

Interviewee: Ashley Carter
Interviewers: Laura Byrne and Hailey Parrotti
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Transcribers: Laura Byrne and Hailey Parrotti



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Abstract: Ashley Carter was born in March, 1984. She lives with her two daughters and husband, Royland, who she met while abroad in Nicaragua. Ashley works for the REC [Regional Environmental Council] as the Farmers' Market Program Coordinator. She grew up in Uxbridge, Massachusetts, with her parents and siblings. From a very young age, she had a love for plants, animals, and nature itself. Her life experiences, including being a mother, struggling with mental health issues, and being involved in the community have shaped her into the person she is today. In this interview, Ashley describes her responsibilities as a woman, a professional, and a caretaker.

LB: So, just so you know, we're doing this interview for the Worcester Women's Oral History Project and this interview will be archived in one of the Harvard [University] libraries.

AC: Cool.

HP: And we also just wanted to emphasize that this is completely voluntary and if we ask a question that you're not comfortable with answering, then you definitely don't have to answer.

AC: Sounds good.

HP: We have a time limit of an hour, but if you want to cut that short at any time, then that's totally fine, too.

AC: Yeah, I think we can handle an hour.

HP: Perfect. [laughs]

LB: Yeah, and if for any reason the interview does go over an hour, that's okay, too.

AC: Okay, great.

HP: Alright, so, first I want to ask some questions about, like, your general life, family, and living in Worcester, working in Worcester and...

AC: Work in Worcester, I don't live in Worcester.

HP: Okay.

AC: I hope that doesn't hurt things. [laughs]

HP: Oh no, definitely not.

AC: Okay.

HP: Okay.

AC: Yeah.

HP: Alright, so what is your...

LB: (____???)

HP: Yeah. What is your full name?

AC: Ashley.

HP: Including both maiden and married, if you don't mind.

AC: Yeah, no, only one. Ashley Marie Carter. C-A-R-T-E-R.

HP: Alright, thank you so much. And when were you born?

AC: March, 1984.

HP: Did you say March 19th?

AC: 1984.

HP: Oh, March...

AC: March 2nd, yeah.

HP: Oh, thank you so much.

AC: If you want the real date, yeah.

HP: And are you married?

AC: I am married to a cisgendered male, man, Royland.

HP: Thank you. And you mentioned having a daughter, right?

AC: I have two children. So, two daughters. One is going to be six and the other is going to be two. We all have March birthdays, so...

HP: Oh, nice.

AC: Yeah.

HP: So, March must be a busy month for you.

AC: It is, it's appearing that way.

HP: And do you identify with any cultures or ethnicities?

AC: I mean, I'm mostly just like a regular Anglo mix. But my grandmother is 100% Armenian and that was like the culture we grew up celebrating, so...My maternal grandmother...

HP: Nice. And can you tell me a little bit about your parents?

AC: Yeah, sure! So, my dad has passed away. He died probably like, I don't know, God, I'm bad at keeping track of this stuff, like maybe 10 years ago now. He was like, from the local area, was like very blue-collar. He worked as a truck driver for most of his life. He got ill with a very kind of unique autoimmune disease when I was like 12. So, he sort of stopped working and honestly, just for those years a lot of medical issues, a lot of that stuff... Very caring kind of guy, he was more like a heavy-handed dad until... I was the youngest child, so he was really soft with me. There was like an eight-year gap between me and my oldest sister, so I was his baby, and he

loved me so much. Funny guy, country music, like kind of like typical white central Mass. [Massachusetts] guy in a lot of different ways, super hard working, loved horses. He grew up [noise from nearby interrupted interview] tending horses. My mom, also hard - worker, and they met, had a family, had three kids way before me, my two brothers and sister. She was mostly like a nurse's assistant in senior living facilities and did activities with them, did medical billing, did nurse's assistance for most of my life. For my entire life, she was always in the nursing home. She retired. She's getting toward 70 now. She lives locally in a small home for, not a home, like she has a small apartment for like older folks. Also, kind of had a lot of different medical challenges over the years. Caring, sort of lack-of-boundary kind of mom, like let a lot of things fly, loving, kind of needy.

HP: [Laughs]

AC: Her own host of traumas, she had her own host of like traumas growing up, which I learned about as I grew up, and loved her mother. When our grandmother passed away, it was really hard. She didn't know her dad growing up because he passed away, so she lived with a step-dad for most of her life. She loves her grandchildren, is very involved in all of our lives. Yeah! I can add more.

HP: No, they, they both sound...

AC: Answer, yeah.

HP: Like amazing people and would you say they've...

AC: Eh? [laughs]

HP: Had a pretty big impact on you?

AC: Yeah, oh my God, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Both parents for sure.

HP: That's awesome to hear. So, you mentioned you grew up with a different culture. So, you've mentioned also that you don't live in Worcester, but did you grow up somewhere else?

AC: Yeah, so I grew up in Uxbridge, Mass., which is south of Worcester.

HP: And...

AC: Like from start to finish. Well, not finish, obviously I'm not dead [laughs] and I don't live there now, but for like my whole... I mean, like, from preschool to high school, so...

HP: Oh, nice. So, how, how was the neighborhood like?

AC: So, when we were... we were growing up, we had this really great place. It had land and woods and we had animals in a more beautiful part of town. As my dad got sicker, my mom and him actually divorced, not legally, but they separated over a very complex situation, wasn't because he was sick. He was very much in love with her still and all this stuff. It was mostly my mom. And we did move to, like, another part of town, but I was just about to approach high school, so it was fine, it was downtown. My childhood home is one I still think of a lot and we drive past it all the time because I live one town over, but yeah. So, that was great. Like, the actual home, because I had direct access to animals and being in the woods and I was, you know, had great... My best friend lived across the street, who I'm still in touch with and... So, like, that part was great, for sure. My household was rather complicated. My older brothers would get in a lot of different trouble, so there was definitely drama around my household. And my parents were medium income earners, so, you know, things weren't always easy for sure. They worked their asses off for anything we had. I never wanted for much. I was a pretty humble kid, but we were definitely lower on the financial ladder than a lot of my friends, for sure. But... but yeah, that place was beautiful, so... And then where we moved wasn't bad either. I mean, it wasn't --- it was just like another boring suburb of Uxbridge, Massachusetts, so...

HP: Just a little curious, does that childhood, growing up there, kind of like impact your decision to work for the Environmental Council?

AC: It definitely... From a young age, I had connections to the outdoors and to growing plants and animals. I'm very, you know, I loved those things, like... Hang on one second.

HP: That's okay. [laughs]

[Voices can be heard in the distance]

AC: Sorry.

HP: No worries.

AC: So, I mean, obviously, you know, obviously, many things happened through my childhood before the point where I started working for Regional Environmental Council, but that love for

nature and farms and things, that started at a very early age. I had my first garden when I was really little.

HP: Oh nice.

AC: So...

HP: What did you end up growing?

AC: Yeah.

HP: Do you remember?

AC: It was simple stuff, like cucumbers and, obviously it was assisted by parents, and flowers and things like that, so...

HP: Nice. So, when did you arrive in Worcester or when did you start working in Worcester?

