

Interviewee: Ann M. Jenkins
Interviewer: Erin R. Anderson
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Location: Annie's Clark Brunch; Main Street; Worcester
Transcriber: Erin R. Anderson



Abstract: Annie Jenkins was born and raised in Worcester and now lives with her husband in North Oxford. In this interview, she discusses her work history with a particular focus on her experiences owning and operating Annie's Clark Brunch, a breakfast and lunch restaurant in the Main South neighborhood. After graduating from Dougherty High School and the School-Aged Mothers (SAM) program, Annie struggled to balance family obligations and paid labor as a young single mother. She began working in the office for the City of Worcester School Department, later working in the Tie Plaza at the Worcester Center Mall and at a rag processing factory on Southbridge Street. In 1986, she began working as a waitress at Wendy's Clark Brunch, where she met her second husband. Six years later, she and her husband bought the restaurant and she has been running it ever since. She discusses her relationships with her regular customers, the ways in which Annie's has changed over time, and its role of community-building in the Main South neighborhood. Annie also emphasizes the importance of her family life and her relationship with her husband.

EA: My name is Erin Anderson and I'm here with Annie at Annie's Clark Brunch on Main Street and it is October 6th, 2006. We are completing a citywide oral history of the lives of Worcester women, aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences. Based on the goals of the 1850 National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on the areas of women's education, health, work, and politics and community involvement. We want to focus today on your experiences with your work particularly, and thank you for your help with this important project.

AJ: Your welcome, Erin!

EA: What is your full maiden name and, if applicable, your married name?

AJ: My maiden name? And my married name is Jenkins. J-E-N-K-I-N-S.

EA: Ok. And where were you born?

AJ: Worcester, Massachusetts.

EA: And when was that?

AJ: ... 1956.

EA: Ok. And have you ever married?

AJ: My second marriage. I've been married twice.

EA: And who were...can you tell me the names of your husbands?

AJ: Paul Mancini was my first husband and Jerome Jenkins is my current husband. And I don't plan on doing it again [laughs].

EA: Alright. And could you tell me about your parents?

AJ: My mother and father were, ah, separated early. When I was a child. I—six years old I have memories of him but after that he was never around. My mother was a single working parent. My grandparents helped out. Ok? My mother's side.

EA: And were your parents born in Worcester also?

AJ: My mother was born in Palmer, Mass and my father was born in Lowell, Mass.

EA: Ok. And when did they move to Worcester?

AJ: Ah, my mother was, ah, early—my mother graduated from South High so she would have moved to Worcester, I think, in the, in the 30s. She was born in '33, so I think in the late 30s she moved to Worcester.

EA: Ok. And, where have you lived during your life?

AJ: Oh. Cities?

EA: Yeah.

AJ: Worcester. Just Worcester [laughs].

EA: Ok.

AJ: I live in North Oxford now though. Ok?

EA: Oh ok.

AJ: So I live in North Oxford, which is 15 minutes south of here. Yeah.

EA: Ok. So you grew up...what street were you born on?

AJ: Russell Street. Russell Street – Elm Park.

EA: Ok. And what was that like?

AJ: Friendly neighborhood. Everybody knew each other. Going to Bancroft Tower.

Going to Elm Park. Ah, summer sessions at all the different churches. Even though I was Catholic, summer school was at the Baptists. Or the Unitarian—I was in the choir there. Catechism at Blessed Sacrament. It was friendly—friends. I had a good time, yeah.

EA: And how long did you live on Russell Street?

AJ: I moved out of Russell Street when I was 18. So, that's about 74, 75?

EA: So is that when you moved out of your parents' house?

AJ: It was when I moved out of my parents' house. Yeah.

EA: And where did you—

AJ: It was a three decker.

EA: Oh, ok.

AJ: I lived on the third floor. My uncle owned the house. I moved to—that's when I got married for the first time. I moved to Charlton. To my mother's—well, it was a summer house that we had. But my grandparents—after my grandfather died they made it into a year round, so my grandmother lived there. I moved there—

EA: Where was that again?

AJ: In Charlton, Mass. I think we stayed there for about a year, maybe a year and a half. And we moved back to Worcester after that. And I lived off of Canterbury Street then.

EA: And what brought you back to Worcester?

AJ: Not having an automobile. Being in the country wasn't close to anything, you know, so it was more convenient to come back here. I was pregnant, too, at the time. So it was, um, coming back, you know? I had just had my son at the time, to tell you the truth, but we moved to Charlton and I had no transportation. We didn't have a car at the time, and it was more convenient.

