I have deep spiritual connection with life and with the creator, with God. And I believe in all of the tenets of the Catholic Church, and adhere to them, but have left the Catholic Church as an organized religion. And I've certainly, I've done lots of research and did my fieldwork for my dissertation on Native Americans, and so I've also embraced a lot of Native American spirituality as well.

NTC: Great, thank you.

LT: Do we wanna um, just, ask, maybe, one or two more?

NTC: Yeah, um, yeah, I like that one, and maybe just one on this one.

LT: Okay, I'll do a h-, we'll do one of the health questions first.

AMM: Okay.

LT: Um, how have health issues impacted your life, or those in your family?

AMM: I've always been very health conscious, and I do a lot to maintain my health. My father had heart disease and we dealt with that for over 30 years. But he, you know, had a bypass, and was medicated, so he lived to be 85, which we were very grateful for. So I saw the impact that heart disease had on him, and of course, I knew all this stuff about health, because that's, I was in, the, in, you know, the sciences, and especially in skeletal biology, I see it all the way down to the skeleton, how healthy you are, and the impact lifestyle has on it. And my mother, had cerebral vascular issues, so she had stroke. And had an aneurism at 55, which luckily they caught. So I realized from an early age, that I had cerebrovascular and cardiovascular health issues, I inherited those. And so it was really important that I stay healthy. So my mother was a phys ed professor, and so, all of us are ace swimmers. We're just super swimmers because she corrected us when we were playing, or just swimming. And so, when I was in graduate school

for my master's, back in the early '80s I started swimming as stress relief. And I was also newly married, and it was really the only time I had for myself, I would go to the pool. And I found it was just a really healthy choice. And so, I've been swimming for the last 35 years for stress relief, so health's really important to me. Not to say that I don't—I was a smoker for many years, and you know I certainly, try to stay healthy. But it's really important. And it's interesting because most, because my mother was a phys ed professor, and very involved in health and healthy activities, and she was a smoker as well, by the way. But I have two brothers that are medical doctors, I have a sister as a medical technologist, and you know, many of us went into the health field, so it's just kind of interesting over the years. So, it's important, very important.

NTC: Okay, and so for our last question we would just like to ask you, based on your life experience what advice would you give to women today and future generations. [laughs]

AMM: That's a big question.

NTC: Big to drive it home. [laughs]

AMM: Yup. Well I think first and foremost I would certainly advise women of today and future generations to think about what they want to do and to mindfully go in the direction of their desires and dreams. There should not be any barriers and there should never be any limitations to what they can achieve. And I think that more than anything, it's important to challenge any kind of stereotype or limitation that's put on oneself. It doesn't matter whether you're a male or female. And that might be a man deciding to be a nurse. I mean it's still—there is guarded snickers when men say they're nurses. And whatever that desire is, if you want to be in the health field or be helpful to others. Be in the giving professions, or the service professions and I think probably that advice would be to pursue what you are interested in and to be—I think probably my advice would be to try to be confident in yourself. I think that women really suffer from two things, lack of self-confidence and a very high dose of self-criticism. And I think those two things can undermine how women present themselves and how they choose to pursue. And I remember a young girl coming up to me after a lecture that I gave. And I give a lot of public lectures, and saying "How'd you get to be so confident?" And I just thought that's such a strange question. And I really—It made me think about it. And I think I was more confident then than I am now at the time. And I think that comes with age. Because I think when you're younger, you think you know a lot.

ALL: [laughs]

AMM: And I think as you get older, you know a lot more, but you know what you don't know. And you are more willing to admit what you don't know. And that's another piece of advice. And that has served me very well. To know what I know and know what I don't know. And to be willing to ask for help. To be confident to know, to know what you don't know. And that's where the confidence comes in. And to be your best friend. To be your best ally. I had six brothers, and although I love them all so dearly and I know they loved me growing up. I

internalized a lot of the teasing and the, “You’re ugly, you’re stupid, you can’t do that”. And it took a lot of years, it took a lot of years to untie all of those strings of what everybody else thought. And a lot of it were these old programs or these old reels that you run when you say, “Ahh, I can’t do that, oh really, I can’t do that.” Yes you can. And that’s how I got through all of it, was saying, “Okay, I am going to go for a swim.” Right? You gotta do something for myself, something that’s going to clear my head. I’m going to be refreshed, I’m going to get something to eat and then I am going to sit down and just do it. And I think just sheer determination is what gets most of us through things. I’m not any—I’m not bright by any means in terms of like oh, you know stellar IQ or anything else. And I used to tell my son, “Five percent intelligence and ninety-five percent perspiration.” And that’s pretty much everything. You know, yeah you can be smart, but you know what, smart people often don’t get very far because they don’t have a lot of the social skills. Or they’re just really busy trying to show that they are really smart. And on some level it’s just more important to just stick to it. And show up. I think that’s a really good—because a lot of times we might not do something because we don’t think we are worthy, or that we don’t have anything to contribute. And a lot of times it’s just showing up, and being there on a personal and professional level. You know, you don’t have to know what it’s going to look like, or exactly what you’re going to do, but just getting there, but just getting there. Going to college, taking that class that’s challenging, right? Push yourself, you know, but do it.

LT, NTC, CD: Thank you very much!

AMM: You’re welcome.

CD: We really appreciate it.

LT: Good advice.

ALL: [laughs]

NTC: It was wonderful to talk to you, thank you so much for having us.

AM: You’re very welcome.