AC: I started working in Worcester around 2010. So, prior to working with the REC, I worked for a refugee resettlement agency, which is now called Ascentria Care Alliance. But, at the time, I was hired to run the community farm. So, they had gotten funding to help recently arrived refugees connect with land and do different farming projects. So, we were kind of like a very different program from what they were used to. All the other programs were like employment assistance, other social-service-esque things for recently arrived refugees. And then Ascentria Care Alliance is huge, so they do other things like adoption and legal services, a whole (____???) of things. So, I came back to the area around 2008 or so and had been farming and then this, where I was living and farming, agreed to rent a piece of land for this project for the recently arrived refugees and so I was, like, witnessing that. And then when the guy who was running it left, I applied for the gig because I needed, like, a full-time thing, too. I had to leave just farming. It was not financially sustainable for me. So, it was kind of like an easy, an easy leap to make. It wasn't really a leap. So, I stuck with them for about five years. We eventually ran out of funding and were kind of butting heads with the leadership at Ascentria because, like I mentioned, their programming is totally different and the farm, you know, it was really a project for farmers and I'm the... I am like the immediate program leader on the farm. We were all people who really believed in social justice and have a lot more pro... you know, progressive thoughts, and we really wanted it to be farmer-led and we were trying to find a way to kind of (____???), like, what's the word? We wanted to, like, supply the farmers with enough resource and pow- like, empowerment to, like, sort of run things on their own. And then slowly, we just butted heads and their leadership messed up and didn't really submit a grant we were supposed

to submit, which led to lack of funding and we just slowly ran out of funding. So, the decision had been made that the program was going to close. My boss at the time was very awesome and she was straightforward. We had a huge window, we knew what was happening. So, I prepared in my personal life, which I was pregnant with my first child at the time, and they kind of gave us the heads up. And she was kind enough to see if I wanted to look at something else at the organization or not. And I just said, “No, I’ll leave. I’ll take the severance and go because I don’t know what’s next.”

I looked at the Regional Environmental Council to sort of own the project, and they did in a lot of ways because that project ran in Sutton [Massachusetts], on a more rural landscape, but which is outside of Worcester as well. But there was a lot of in-town projects. So there was a lot of--- we transformed like three, three sites in Worcester that have been like tax-default, so there was this partnership that we had with the local Common Ground, which is a... a CDC [Community Development Corporation] in the Main South area, Piedmont area, and, so, we had placed a couple farmers on different land and we developed the sites from abandoned lots into sites that were actually functional. So, REC did help us with those originally. They were like a partner on it, and they maintained those during this transition and still do, actually. But, in terms of them having a whole project, they didn’t have a lot of resources. They offered, but it was going to hinge on me doing all the, all the work and all the financial stuff to try to get it back up to snuff. But I was about to be on parental leave and I was like, “I don’t, I don’t really want to do it.” It’s kind of a huge project to be involved with to begin with, and then some of the western Mass. components, because it was based out of Worcester and out of Springfield, a lot of the western Mass. components we worked to, to leave intact in some ways, too, because, of course, this was all really important to the communities and to the farmers. So, my relationship with REC had started while I was on that project which was called New Lands Farm. Our farmers would do--- we would go to the REC farmers markets to sell fresh produce and it was, like, a hit because we were really growing very specific and culturally relevant crops. So, it was just like a really dynamic diverse offering of produce and, like our farmers were presented a lot of people in Worcester, so, you know... I started my relationship with the REC there.

HP: That’s, that’s awesome. That, that’s such... That sounds like such a complicated process, but I’m, I’m glad that you got to this point.

AC: Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah, but I guess, I guess I stayed home with my baby at the time until, like, I don’t know. I don’t think I took the job with REC until, like about she was 10 or 11 months. So, I was pretty lucky. It all kind of worked out, for sure, and honestly, my job at REC is both fulfilling and a little less difficult. There was a lot of different complexities, working with such large numbers of farmers and their families and language barriers. It was very fulfilling, but I was also living on the land where the farm was, so it was like... It was very intense work that

didn't always leave my side as easily as my work does now, which is very important for my personal life, so...

HP: That's, that's awesome, really inspiring. [laughs]

AC: Ha, thanks.

HP: That's awesome.

AC: I got lucky.

HP: Yeah.

AC: So [laughs], mostly just luck.

HP: So, do you have any other family that lives close by or in Worcester?

AC: Yeah, so nobody lives in Worcester, but I have a brother in Webster [Massachusetts] and I have a sister in Uxbridge, and then my other brother is in Tennessee, so not local.

HP: Nice. And so, in your opinion, what do you think the challenges that Worcester has to face these days and maybe what...

AC: Oh my God.

HP: would you change about it?

AC: So, these days, I really think housing, like affordable housing is on the top of the list, which is not unique to Worcester, but it's really, really accelerating at a high rate. So, it's like, between the, between the other challenges that were already existing pre-pandemic. And now that it has been exacerbated during the pandemic, so anything, like, low-paying wages, childcare, job acceptability, transportation, all these things, food security, obviously is, like, what we focus on, but all of those things. I feel like, out of all of those things, affordable housing is depleted, like there's lack of affordable housing. All the housing developments that are happening, you know, only really integrate about, like, one-third of all the space units is affordable. So, I think on a local level, and this is already happening and I'm not intimately involved in it, but, you know, a lot attention has to be put towards regulating what kind of building can come in here. Like, it has to be increased, affordable housing. But rent hikes need to increase and, you know, I think that a lot of help with the physical structures in Worcester really have to come along way as well.

People are paying too much for homes that are... are really outdated and falling apart and it's not fair at all. And also, like, the gentrification is just happening at a really high rate because property is so high in Worcester that everybody... A lot of people are commuting, you know, they're moving in. They're commuting to places like Boston [Massachusetts] where they can make more money and all these things. So, there's just---- there's just too many people moving in and too many people being elbowed out, which has a lot to do with where the city has interest. And obviously, there's been more interest in developing things like Polar Park and other parts of the city and more focus needs to go into how to solve the housing crisis because there's so many people who don't have affordable living situations and it just compounds everything else. So, we see that obviously people are struggling to have, you know, affordable homes. When you don't have affordable housing, you have less money to spend on food. If you don't have good transportation, you have less ways to get to work and you have less ways to get to school. You have less ways to buy food, access food that's affordable. So, all of these things are super intimately connected. So, I would put housing on the top of that list and, obviously, more local jobs, but I can't speak to, like, I'm not, like, a job expert. But obviously, like, some sort of training programs or, you know, a training program to how to get folks that need jobs into these jobs, because we know that there's also a demand for folks to work. But either the high--- The wages need to be higher and or the no, the --- oh my God. The benefits that you get with a job as well, even like paid time off, the holidays, all these things... Right, these people are also trying to have, you know... They have families, so they have to deal with those things. You know, so daycare wages, which I think is obviously a national crisis not just... not just Worcester, so yeah.

HP: Yeah.

AC: I would say housing is number one.

HP: I definitely agree with that because I've, I've definitely seen that housing is really expensive and, more times than not, the housing...

AC: Yeah.

HP: isn't even the best quality either.