EA: And do you have children?

AJ: I have two.

EA: Could you tell me more about them?

AJ: David is 33. And Meghan is 28.

EA: And they grew up—

AJ: In Worcester. We lived off of Canterbury Street. The kids were there. We lived off of Ripley Street, which is near South Worcester. All in Main South, where I am now. They grew up here.

EA: So you spent a lot of time in—

AJ: In Main South—South Worcester, yeah. [baby cries in background].

EA: Is she ok? [laughs]. When did you move out of the Main South area?

AJ: 1991 I moved to North Oxford.

EA: Ok. And that's where you live now?

AJ: That's where I am now, yeah.

EA: And what made you move?

AJ: My second marriage.

EA: Ok.

AJ: When I—I wasn't married at the time—when Jerry and I decided to move in together we were able to get a house and it was big enough for everybody. My kids were at the time 11 and 16, so that they had their space. He had his space, I had mine. Until we could make a family together. And it's worked out pretty well. And the kids—but we grew up in Main South—South Worcester area, honey. Yeah.

EA: Ok. And how was North Oxford different than, ah, than the Main South area?

AJ: It's more of a country living. I am on the main drag, but at night it quiets right down. But there are city streets, but they're quiet right down in the city. If anything, local traffic during the day isn't as busy, but it isn't that much different than being in Worcester.

EA: And how is it different raising children in Main South versus in North Oxford.

AJ: In the city, I think it's more convenient to get around places—city buses, cabs, walking distances to stores and everything. In the c—in North Oxford maybe a little farther to go places, but it's not that far to walk too. You know, it's not that small of a—it's not too bad of a country, at least where I am, ok? I'm more in the—what am I trying to say? I'm more in the city, the inner city part of Oxford, honey. Yeah.

EA: And you have a car now?

AJ: I do, yeah. Oh yeah, a lot of things have changed since, [laughs] since my first marriage and things, you know?

EA: And what impact has getting a car had on your ability to be mobile?

AJ: Yeah. Well, it gets you around a lot easier. You're able to go to more places. Your time schedule's a lot different. Instead of waiting for busses—I always either walked or took the bus when I was a kid.

EA: Mmhmm.

AJ: I had a car when I first—it was just when I first got, um, my son was born and we really couldn't afford a car at the time. We were able to get a car later on. Maybe not a brand new one, but you know, I was, middle class. Financially we always had to, you know, shut the rooms off in the winter if the heating bill got too much or whatever, but um, we were never, I wouldn't say, poor. But, I had a budget. There was times I had 20 bucks in my wallet for the week that would have to last, you know? But I think it makes you a stronger person. You know. Gives you a different viewpoint on things. You appreciate things a lot more.

EA: And was that similar to your upbringing when you were—

AJ: We were middle class. Yes. My mother—single parent, always worked. Grandmother always helped with babysitting and was always home. So she was there when my brother and I got home from school. My uncle, we lived in a family home, so my uncle was always home. So my uncle was on the first floor.

EA: Ok.

AJ: So we were, we were middle class. I wouldn't say we were poor, but we were not rich either, you know? [laughs]

EA: Ok. And what did your mom do for work?

AJ: Business. Credit managers at different, ah, an oil company in Worcester—Ware Pratt—she was in the business office taking care of the accounts. And I think at the end she worked for Elvona's at the end when she retired. She retired at 60. She had rheumatic fever and different disability things going on so she was able to retire early. And my mother was always involved with cub scouts, so I was always in cub scouts with her.

EA: Ok.

AJ: Same thing when my kids were growing up. We did the Little League, CCD at the Holy Name of Jesus Church, I was the secretary of Marenzo Little League for 8 years, I ran the snack bar for 8 years. Yeah, that's 'cause my son always played ball. So Meghan—I would drag Meghan along with me [laughs] and we watched her brother play ball, you know?

EA: So you were really involved in your kids' lives?

AJ: Yes. Yeah. And I believe you have to be to make sure... There was always kids at my house, that's for sure. They always—sleepovers, supper at night for whoever walked in the door. You know—the pile of American chop suey, sheppard's pie, baked macaroni—anything that was easy and could feed a lot of people [laughs]. That's what we had.

EA: And that's similar to what you have here [laughs].

AJ: Exactly! Exactly! You know. But everybody likes it.

EA: And did you—ah—you said you attended school in Worcester.