AC: Yeah, definitely, so...

HP: So, going off of that, are there things that you've noticed in the city to, I guess, help you come to those conclusions that we need better housing situations?

AC: I mean, if you read any articles about ---- I mean --- first off, I went on a house hunt. So, we just bought a house in July, so being, like, personally involved with, and that's just house hunting. We're talking like buying a home versus any of these other things, but even just buying a home sure wasn't like a ---I didn't necessarily have to be in Worcester. But even the places I did try to buy in Worcester, I was out beat by (____???) like, cash. Just people throwing cash at housing. So, I mean I had that experience, you know, the actual housing market. So, buying homes, how tricky that has been recently. So, I had that sort of lived experience. And then just the other experiences working with other community members that are more involved with housing and we talk back and forth. And even though my area of work is food security and food access, these things overlap. I'm --- I've been recently involved in a, something called Catalyzing Communities, which technically focuses on obesity in Worcester, childhood obesity, but it's really like a queue-(??) for food security. So, I've been working with some of the best folks around who, you know, either live in Worcester, are a community member in Worcester, or have another job like I do, who see these things first-hand. So, you know, we have --- we sit down every so often. It's through the Tufts University, so it's really like a case study sort of, to try to put that problem in... Which is, like, the food security is the problem and, like, networking and using a lot of different techniques, like causal diagram, causal loop diagrams and really seeing how these things all interact. And like, before you get to food security, there's always these other things, so... And even in my personal life, I can relate, even though I don't live in Worcester, as somebody, like, with an okay income but being ---you know, combatting things like childcare prices, regular food prices, not having a lot of general, a lot of generational wealth on my side, having a husband who's an immigrant, all these things, so, you know. I, I see how these things interact and play in your life and why they create so many obstacles. Why is it so hard to feed your family? Which, ultimately, food security is connected to child obesity and other things like access to physical environment and things like that, which, in Worcester, you know, there's, there's different, different things going on to increase that, but the disparities between neighborhoods, like who has access to a playground that's safe, you know, who has access to parents that are available to take them to the park, all these things, you know, is... Yeah, just the longer you work, the longer you work on these things that happen on a social justice level, it's clear how they interact with each other, so...

HP: Yeah, it must be interesting seeing these things first-hand.

AC: Yeah, I mean, only a daily basis, what do we see? I mean what do I see on---is folks with SNAP [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program] benefits, right? So, most of our shoppers, not all, are (____???) utilizing the SNAP benefits, which was formerly food stamps. So, you know that they--- financially they're qualifying for a benefit, which is actually kind of hard to qualify for, like your income has to be pretty low first off, even though they... they do take into account certain things that they call deductions, like your housing cost and things like that. It is

still ---you could be a single parent and make 14 bucks an hour and, you still don't qualify. So, it's, it's pretty limited on who that benefit can reach. So, anyways, the majority of our shoppers are SNAP holders, so on a day-to-day basis, I mean, I'm just helping folks utilize their benefits and have access to local produce which is really, like, another attempt at breaking certain inequities, right? We're trying to, like, get these eq ---balance these things. So, I only get to see people shopping for benefits and being ---and shopping for produce and being grateful for access to these things, but honestly, in your gratefulness, you can tell. Why is it so grateful? Like, I've never had other shoppers in my past when I did work, specially on food access work or like in low-income communities, their gratefulness is a huge indication of, of the need that they have. I also work really closely with food banks in the area. So, our program is not emergency food, right, people are spending money to purchase our food. But I work closely with a lot of the, the food banks in the area and, obviously that has been growing over the years, even before COVID [COVID-19], is continuing to grow. So, that's how I see it first-hand, you know. I, I am not a social worker where I sit down with a client and I have to hear all the, all the challenges they're facing, but it's, it's... hold on one second.

[Long silence].

LB: Were you recording during the informed consent part?

HP: Yeah.

LB: Okay.

[Long silence].

AC: Sorry about that.

HP: No worries at all.

AC: Yeah, so, I'll end there [laughs] wouldn't remember-(??) what we were talking about.

HP: That's alright. So, just going off of that, what distinct characteristics do you think makes Worcester Worcester?

AC: Say it again, what character makes Worcester Worcester?

HP: Yeah.

AC: I can't put that in the phone (____???) you have to use my phone. Go find it on my phone. Sorry.

[Voice of her daughter interrupts the interview]. [Long silence].

AC: So sorry.

HP: It's okay.

AC: So, going off of that, you said what about...?

HP: Yeah, so just, like, what characteristics of Worcester makes, makes the city unique?

AC: Worcester Worcester?

HP: Yeah.

AC: So, growing up ---so I'm going to phrase --- I mean I'm going to tell you, like, why I love Worcester, which I think is probably more truthful. I can't speak for everybody, but so, growing up living south of Worcester, we didn't go to Worcester a lot. If we went to, like, a city, it was, like, Providence [Rhode Island], so I didn't get to, like, fall in love with Worcester until I got older and I came back to the area, right? Like, had I went to college, I had been more exposed, I had traveled more places in the world, things like that, and when I came back to Worcester and realized how diverse it was, right? So, we've got folks from all over the world that live here, some really rich culture, like the Puerto Rican culture in Main South is so beautiful, so lovely, and the place is just --- has so many different foods, right? And the, the integration of the schools being around. So, when I was growing up, and probably until awhile back, it... I always loved that Clark [Clark University] was, so and not to pick on just Clark, but for example, Clark was, like... It just melded into the background, right? Students would come, they were transient, they might make an impact or not, they might stay, I don't know. But it --- I just loved how it felt ungentrified at the time, it felt like these two things were living side by side. Now, the squeeze is happening, for sure, which is definitely hard for me to watch. But, I loved that it was a place that had these colleges, had that kind of culture, and people had a lot of love, like, for their city and it always felt like this love that they had to testify because the outside world was always saying, "Oh, no, Worcester is --- you only go there for this, this, and that, like, that's it." It kills me now, because now, like, some of the folks I grew up with, right, so now we're all kind of -- - I didn't know I would be, but I'm kind of townie, I only live like one town over from where I grew up. But now, all these folks that, like, used to shit, excuse my language, on Worcester, you know, now it's a place to go for the fancy meals and this, that, and the other and the breweries and the shopping and so it's definitely, like, coming up in the world, so to speak, and but still, like, I just love that folks who are from Worcester, just love it. You know, they're just such strong lovers of

Worcester, and there are so many things that are not uniquely challenging for Worcester, right? We still have these communities that are being squeezed out of these places that are being developed. But just the mix of cultures and the, the room that some of these cultures have to continue, right? So, you know, there's obviously legacy in Worcester or history in Worcester that's fraught with racism and all of those things and, again, not unique to Worcester, but just the Worcester pride is really, really something, you know, even the Irish pride. Not even just saying, like cultures that are cultures represented by people of color but, with the Irish pride in Worcester is so strong, too. You know, like, probably so much to their detriment sometimes and... And the city council is getting less white male and all those things, so it's lovely, but yeah... People and food, I mean, I just think Worcester is all about people, pride, and food. But also, like, some of the things that you find out on a daily basis about these superhero folks that, you know, have been working in Worcester for so long and, and that is also unique, so you get to some cities in Massachusetts, too, that have a lot of different needs that Worcester has, but our connections are stronger. It's like, somehow, these, these social justice warriors, like, we all have each other's backs, our community members. I think we really do a good job integrating, not being just people who come in and say, "Oh, this... this neighborhood needs this project," or "The city needs this." It's very --- we have a lot of community members that are also social justice warriors, and like I said, that connection is so strong, and I feel so obliged --- I feel so honored to be even involved in that, but we have so many knowledgeable people that are in our city that are welcome. Looking back at our history and calling it out and, and people who want to honor our native people. You know, people who are just really ready to put people first and I think that's really unique. And, like I said, we just have--- the diversity is just ---I --- is just a thing of wonder, for sure, and it's also an old city. You don't have that around the country because we're in New England so there's a lot of old rich history there.

HP: Definitely... and just going off of that, how do you think women's experiences are in Worcester?

AC: Yeah, I was going to say, there's also a lot of powerful women. I don't know if it's because I'm involved in food and social justice, but, I mean, there's a lot of women now that are starting to shape Worcester, and I think that's so important. You know, a lot of our, our ---- I say our, we're not even allowed to vote in Worcester. But the city council is, you know, got a lot of beautiful --- it's starting to get more diverse, women included. So, and our, and our school committees are getting more woman-representation and or non-conforming, gender non-conforming folks and all of my best mentors have been women in the Worcester area, young and old, so...

HP: (____???)

AC: Yeah, a lot of wonderful college professors that are women. I don't know how we out-pace the rest of the world, or you know, cities, but...

HP: That's, that's honestly, like... That's so awesome to hear how women are basically empowering this city, like...

AC: Yeah.

HP: From at least, from what I've seen and what you've told us.

AC: Mhm.

LB: So, I know that you mentioned that you grew up in Uxbridge. Where did you --- what schools did you attend while you were living in Uxbridge?

AC: Public schools, just like, only --- there's only one school, so, you know, not one school, physical building, but one public, you know, chain of schools, preschool, elementary, middle school, high school.

LB: What were the names of the schools?

AC: My first school was Blanchard School, which doesn't exist now. It's like how ---it's like housing. That was, like, pre-k [Preschool], and then kindergarten, Taft Elementary, which is still existing. God, what's the middle school called? Whitin, it's just called Whitin, Whitin Middle School. And then, Uxbridge High School, which, when I was in high school, we were the old high school. Our ---that town has gotten a new, updated school, probably now for the past, like, handful of years, maybe more, because time just, like, goes away once you get older, which was --- the town had to fight, or the people of the town had to fight, tooth-and-nail to get a new school. It was so needed, but yeah, so...

LB: Okay, and I know that you also mentioned that you went to college. Where did you go to college?

AC: I went to the University of Vermont.

LB: Okay, and when did you attend there?

AC: I think it was, like, 2003 to 2007. I did the five year. [laughs] I took some time off in-between. But yeah, so 2003 because I graduated in 2002, so by the time I got to college, 2003 to 2005. No sorry, 2007, so it was five years.

LB: Okay, did you have any challenges that you faced while pursuing your education?

AC: Eh, just money. I mean, I was a decent student, I don't feel like I struggled on that end, but, I mean, I took a ton of loans out to go to University of Vermont, where I could've went to UMass [University of Massachusetts] Amherst and just spent less money, probably got a similar degree, but I didn't want that. I wanted --- I don't know, Vermont, I guess, and a lot of different things shaped that decision. I have so many loans left, although I did just get a shit-ton forgiven, which is, like, huge, but I still have so many loans left from there. So, even during the school year, I would mostly work, do work study. I would get paid jobs. I took out special loans, like the extra loans you don't want to take, to cover (____???) expenses and living, food, and all those things. I'd come home and work in the winter, I mean, summer. And then, finally, I just lived there anyways. We had apartments and stuff like that, but yeah. I moved most of my life there in, probably after the second year of school for awhile, so... But yeah, I would say financial. I just didn't, [cough] I didn't have my parents to, you know. They filled out the FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid], but they didn't have anything extra to give us. So, even though I had gotten a lot of scholarships and, like, the grants that you don't have to pay back and all that stuff, it was just an expensive school. So, I mean, I didn't have somebody in my life who was like, "In six years, this is what your life can look like, are you sure you want to make that choice, because it's a big, financial burden?" You know, my mom was just excited for me to go to school, so, you know, and she wasn't going to know any of that. She hadn't gone to the college, so... My dad even, even more so. I don't think he actually graduated high school. He left school when he was, like, in ninth grade. I mean, he was born in 1939. So, like [laughs] he went to school in, like, practically a one-room school house and then wanted to work because it made sense to work, not have a high school degree. So, I didn't have a ton of resources to lean on. Even my sister was the one who brought me for the tour and all that stuff, right? So, I would say financial was the hardship, probably, and then, yeah, it was difficult just like any other college student, like you're away from home. I didn't so much miss home, but I do remember having a hard time connecting to new friends because my town not, not being the smallest place in Uxbridge, but I had a tight-knit group of friends. So, like social, my social life was a big part of my life and that was challenging at the beginning of school, for sure.

LB: Did you have a lot of options when you got out of school, regarding careers?

AC: Well, I wasn't interested in really having a career when I first got out and there was tons of farming in Vermont. It felt like that's not really what I was trying to go for. My degree was in

plant and soil science, so I had some of the science background and then the real title was sustainable landscape horticulture. So, it's kind of a mix between progressive landscaping and, edible landscapes, sustainable landscapes, regenerative landscapes, and farming. So, I had thought about going to design school to sort of solidify more of my design background because I found that to be an incredibly creative part of agriculture and horticulture was designing landscapes. But I didn't want to do that. I ended up traveling, making some money. I just wanted to travel. I wasn't somebody who wanted to be in one place. I wanted to see other places. I traveled, I went abroad, things like that and, I would say probably not, like not a ton of access. I mean, I probably could have squeezed into, a USDA [United States Department of Agriculture] something and worked for the government. But that was never going to be me. I was never one, even though my biggest hardship, one of my, I shouldn't say my only, but one of my biggest hardships has been money or financially burdened. But I --- it still never made me want to work hard to get more money. Not because I didn't want to work hard, it never made me want to choose a life that was profitable over a life that was meaningful, I suppose. And I think obviously, there's ways to have both, but I was never ----I don't, I don't see myself a very motivated person, like I wasn't one of those people doing extra this and extra that and like, "I'm going to do this internship so I can get on this career path." I'm just not somebody who makes things happen. So, I feel like all my successes in life has honestly just been a string of luck and having some skill sets in growing food [laughs]. That has helped me get from point A to B. I also think I'm really good at accounting and there's obviously skills I've picked up along the way. I'm organized, you know, all that stuff. I'm motivated once I'm in place, but I'm not someone who's trying to move mountains to get where I need to be, so...

LB: Okay and I know that you said that your parents had a really impact... like, impactful presence in your life.

AC: Mhm.

LB: Did you have any other support networks or mentors in your life?