AJ: I did, yeah. Winslow-Sever were my grammar schools which they're no longer here anymore. Both the buildings have been torn down.

EA: Ok.

AJ: Ah, Chandler Jr. High was, well it was Chandler Jr. High, now I don't know what Chandler is. It's over there by Worcester State College. I went to Jr. High there, and I graduated from Dougherty High in 1974

EA: And what were your experiences like in school as a kid.

AJ: I—[talking to man who walks in the door] Hi honey. Daphne, could you change this for Jason, please? Yes, please. Ah, high school I took business. I wasn't interested in going to college so I took business courses. Then, um, in grammar school all A's and B's. I think we had a class of 540 at Dougherty and I graduated I think it was 200. So I was just about the first half of my class—A's and B's. But I took typing, shorthand, all that kind of stuff.

EA: Ok.

AJ: Which I worked for the City of Worcester—the school department—for one year after I graduated. I did the civil service, and then I got on the civil service and I worked there for—one year I worked for the school department and it ruined me for doing any kind of office work.

EA: Really? How come?

AJ: Women were horrible. Nothing but backstabbers that wanted to get rid of you that—Oh! It was horrible. My first experience was, I'm like, I'm not doing this. Sitting behind a desk, listening—you know, it was horrible.

EA: So the women coworkers were bad? How were your relationships with the men coworkers? Or did you work with men?

AJ: No, I didn't. The school district office was filled with women. We did requisitions for different schools—bring in what they wanted. Books and things like that for the next year. So my job was to type out the requisition and turn it over, so it was a pretty boring job to begin with, you know. But I don't remember any men being in the office. I think it was all women. All I know is that I didn't enjoy it. I enjoyed being with the people. I love being with people, but just couldn't stand the clique-iness. The "hi, how are you?" but then as soon as you walk away—the backstabbing. You know? [laughs]

EA: So putting on a persona for—

AJ: Yeah. And then it just, yeah. It ruined me from doing that kind of work. And then I went from there to—well I was a mother. I was a mother when I was a senior in high school, so I, you know—I did graduate, though. I was in the first SAMs program in the city of Worcester, which was the School Aged Mothers program at the YWCA.

EA: Ok.

AJ: I—you weren't allowed to go to school if you were pregnant then.

EA: Wow.

AJ: Yeah. So I was only allowed to go for my first trimester and after that I had to go to the SAMs program. And to tell you the truth, I think I could have—my son was born on Labor Day of my senior year. He was born on September 5th, Labor Day, and I went back to school and finished my senior year a week later. So, I mean—and I did finish. Like I said, without my parents—without my *grandmother* helping me, and my mother babysitting, and my, my son's godmother—so that I could finish my schooling, you know? I don't know what I would have done. But it worked. And I walked David to school, right near Elm Park every morning to drop him off at my girlfriend's house. And then I walked up the hill to go to school. I came back, picked him up and went home. So life changed, you know? I had responsibilities. I worked at the weekend—my social life was working weekends. I worked Saturdays and I worked Sundays at the Tie Plaza down at the Worcester Center back when it was first new.

EA: At the—the what plaza?

AJ: At Worcester Center. At the, ah, at the mall that's now closed—

EA: The Outlet?

AJ: The Outlet, yeah. Well, when it was brand new, I worked there. When it first opened, yeah. I worked there. At a little store.

EA: And what did you do?

AJ: Selling ties. It was a little corner tie plaza, it was called, and they had ties and bows and cufflinks and all that kind of stuff. It was a men's store. And I worked there. And that was my social life, you know, going to—I got to go out every once and a while, I mean, but like I said, you had responsibilities, you know?

EA: And did you enjoy that job?

AJ: I did. I did. And then, from there—what did I do from there? I didn't work for a while. My husband worked at the Standard Foundry right here down on Southgate Street and he had, at the time it was decent money, benefits. So we were able to—I stayed home with the kids, you know. And until—well, my marriage started to fall apart, I would say when my son was like 8. And it was getting a little bit—well, we separated a couple of times, tried to get back together. And finally in 1987 I called it quits. He had issues that just wasn't my—you know, he got into drugs, he got into alcohol, he got into drugs, and I was all set, you know? It was time to move on. And then, people, you know like staying together for kids—I don't think it's a good excuse. I just think it's better to get it—*do* it—and then start anew and just go along with life. And so from there we moved—after my marriage we moved to Thayer Court off of Ripley Street down here. And I started working here in 1986...87...86, I think or 87. It was walking distance from work. It was mother's hours so that I could walk to work and then I could get home for the kids from school, you know, after school. So it was convenient. The kids sometimes met me here, you know. Saturday mornings I would bring Meghan into work with me on Saturdays mornings. You know, get up and walk and we'd walk to work here. And you know I kinda—once the kids—well we moved 91, like I said, after I met Jerry in 88, 87—and I met Jerry here.