AC: Yeah, I mean, close friends, for sure, but in terms of, like, mentors ---I mean, I had a couple college professors that went out of their way, but I don't think about them every day. My sister was always there for me, so she played mom a lot in different ways and she helped me out financially, too, because she was sometimes in a better spot than my mom (____???) at those times. My grandmother was a huge impression on me. I mean, she, she helped raise me, she was there for all the half-days and to pick me up and she... Financially, she would help me so much, she was also somebody ---she had just more secure financials because she had a pension and things like that and had a home, you know, all those things. And she just was... I mean, she was just somebody who loved me fully, 100 percent. Thought anything I did was cool and amazing,

so --- she just, you know, she just held us together. She held my mom together, which, you know, helped me at the time. She was really important to my sister, the whole family so, yeah she was another huge impact. Obviously became less of a less of a resource the older she got as she got just because she got, she had dementia and you know I became the caretaker. Well not just me, not the sole caretaker, but I developed a caretaking role in her life, still very fulfilling. But her love and support of people--- she wasn't like woke or anything but she was always so kind about everything. So, my mom had what I call a synth in being bisexual. And even when she came out, my grandmother, being an old school, could've been against my mom in those ways. She could've gotten down on my mom so many times. She never did, not because of that, but in general. So, I think her empathy and generosity definitely were huge impacts on me. And later on in life I do think that my first boss --- so when I was working at New Lands Farms, was honestly a huge impact. She really taught me so many different skill sets in terms of program and project management. Her name is Shameriah and we were just so close which is funny because we didn't work in the same space. (brief pause So Shameriah ---her work was based off the western part of the state and she was always such --- we were so close, I mean we got more close personally but...(brief pause) So, she was huge. She was a huge impact especially with like budgets and grant writings and some of these like very foundational non-profit stuff. I'm not the person you... This is funny that this is going to go down in history. Who's going to read my article, right? But another huge impact I had or like a person --- so after college and all these things I did all this stuff, right? And I had my best friend who we can talk about or not obviously had an impact but when I was traveling. I worked on... So when I was traveling, I worked on this permaculture farm which permaculture's this very ---- I'm not going to get into it, but anyways I went --- it was in the tropics and I worked on this farm and it was led by a huge chauvinist, some white chauvinist. But at the time, and still to this date, he has a lot of impact on me because I learned so much by being there. And it was kind of his farm to run and I learned so much from permaculture and agriculture and sustainable agroforestry place that I mean it was a huge moment in my life. Again, permaculture, lots of men have the hand, I mean they take a lot of freakin' room up in that space, a lot of white men take a lot of room up in that space. (brief pause) Yeah, that had a huge impact on me. Also, starting to see his impact on the community, or lack thereof, and like the way he managed things as a white man in comparison to his impact and his way of being like the folks that lived there, the community members. So, again he had a huge impression on me, right, like not always for the better but his mind was crazy. Like his knowledge base of plans and all these I mean I just have a really eye opening experience there. Which most people do in another country to begin with but this was like driven by, by him in a lot of ways. So, and then my husband obviously has an impact on me and my current boss has a huge impact on me, she's amazing. She's younger than me, she's a Worcester native well as native. You know what I mean. Born in Worcester, born and raised in Worcester is just, she's just incredible. Her knowledge base of Worcester, her networking skills, her

intelligence towards problem solving and creating systems is just amazing, so she will forever definitely impact me as well so...

HP: So, I notice you mentioned a lot about financial struggles throughout your life thus far and I was curious about your work experience and...

AC: Mm.

HP: So, what was your first job? Like your very first job?

AC: Babysitting. Oh, and that was easy. That was sweet cash for my pocket. I wish it was that easy nowadays. Uh yeah definitely babysitting.

HP: And what other jobs have you had?

AC: I have been a pizza delivery girl (laughs) in college. I worked at a daycare in college. I did camp counselor in between on certain summers for like the Audubon. [National Audubon Society] I worked at a nursery, a plant nursery, loved that gig too. That was really good. I learned so much there. During the winter seasons as a package handler and lots of farm management work so I've worked on orchards... I've done propagation. When I was in the tropics, I was in charge of the nursery area. What else? Yeah, a lot of farms like one two three four, four or five different farms in my life and then the New Lands Farm which is starting to get more professional, right? So, at that point I went from not an hourly wage earner, who worked in the field even though I was managing as well. I went to a salary and having reports to make and following all those kind of more professional things and then that and now. So, really I have only ever had two professional jobs in my life (laughs) but I mean I worked at a (??) for like five or seven years or six years, I don't know And then now I don't really have a plan to leave where I'm at now. I'm pretty happy, so happy and committed as well, not even just happy but committed to the work and I'm more settled now, right? So, you know but probably want to spice it up in a couple years or so maybe cause I'm going to have to like stay challenged. So, yeah!

HP: Yeah, I was going to ask like what you do now, what, what does that mean to you?

AC: Yeah so, (sigh) what does it mean to me? I mean I feel like my work is important. It's challenging enough, so is actually challenging in a lot of ways. So, it still sort of like gets my--- I'm like somebody who can work with complexities, right? So, it still kind of like jazzes me up in that way. I still have room to grow in my skill set. So, essentially my role at the REC is to --- I'm the program coordinator. So, yes, we have markets but which is like an operational part of

the job, but also, you know, help with grant reporting and help with fulfilling and writing budgets. I supervise staff. I supervise markets. I do the ordering, the purchasing, the infrastructure improvements. You know, buying things, I mean I do so much right to run these markets and we've cultivated. I've cultivated relationships with customers, my boss, the organization, the farmers, lot with the customers I know. I already said that, but like they've gotten used to seeing my face for a long time now. State agencies I've formed relationships with, different food collaboratives, different partnerships within Worcester... So, I mean I think that goes a long way and I think my passion is still alive, even though I daydream about like sitting down and designing landscapes and things like that because I think that would be also fulfilling. This is meaningful to me, right? I don't --- I enjoy that my work impacts my community, and yes, I don't live in Worcester, but I find it so important to have an impact on that community. So, I just think that's really important. I don't see myself wanting to leave the social justice field. And I love food because food and farming is like where I know, like that's kind of my skill set, even though I have a lot of skills you can apply to different things, like my accounting and budget skills would be useful on any kind of project management. But I know the farming community. I know how food ---I just love food. (laughs) I love food and I love the connection it can bring to people, in between people. So, I can't picture myself not working in Worcester, but who knows? I don't --- I could not even tell you my next steps for sure. Like I've said, I don't really make things happen. So, but yeah, I definitely would feel I would --- oh my God, one time I tried to be a nurse for a second. I forgot about that. I was kind of having like a crisis doing my work on New Lands Farm and I like signed up at QCC [Quinsigamond Community College] to be a nurse. I've been like helping my mom through this terrible mastectomy. She had that, went awry and like she had breast cancer. And all those things and I was like, "Oh yeah, that seems like it's really going to make sense for my life like financially and schedule, and yes I'm scared." None of my college credits have transferred I was going to, have to like start from scratch, so I was literally sitting in an English class at night. Like on top of my full-time job and I knew I was like, "No. Nope can't do this, like totally do not have the motivation or like wanting to hike up my student loans. No I'm not going do this." So, that was like the only time I had a career sort of crisis and I went right back to the farm and it worked out. So, I don't know I mean there's like other passions I have that I could look into but, I don't know I think it'll be hinged from here on out.

HP: So, you just mentioned helping take care of your mom and I think you mentioned taking care of your grandma as well right? So...

AC: Yeah, I'm a caretaker.

HP: Yeah.

AC: I still take care of my mom, she has like a lot of different needs. So...

HP: Here's my next question here. Are like, what are your primary responsibilities in terms of like housework and childcare or even just care in general?

AC: Yeah, so I do a lot with my daughters. So, I have my two kids. My husband who, (background muffle) you know, we're a team, but I do help him a lot. So, he immigrated here like 10 years ago, 11 years ago because I wanted him to. We had met while I was abroad, and we wanted to forge some sort of life together. To cut that story short in terms of like need, I have a lot of responsibilities, if that makes more sense. So, like I'm most --- I make more income than he does. He tends to not have full-time work throughout the whole season. So, I do sort of, I add his load to mine. I want to help him build his career. I help with a lot of stuff at home that feels out of his comfort zone. And then my mom, who lives down the street, has a lot of needs. She's become more immobile over the years. So, doctor visits, finance whatever help she needs financially to figure out... Shopping sometimes... I've been able to plan with her on how to do these things better. She has more of a health aid that comes in once a week. My sister pitches in but lots of doctor visits. Lots of like house cleaning and just --- she has a lot of stuff going on. So, I'm her ear. I'm somebody who needs to direct her, emotionally and socially sometimes. I have her come over and visit the kids. I have to pick her up and do those things and blah, blah, blah and then yeah our home. Childcare --- my youngest goes to daycare four days a week and then Ariana's finally in kindergarten so she's like mostly dealt with But I do a lot of like the schoolwork with her. Yeah, that's a small, but it's actually more. It's a lot and then house stuff. My husband and I are like pretty split, but there's obviously things where it's like tends to be my rule to do things where things --- like pick up to do --- I mean he's pretty domestic so he --- we share all the mundane tasks of the home, like the dishes, the clothing, like laundry and cleaning, putting the baby to sleep, tending to the baby. We call her the baby, she's almost two but a lot of that stuff he helps me with, but I end up doing ---I'm more of the bills person. I do the budgeting, which is huge when we don't have a lot of wiggle room. And then he's ---he can pick up kids sometimes. His work schedule is different so sometimes like I have more of the work load with the children because he's not home and the whatever, but I mean that fluctuates over the years, so it's a little different and then my work, but yeah...

HP: And then do you think being a caretaker has changed you over time?

AC: Yes. Sometimes not for the better. So, caretaking I think is all about boundaries, like especially when you're doing like internally, like your own family. So, it has been a struggle for sure, and I feel like two kids has been different for me. Once I got to like the second child, I mean that was all during the pandemic, too, like there's all that stuff that everybody kind of dealt

with. And then I think sometimes having a partner who is immigrant, I mean English is not his first language. There are some challenges there that I tend to put on me to problem solve, so like that is a form of caretaking whether it's like somebody that's not always asking you to do it by default. It is totally all about boundaries, and I just I wasn't brought up with good boundaries and I have to learn good boundaries. And then employ those good boundaries, so it's a lot. So yeah caretaking, but at the same time there's like a beauty to caretaking, too, right? It's not something that everybody has to do nowadays in our society. And I think that that bond of having older family members in your home is so important and I was so connected to my grandmother and knew like my great, great grandparents. And I think that stuff is so lacking from our society and it's so prevalent in my husband's home, right? Like in Nicaragua there's still like elders live for longer for one. They still live in their homes longer. They play by the roles in the home. Our society so it, it's hard because I'm conflicted, right? My mom is a burden on me, like straight out, she is burdensome and she can't always give it back the way she wants to if she was mobile again. This is something she freaking fixates on, but like if she was more mobile, she could help me with my kids, right? Like I wouldn't be paying for daycare and all these things and she could help out more blah, blah, blah. Which is also true like yes there is a burden to it, but like my grandmother did it for her mom. You know my mom did it for her mom and like I'm doing it for my mom. There's ---I wouldn't stop. And it is not something that I wouldn't want my children to witness. Like I think that the care of elders is so freakin' important and that maintaining them is a connection, so I should probably be more quiet about it being a burden, but I just have a hard timewith work, life, spouse, children balance. I mean I had that more so than others because I've always had depression in my life. So right now my depression and anxiety are like a little checked because I'm --- parenting is a struggle for me. Finances are a struggle right now and having a good therapist is a struggle. So, like my work life balance is out of whack. It probably will be until my youngest is a little bit older. I'm not having more children. I'm not emotionally capable of doing that. I can only be a great mom to these two kids, like that is enough for me, even though I would love to have more family and children. This world is just not cut out for that because I'm playing so many other roles. I am probably a person that would be happy to be with my kids more if there wasn't other restraints as well, so yeah, it's totally shaped me. It totally has an impact. Yeah.

HP: I'm done.

LB: So, I know that you play a big role in the Worcester community with all of the food issues. Have you ever been involved in any other form of volunteer community work?

AC: I'm bad at volunteering. Immigrant stuff and like signing people up... I did some work on registering people to vote a little bit because like that has always been near and dear to me. Mostly because I like walk my husband through like citizenship process. And I think that's really

important for folks that are non-citizens that want to become citizens and like they should. I think there's a lot of really important benefits to that. Yeah, that's it. I'm not good at volunteering because, like I said, I'm not great at, I mean I've always been active in whatever food actions that have ever been happening. You know, I do lots of like actionable items, like you know, writing and talking to my legislator, things like that. Again, mostly during work or pertaining to my work or my field. So...

LB: And do you consider yourself active politically? Being in that community?

AC: Yeah. Yep. Again, I can't always stick around. Like after hours, for the rallies in Worcester and stuff like that... Like over the years I've gotten less involved in those assertive actions because I've said I can't even get my act together to get there. But certainly, I tend to do any lobby days I can at the State House. I'm involved in a couple different advocacy groups. So, a lot of call to action, a lot of dissemination of like, "Hey if you guys can write to somebody about this bill, it would be really helpful. "I stay in tune. I did some postcard writing for different campaigns over the political years, so that even if it's like you know you write em' and you send em' to Georgia. You know wherever that important vote is happening, things like that. So, sort of like passive, definitely not a lot of like direct action. Stuff going on...

LB: Yeah, so it sounds like politics and just the community in general is really important in your life.

AC: Yeah totally.

LB: Would you say that religion has played a role in your life at all?