EA: Oh really?

AJ: Yeah. I met him here. [Daughter, Meghan: He thought she owned the place]. Yeah. He did think I owned the place [laughs], but...

EA: And how did he come under that impression?

AJ: Oh he was kid—ah, I worked for two brothers. And he knew the two brothers. And would pick up—he was a landscaper, so he would meet his crew here every morning. They would have breakfast and everything. And after like, I don't know, a few months and I finally did my paperwork and got my divorce—I did my own divorce, too. Yeah. It cost me a hundred dollars.

EA: Wow.

AJ: Yeah. Well I had one of those non-contested—he didn't have any money, so what was I going to get, you know? I just wanted a divorce. So I did my own divorce and once my paperwork was in Jerry and I started dating and we kept two apartments for like 3

years until we decided, like I said, we found this place in Oxford. It's an old farmhouse with big enough place that the kids had like their own little in-law apartment upstairs, I had a place with him downstairs.

...

AJ: [laughs] Yeah. Um, so after that, like I said, the place, and the price was right and it was big enough for all of us so we could learn how to live together. Because they weren't his kids. They were 11 and 16, different ages. They had their own thing going on too, you know? Meghan went to Oxford High from there and David was a senior up a South High so he stayed there and graduated. And David stayed with me up until he got married 5 years ago. And he's a UPS-er. He graduated from high school and he didn't want no college, but at least he's a UPS-er. He makes real good money. He's a Teamster, you know? Yeah, Meghan graduated from Worcester State and now she's back getting her Master's in Education so she can teach high school level.

EA: That's great.

AJ: And she's working with me just until she can get her Master's and I believe she wants to be a teacher.

EA: So when you first started working here, of course it wasn't called Annie's...

AJ: Nope. It was called Wendy's Clark Brunch. And I worked as a waitress. I worked here 6 years and the boys that I worked with wanted to sell it. So Jerry and I were dating at the time and Jerry had some money put away and—well his father, to tell you the truth, helped us with the down payment.

EA: Ok.

AJ: And so in 1991, we bought the restaurant. Well, *he* bought the restaurant, I should say. I ran it. He was here too. We worked seven days a week for 9 years until we paid everybody off that we owed.

EA: Wow.

AJ: Yeah. After that, I started taking Sundays off. [laughs] Still work 70 hours a week, though, but I wanted one day—it was getting to the point where I hated my job. So you have to sit back and say, “Do you want to change your job? Or we have to change something.” And I love my place, you know. So that's why I just decided to close down. Financially it may not be smart, but mentally it's totally ok. And to tell you the truth, I would love another day, you know? [laughs] And that may be coming, too.

EA: There you go.

AJ: Only because um, I'm low maintenance, low means. I don't have to have Italian granite marble bathrooms, you know what I mean?

EA: Right.

AJ: I'm quite happy with what I have, you know [laughs].

EA: So you said you worked for a couple of brothers, right?

AJ: Billy and Arthur James, yes.

EA: And they were the owners of Wendy's?

AJ: They were the owners of here, yes.

EA: And who's Wendy, then?

AJ: Wendy is, let's see. I worked here 20 years. I worked 6 years for the boys. She was here before the boys.

EA: Ok.

AJ: Wendy Wheeler, her name was. And she also worked here with her father, her husband...

EA: She worked with her father and her husband?

AJ: Her father and her husband here, yeah.

EA: And who did what, was she the...

AJ: She was, I think, the owner. But I think she had two teenage daughters and her priorities changed. She was spending too much time here. She needed to be with them.

EA: Ok.

AJ: And I believe that was the reasoning why she left. It was too many hours. And it is. People don't realize that you don't just walk out of here and the magic fairy brings everything back in in the morning, you know? Or makes all the food or whatever. It's a 5—well, I work 5 to 5. And I still do bookwork at home. Um, I have my own housework and you know, you have your own stuff to do. But I try to do as much of the book work as I have—my husband and I both have, he has his own small landscaping business. And he's also, he's 17 years older than I am right now, too. Right now he's a senior citizen and he collects social security, but he likes his landscaping customers and he just keeps his own that he has and it's enough for him to get back. Like I said, we get by. You know, we pay the bills, we don't owe anybody anymore, and it's a nice thing, you know?