AC: Not really. (laughs) I grew up ---my mom was a Christian. My grandmother would go to church and things like that, but I don't think --- so I mean my spirituality yeah, I believe in all kinds of things. I love to glean the best parts of certain religions and hold onto them, but I've always been a child of nature. So, I seriously --- just I mean like it sounds a little woo woo, but I feel like there you know the earth around me is my god. And the impact I make on it and the people around me is what really guides me. But my husband's a Catholic. And observing Catholicism and other religions in places that are outside of this country, I understand why they shape cultures and why people will hold onto it. I think faith is important for a lot of people and I really, really respect that, and sometimes some days I'm jealous of it, too. Like I wish, I wish, I could have some one thing I can focus on and have them be my guide and have that be my compass because I do flounder a lot. I'm a very conflicted person, it's my personality, like it's very hard for me to make decisions. And some therapists would say that's my depression. But I think it's more because I'm an empath and I see so many different perspectives. It's hard for me

to make certain choices in my life cause I'm hyperaware of too much and of myself. So, yeah, so some days like having a Bible to just stick to sounds kind of lovely, but no, no I'm agnostic. Like so if people ask, I'm agnostic. Maybe when I was younger, I would say I'm an atheist, but I don't like to be that fooled anymore and I'm not sure like I wouldn't count it out one day that I'm --- I subscribed to something, but yeah no, definitely not.

HP: So, you also mentioned that you struggle a little bit with depression and anxiety right?

AC: Yeah.

HP: So, do you have any other health issues or mental health issues that you struggle with?

AC: Luckily not. (sigh) I'm about to be 39 and I do think that maybe it'll creep up on me because I've noticed my blood pressure is higher when I go to the doctors, but they don't care yet. I'm technically obese like right now I'm obese. I've been less obese in my life. I don't really believe in obesity in a lot of different ways and or how that applies hypothetically. I technically don't have anything physically wrong with me. I don't have to take medication for a medical condition. I do take something for my depression, but I have nothing going on with me health wise, which has been great because so many people my age and younger will have at least something going on. Blown ACL, I don't know anything, and I have been lucky enough to not have anything like that. I will say being obese and or chubby as a child and all those things has greatly impacted my life. So, like whether or not that's considered a medical condition is like obviously up to those. I had asthma when I was a kid. Then again, I had secondhand smoke and being chubby that doesn't mix all the time when you're little, so yeah, I mean that's been a struggle for sure. You know? Definitely always at odds with trying to love myself which I think most people are. Like honestly not dependent on whether or not they have medical conditions or mental health conditions.

HP: So, to treat your anxiety and depression, how is it accessing a quality in affordable healthcare and getting to those medications?

AC: Uh it sucks. The medication's cheap. I had a great therapist like years back and then had one for another like lots of years. So, like before being married, I went on Weight Watchers, I had a good therapist, I had a great workout routine, like had a balanced life and ate well, like worked on boundaries, and did all this really great work. And then I had a kid and it kind of all fell to the wayside. Also, costs had just gone up as my life has grown. All my financial needs have grown, too. So, like now the healthcare I get which is not through REC, it's through the Health Connector, nothing against the Health Connector, but like it's just limited. So, it's either pay out of pocket for a really great therapist or like paying my regular co-pay through providers that are -

-- accept my health insurance. And that's where I'm at right now. So, like once I left my other provider, mostly because I was done with her. She wasn't digging any deeper. She wasn't going the way I wanted to go. I was a mom, I was happy like everything was going okay and then challenges happened. And I hadn't found a good therapist since because it's a long list. It's a long list to rifle who takes your insurance, who doesn't. Who has the type of therapy you want, I just learned now that like there's types of therapies that I don't think go very far with me like not the ones I want to explore so that is like something I do on the weekly. I'm like, "Okay, today I'll like look for one." So, I do an email and then I get this back and then it's just been a slow go for me. The primary care doctor I see, like he's fine with dispensing me SSRIs [Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors] because he knows that I'm depressed and things like that. And I have a very ---I'm a very functional depressed person. You know? Like I don't ever miss getting up in the morning and taking my kids to school or like --- yes, I have to, you know ---I have some mental health days and I hurt relationships. Those relationships are a struggle for me and like feeling completely happy or caught up is difficult for me. Sometimes taking on the weight of my fellow community members and what they're feeling or experiencing is almost too much for me. So, I get --- those are obstacles for me. Sometimes I feel like my depression is an obstacle for me to be like a better advocate and direct actions sort of policy person. So, that has been difficult but yeah, he'll dole me out, he's doled me out a new medicine and it is functional. There was a while where I didn't want to do anything mainstream and I did a lot of homeopathic stuff, which is still a huge --- like I still think that's really important but a lot of things that I could work on like having really good food, really good exercise, like all those things that like help mental health. It has been challenging for me, so I have been grateful that there's medicine I can take and it's very easy and cheap and accessible. But yeah, I think it's hilarious that I can get those, or I could walk into like a cannabis dispensary and like all that stuff is so easy now. That and like going to the doctor and like a prescription, but finding a good therapist is like so difficult in this health industry we have. It obviously has grown since the pandemic and lack of in-office time has --- just so difficult and that, that has all to do with the health insurance industry as well. If it was easy for these wonderful private providers to take whatever insurance, they would be doing it. They're not taking it to be an asshole, they're not taking it because they would ---it would it damper their practice, like it's just so challenging. So, like you know again, it's a systems problem, but you know I do my best so yeah.

HP: Yeah, I appreciate how open you are about your mental health because I feel like a lot of people will struggle with that.

AC: Because it's stigmatized like it's not a big deal. It's --- lot of people have depression. Sometimes it's circumstantial. You know what I mean? You go through depression but I'm pretty convinced that from day one I have been low in serotonin or something. You know what I mean? Like my life hasn't been easy, but for some people and honestly that's why I'm not ---

that's the other thing, trauma right? So, no one's open about trauma. We're getting more open, but that's another reason why I think a lot of therapists and I can only get so much work done. You know what I mean? Because they want to practice on like cognitive behavior and all these things that I actually don't understand, but like I think that I need to address trauma, my mother's trauma. My relationship with my mother like a lot deeper, right... Which are, again these are like those are cycles that have happened. So, again something that we really need to be open about, and trauma is super prevalent in communities that suffer with food insecurity. You know like trauma is prevalent in communities of color. This is the big part, so I have done some of that work in groups and in group (??) not my own work, but working with communities through a trauma lens and, and when to celebrate because people do go through trauma and they come out on the other end. And communities of color and communities that are diverse like Worcester, you know... So that resiliency is really important and people's resiliency, culture's resiliencies, all of that is really important. So, it's all part of it. So yeah, that's why I'm open about it. But like I have nothing to lose. I don't care anymore. So, (laughs) but yeah. And it's just all there, you know what I mean? It's --- why hide it anymore? We've hidden things as a culture for so long. It's not worth it, so...

LB: How would you say...

AC: Can I pause and ask how many more questions you want to get answered?

LB: Yeah, there's just a handful left.

AC: I've got to get food.

HP: There's just a handful left.

AC: Okay.

LB: There are five left.

AC: Okay I'm going to take you with me. I might have to start cooking something, so go ahead and answer or ask the questions.

LB: Okay. How would you say that you would define success in your life?

AC: Ooh I like that one. Let me think about it and ask the kids a question real quick. [pause in conversation]

AC: Okay we got the meal plan in my life or at my work? Sorry the success in my life?

LB: Yeah, and how would you say the definition itself for --- has changed in your life overtime?