EA: And did your husband ever work in the restaurant?

AJ: He did. He worked in the back kitchen if I needed to. And he still would if I needed him.

EA: Ok, and doing what kind—

AJ: Prepping. Prepping the potatoes. Or even flipping the burgers, he can do that. My mother's worked here with me, my niece. Family. Family has always. I try to keep it with family. And then of course I have the Clark kids that waitress. And they don't get paid. They get their meals, and they get their tips. And they like it. Yeah, they know they can come get their meal anytime they want.

EA: Oh, I didn't know that.

AJ: Yeah. Instead of paying them two-fifty an hour, I just—you guys can eat, you know? And they'd much rather come and be able to stuff their faces and know that they'll be full...and that's my arrangement with the kids.

EA: So what's it like working with family? [Meghan: a pain in the ass!]

AJ: It has its good and its bad. Yeah. It has its good and its bad. One of my favorite sayings, ladies? "Whose name's on the awning."

EA: And when your husband works here?

AJ: Oh, he's the boss.

EA: Oh, *he's* the boss?

AJ: Yeah, well, we always tell him he's the boss. We always call him the boss. Never let him think he's not the boss. [Meghan: he's not the boss.]

EA: But it's not called—but it's Annie's, right?

AJ: That's right. You got it, but I'll tell you without his homemade hash—he makes my chili—he's built the name up very much, yes. [Meghan: one thing about my mom having me here, she knows I'll never be late. I'll never not show up.]

EA: And if you did, she'd know where to find you, right? [laughs]

AJ: Well, trust me, all my help too, yeah.

EA: So did your husband work here more when you first opened?

AJ: Yes. Well, we got our initial investment from my father-in—from my future father in-law. So I wanted to make sure he got paid off. And we did. We did good, you know? [to someone in background] Thank you honey. [kissing noise] Thank you very much. And like I said, it was a lot more busy than it is now. There was a lot more friends. But life changes and I don't think there's a correct one answer for any problem why people aren't as busy as they were. I think it's a lot of things. Everybody says it's the economy, which—it's a clock, the economy. I've seen interest rates up to like 14 come back down again to 4, now it's coming back up again. It's happened all before, you know? Your generation hasn't seen it yet, so you don't realize that it's already happened. Gas. Going up to—everybody freaks—what, \$3 a gallon? It's been there before. It's been—well, not \$3, but it's been—I remember when you only had certain days you could get gas. We had our days, we had—I've been there. You survive. You gotta learn how to survive. I do believe the middle class is going to be the survivors. Because they're going to know how to work. They're going to know how to take care of themselves to live. Your rich has everybody else doing it for them. They're going to be clueless. Your poor are too poor already. You know, to be able...I think it's your middle class—that's your survivors right there. People who know how to work, not to be afraid of work, not to just look for a handout, you know? It's important in life.

EA: And how did you learn this, I mean, work ethic?

AJ: ...I think my grandparents always had good values. Honesty, um. [Meghan: My mom had to work. She was a mom at 16.] I believe being honest. I believe, um, being real is—that's it. You don't like someone, you don't like them. That's it. Don't try to be fake. Don't try to be someone else. And all I know is that I don't want to see all of these bills coming every month and getting all over-bloated just to keep up with the Joneses or the Smiths. I mean, sure, I walk into these places and say, "Wow. I wish I could..." Well, I could, but I also don't owe \$350,000 on a house. You know, which is fine with me. [laughs] I also enjoy going on vacation—much more than um, maybe putting in that Italian marble in the bathroom.

EA: So, leisure time...

AJ: Leisure time to me is what it's all about. Whether it's in one room—you know, you do what you gotta do. And it's all about being with you who want to be with, too. Exactly. I enjoy being with my husband. I enjoy being with my family. I hate working the time that I do right now, but it's—I love being here because people come *here*. People know where to find me twelve hours out of the day. Come on guys, you want me? You know where to find me. [laughs] I enjoy that. I enjoy people. Twenty years now I've been here, and I enjoy people knowing that, too, people knowing my name. "Oh, I know that place down on Main Street." I like that. Yeah. I like that.

EA: So do you have a lot of regular customers?

AJ: Always. Yes, definitely. Doctors, lawyers, Indian chiefs, politicians, city workers, a lot of everybody. That's another thing too. I should go up on prices. I should not give as

much as I do. So what? I can do it. I enjoy doing it. And that's another thing. I mean, people all the time tell me, "Look how cheap you are." Oh well, I tell them. Oh well. So give me more, then. [laughs] And if they give me a hard time, I usually *do* charge them more.

EA: There you go [laughs].

AJ: Yeah. You don't get mad, you get even. And it's usually at the cash register, that's what I tell them. I'm just holding it guys.

EA: I think in just a second I'm going to have to flip the tape over. So, ok, what were we talking about?

AJ: I have a lot of regulars...

EA: Yeah, ok. Could you tell me more about your regulars?

AJ: Well they meet me here in the morning. I come to work—and I don't open 'til six, ok? My hours are six to three. But I'll get here at quarter past five, five o'clock in the morning and one of my regulars will pull up, come in, they know I'm getting ready but they get their cup of coffee. I have to buy six newspapers in here a day because my regulars want their own paper in front of their papers and they won't share. So I buy six papers a day just to keep these guys happy. And I shouldn't just—they're not just men. They're women, too. But most of my regulars at six in the morning are men. You know, construction, they work at different factories, state hospital, Read-Lube. [Meghan joining in: Firemen...] Yeah, fireman, unions. The City Clerk of the City of Worcester is a regular. I had—Tim Murray was in here not too long ago. Mr. Murray was here.

EA: Wow!

AJ: Yeah! So I have my celebrities. Yeah. [laughs]

EA: And, like you said at six in the morning is usually men. Is there different crowds throughout the day?

AJ: Yes. At 6:30 in the morning—six to nine unless there's finals.

EA: There we go. Let me switch this real quick. [turns tape over]

AJ: From six to nine, six to ten, it's usually your working person. They gotta be to work for either six. They gotta be to work for eight, for nine. Then unless it's finals times or something like that then I'll have the Clark students who've been up all night or are getting up early to study for that final exam. They'll come rolling in. I've been bombarded in here at six in the morning all by myself with like 30 kids all coming in at once. And I just look and I'm like, "Alright, guys." And usually there's a regular among the faces and they know where to go grab the coffee. They know where to grab the water

for waters. They all work—I mean, that’s what I like about it too. The kids will grab their own silverware—they’ll make themselves at home. That’s what I like about it too. They feel like this is their kitchen, like they’re in their own kitchen. And I used to real nervous about it, but now it’s like *que será, será*. What are you going to do? You either wait or you don’t wait, guys. And then after that by lunch time, being it’s so hard getting a parking spot around here, too. There’s a lot of walking business. The professors, the workers at Clark, of course. Without Clark University being here, this place would not make it. I have to admit, but my summers are my survival time. Where you know that your paycheck is going to be about in half for the summer. But as long as you get through those ten weeks and just manage, you can do it. I’ve done it. I still do it. And the kids make good money here, too. They complain how this one doesn’t tip, that one doesn’t tip. We try to—you try to—in their own countries they don’t do it. So you try to make them understand, but there are some people who just don’t want to learn. They don’t care to learn—whatever, you know? And I try to tell the girls, too, don’t dwell on it. Don’t let it make you miserable. Just let it roll off of you and let it go. You’ve got enough things in life to be worried about than to worry about what tables didn’t leave you a tip. And then again, maybe it’s because you’re a lousy waitress. [laughs]

EA: That could be [laughs].

AJ: Well, that’s what I mean. There’s different things, you know, honey?

EA: And when you were a waitress—how were things different before when you were a waitress?

AJ: The customers before—*eggwhites*. With cheese. Ok? We never had any of that. Maybe the dry toast I can see, but now it’s—I didn’t have the vegans, vegetarians, as much. Which I have a vegetarian menu. I can serve a vegetarian. I can do a vegan. I’m ready for them. See, I think when I started working here we didn’t worry about that. There were more hearty eaters—wanted your bacon and eggs. They wanted to eat. They didn’t want fruit. I do a lot of things now that I never did do. The fruit. Having fruit. Having the veggie burger. I wouldn’t be caught dead with a veggie burger in here.

EA: [laughs] I appreciate the veggie burger.

AJ: Oh yeah! And the ground turkey for turkey burgers and stuff like that. A lot of stuff like that has changed.

EA: Is that because the people coming in have changed?