AC: So, I have to tell myself all the time that I am successful. Like I think I had a huge success with my home and my children are in a very decent school system. These are not successes I would've deemed... Like I wouldn't think I'd be here. I was on a very transient front. I wanted to travel, I didn't want to get married, I didn't want to add here to like the hetero-normative mainstream way of life in any way, shape or form and I'm here now, living it. (laughs) So, but it's really important. I do think so far that we have had success. I was successful falling in love and staying truthful to that and having --- working through the legal system to get my husband here. We've had children that were all intact, like they go to a good school system. We actually bought a home. My husband bought a home when like by ourselves, no magic like no magic thing happened. We got lucky in some ways, but like that's huge. So, like the blue collar me wants to say I succeeded. But honestly my personal life of true success is we do want to have a piece of land in Nicaragua and I want to have more connection to that land. My husband needs it. This is, this is not his 100% dream to like be in the states year-round. Like he wants to be back in his community and his family and not do it as an old man. Those are in his words. He doesn't just want to retire in Nicaragua. So, we really want to have that light where we can do both, and a lot of that hinges on our financial success. And, unfortunately, it does ---we've got ways to go once our other child's in school and things like that. Like it will get better, but I think success is being able to be here, have a home we love, all having jobs that fulfill us and being able to be in Nicaragua at least for part of the year or at least be going back and forth more often than we are now. So, yeah... And I guess we are success, too, like be more successful as like a white woman. I want to continue learning how to amplify other voices and to give space and figure out how that all works all the time. I mean it's always everchanging. I'm always ever learning but I, but you know, I also have a --- children that are technically bicultural. You know? Both of my children, at least for now, pass as white little girls, but they're not. They're Latin-X, you know? They, they're little Latinas. I want to hopefully provide a life to them where they can learn those parts of themselves and whole-heartedly love those parts of themselves and have their friends and other people in their lives love those parts of them. Yeah, and I want to stay with my husband. I want to work. Relationships are freakin' hard. So, I hope that we can always really work through things. I think that's success and I want to get a night's sleep one night. I can't wait 'till both children sleep better. Can't wait. That'll be successful, if I can get nine-hour sleep in like before I'm like 80. I think that'll be successful and I think other successes are just like continuing my own personal journey with loving myself and feeling whole. Again, loving all parts of myself and stuff like that. Yeah, again I'm pretty humble so, pretty modest like in forms of success.

LB: Okay, I know that you have touched on your trials and tribulations with your depression and anxiety. How would you say that you get through the tough times in your life?

AC: Through the tough times, well, it's helpful that my boss and I are so close because on a work level, it would be really intense if I had kept some of that in or hidden. But I think always having like work spaces that have been open and flexible is really important. What else? (sigh) Can you repeat the question? I'm starting to get faded here.

LB: Yeah. How would you say that you get through the tough times?

AC: Oh yeah, the tough times and I have networks. So having my sister, which up until recently, has been financial support, still in some ways, and that and so that's really important, right? Like still having family members in the area that can help me and then I think using my community as that well. This is kind of terrible to say as the distraction, but like it's not a distraction, it's like being able to help them and not...I'm not saying that in all mighty powerful kind of way. Like just having... So, being able to impact other people and put my work in front of me is so helpful on some days. So, that's how I get through it, and working with other people around me. Like I said, that network of amazing social justice warriors, who do happen to be women and a lot of women of color. Like just being able to witness that and sometimes be a part of it is --- gets me through it. So...

LB: So, based on your life experience, what advice would you give to women of today and future generations?

AC: Ooh, what kind of advice? These ones are kind of hard. I don't want to be corny and be like don't give up, but I don't know. Make your own space, be free to be a woman, you should never feel less than ---don't ever let anybody make you feel less than and don't ever think that you are less than. There's not one way to be a woman either, that just like there's no definition of what success is for one person and there's just not one overriding thing. Make sure to have fun and find love, enjoy your life, even if it is like in a career mentality. Even if we're talking about professionalism or something, find your comrades and stick with them. You know? Be willing to ask for help, too, like getting help on any, in any way, shape, or form as a parent, as a professional, as anything, don't be afraid to get help. We should be helping one another, it's not like a sign of weakness.

LB: Okay, I think that's really good advice.

AC: Great.

LB: So as a part of the Worcester Women's Oral History Project, we're working to tell a fuller story of the history of women that has been recorded in the past. What do you think that we should be sure to include?

AC: Say that last sentence like what's included?

LB: What should we be sure to include?

AC: Can you back up? I don't get it, sorry.

LB: So as a part of the Worcester Women's Oral History Project we are working to tell a fuller story of the history of women...

AC: Mhm.

LB: that has been recorded in the past. So, what do you think we should include in that?

AC: I think the stuff that's been hidden over the years like the miscarriages, the abortions, the, the shit I had to do to get to this country that I'm not proud of, the stuff that they had that they had other people go through like the dark stuff, I think is important to put to light because like I said, that resiliency's so important. It's what makes us adaptable people in what --- just all those lessons learned during resiliency and all those beauty that can come from it in the end. (sigh) What else? I mean, I think all the stories from older women, the like older, the better, you know? Maybe the younger, the better, too, like not folks like you. Those stories are important because I know for me that I have forgotten a lot of things that were probably important to me at the time of your age that I can't really even recall anymore, but yeah. I can't --- I don't know what else. The fight to be a woman like I think obviously like the non-binary and the trans community. Yeah.

LB: I think that's good.

AC: Great. (laughs)

LB: Is there anyone else that you would suggest that we talk to?

AC: Well beyond my boss, who I'm sure has already been approached, I don't know. I shouldn't have even asked or maybe she's already done this, but I think she's amazing. Her name's Grace Swiloski. I can email you her name. Do you mean anybody else like people?

LB: Any woman in the community.

AC: Oh, any woman? Gosh Nellie Medina. I can email you her. She's like a beautiful community member that lives in Worcester she's a Latina, super involved and has gotten more involved on a city and state level fighting for community. I mean and she really does do the fight, you know? She's out there with her kid at rallies and just doing so much work and really motivated because of her position in her community and as a parent and as a Latina, so like just super inspiring. There's probably a handful of women that kind of need that sort of description I just stated. Trying to think of other --- I mean there's probably just so many. I'm trying to think of somebody that has like a long, long history in Worcester. Yeah, I can get back to you on paper too. Let me think about that more, yeah.

LB: Okay. Those are all of the questions that we have for today.

AC: Great!

LB: Thank you so much for...

AC: Yeah!

LB: -participating in the project.

AC: You're welcome.

HP: Yeah, we really appreciate the time you gave us to do this.

AC: Yeah! This must be fun. How many do you get to do of these?

LB: This is the only one because we have to write the transcript.

AC: Oh, okay. Well I hope it was enjoyable.

HP: It was.

LB: It was!

AC: Well good luck.

LB: Thank you. We'll be emailing you an electronic copy of the informed consent and the deed of gift and then-

AC: Okay!

LB: You can just sign that and send that back.

AC: Perfect. This is exciting. Thank you so much.

LB: Thank you.

HP: Of course, thank you!

AC: Of course. Have a great night, bye.

HP: Bye.