AJ: Yeah. And these kids love my mashed potatoes. That’s another thing. Comfort food. Mashed potatoes, gravy, the turkey dinner, the meatloaf dinner—everything’s *homemade*. And the mashed potatoes are for the vegans. So I try to do that, too. I even have the Canola spray if they freak out on too much—too much butter! [laughs]. So there’s a lot of things that I do different that they would never do. It’s not something they would do. But I don’t remember people ever asking, “what’s in this?” or “what’s in that?” Can we read

your bread to see what's in the ingredients? Sure. I'll be right with you. [sarcasm].
[Meghan: "Can I see your box of pancake mix? I want to see if it's vegan or not."] Yeah.
So that's how it's changed, maybe.

EA: And have your relationships or interactions with people changed? You know, before you were owning the restaurant when you were waitressing, as opposed to...

AJ: I'm sure it's changed, but the point of changing...well, I still have a list of people that owe me money. To the point where, if someone comes in here hungry, I'm not going to say no. And believe me, if they wanna do a job, take my trash out for the day or something? They're going to get a meal. I love doing that with somebody. I've got plenty of students—I'm never going to let somebody go out of here hungry. I just couldn't do that. I think that's the mother.

EA: Yeah?

AJ: You know, I remember plenty of times where I had an extra head coming into the house. Alright, there went my plate. There went my supper. Guys, here. I always could find something to eat. And maybe that's just the being the parent thing, the mother things. Which, I think that's where maybe this society has lost balance. Parenting. You don't just have a kid and they're supposed to learn. You don't send your kid to school and think the teachers are just going to teach them. Teachers are there to *teach*. Not about growing up or parenting. Parenting is your department. It's your department to make sure they do their homework. You know, you can't leave it up on a teacher. "You sit there. You stay in until you do your homework or you don't go out, you don't go to school. You know how you're sick in the morning but then you're alright in the afternoon? Ma! But I'm alright now! Well, too bad." That was another rule in my house. You don't go to school, you don't go out. You're in for the day. No friends, no calling, no nothing. That's it! I wasn't really—I think I was an easy mom. I didn't ask anything that I had to do. I don't think I ever asked anything unreasonable. I always told my kids, too, "You're ever anywhere that you don't want to be, you pick up the phone and you call me. I don't care what time—I don't care. I will come get you. You might have to listen to plenty, but I'll come get you. Don't forget that." [Meghan: and she did, too!] And I, well, I had one with this one, yeah. A phone call at I don't know what time of night. [Meghan: Three in the morning?] So I went and got her. Of course! My 33 year old. There was a juvenile issue at the Mass Electric. Him and two buddies got caught throwing rocks on the railroad tracks. That's a federal offense! That's court. That's criminal. Got arrested. Broke my heart, but I let him sit in that jail for six hours so that he would get the point. And I—he was scared shitless when I got there. He couldn't *wait* to for me to get there. And he went to court—embarrassed the heck out of me, but—and he got community service. He had to pay back money. They did good. The court, the community service, they did good. I think each of them had to pay back like \$300 and, knock on wood, they kinda—you know he got a lot of speeding tickets during his high school years and that kind of thing. [Meghan: He owes his sister for that one!] But when it comes down to court or anything like that—thank you—that was it. He turned his life around and that was it. But it was, you know,

boys being boys. [Meghan: I hate that! I hate that! She treats boys so much different than she treats girls.] Now that's the argument my girls have been giving me for years.

EA: Really?

AJ: Yeah. I was brought up—my grandfather ruled the house. Dinner time, grandpa sat at the head of the table. And I still—my husband—it's the same way. We have a family meal and my husband is at the head of the table. Of course he's at the head of the table! He's the head of the household. I don't think that's—I'm not being—it's not a male or a thing— [Meghan: But after dinner the boys can go watch TV while the girls clean up]. Well...what can I say? Ok. I didn't make anybody clean up. Trust me, honey. I do the dishes. I've always done the dishes and I've always cleaned up. I've never forced—which I wish I had been better with my kids growing up about that. Making them make their beds, pick up their rooms more often than I did. I used to just shut the door.

EA: [laughs] That's one strategy!

AJ: And I was afraid to look in rooms. I hated to see what I used to—when I did clean the rooms. Glasses that had been there for a month. Dishes. Guys! But I also had a garbage bag in hand and I said, "Guys, you have a half hour to pick up everything that you want and if it's not picked up, this is where it's going. If I go in there, this is where it's going."

EA: Wow.

AJ: So, I mean, I wish I had been better with that. Teaching—making them make the beds. Doing that kind of thing—more responsible. But my son, he does housework now. He's a stay at home dad right now because he had back surgery, so he's watching my granddaughter while his wife works. And I never thought I'd see him do that. But he's impressed me quite well. My daughter's wonderful. I went through my bad—I mean, it was rough being with them at points, but they've turned into wonderful adults, I think. Yeah. This one could be a little nicer, but I blame that on her father. [laughs] The genes, you know? [Meghan: You were born with the sucker genes. I wasn't.] Well, see that's another thing. See, they think I'm too easy. They say no. I don't say no—well, I try not to. But I have learned to say it a lot—I mean, yeah.

EA: That's an important skill.

AJ: Yeah. It's not *easy* to say no, but it's definitely necessary sometimes. And I have to put blinders on and I have to just say to myself, "You're not wrong. You're not wrong with what you're doing. Just do it!" And I say no a lot more than I ever have, lately. I really have. [Meghan: She's learning!] I am learning. I'm 50 now. [laughs].

EA: And, um, when your kids were young and everything, you did most of the work around the house?

AJ: I did. I did. My first husband had—was useless. I totally—he was brought up in an Italian family. Drinkers. Fighting, yelling, screaming. Totally the opposite of what I had in life. Totally the opposite.

EA: And did he work?

AJ: He did. He worked at Standard Foundry as a laborer. Came home dirty as heck. But the uniform would be taken off on the back porch. I would have to wash the clothes separately. He did work. But he also had a hard time—I would have to meet him at the local neighborhood bar on payday if I wanted any money. And that was the worst part. The kids and I would walk in tow, go down and meet dad, get the paycheck cashed so that I could have money for groceries—and really that's it. Groceries and pay the bills. If it comes out as anything for me, it was always last. Which, I think that's another thing that's a normal parent thing. You try to give your child more than what you—well you always try to give your child more than what you had, but I found out: what is wrong with what you had? And you don't learn that until, I think, you become a parent. Or you have to take care of somebody else. And to stick that on your kids—well *of course* they want \$150 sneakers. The other kids have them. Guys, I'm sorry, but it's not there. You try to do your best without putting yourself too far into hock. You've gotta show them that, just because we don't have what this person has doesn't mean that we don't *have* something and be lucky what we have. Because it's not easy to make a living today. You can't go to a baseball game! Some people don't even make that in a week—a paycheck.

EA: The Red Sox, you mean?

AJ: Exactly, honey. I mean, going out. You go out—come on, honey, you go out to a bar, you know it's going to cost you easy 40, 50, 60 dollars? I remember these guys if they—a \$20 bill. Now I'd much rather buy a 6-pack and go home. It's a lot cheaper. A lot easier. No more arguments, whatever. You do your housework, you get your stuff done. I'd much rather just stay at home. I don't mind being at home. Here and at home—I'm happy.

EA: Yeah? And the—so were you a stay at home mom at some point during your—

AJ: I was. I stayed at home when Meghan was born—1978. And I didn't go back to work until Meghan went into...not preschool. It's not daycare. What's it? Headstart. Headstart. And the bus would pick her up in the morning right outside the street, and that's when I started doing the—not here, but I worked down at a local factory. The mother's shift: from nine to two. And I was home in time to get the bus for Meghan and my son—we lived right next door to the grammar school. It's was easy. So I walked to work. It was right on Southbridge Street. And then after I left that job there cause I got offered this job here at the restaurant.

EA: And how did you get that—

AJ: Friends of my first husband. The two boys—the brothers that I worked for were friends of my first husband.

EA: Oh, ok.

AJ: And friends of my second husband, too. We kind of knew everybody. [Meghan: Mention the fire, too.] Oh, and we had a fire, but we got burnt out of the fire in... [Meghan: 83. No 82. I was in Pre-school]. 82. And no insurance.

EA: Oh my gosh.

AJ: And the landlord had no insurance. So it was three months of living with—I lived with an aunt in Cherry Valley, I lived with a friend up on Grafton Hill, I put together a package for applications for housing to get going on that. And about three months after the fire we were able to get an apartment over here on Ripley Street. Of course we—I started out all over again cause I lost just about everything. But Red Cross helped at the beginning. And then, of course, welfare. They gave you vouchers—you couldn't buy brand new stuff, but you could buy your couch, your stove, your refrigerator—your initial stuff. Beds. And from there on I just—you save. You have to do like I said.

EA: That was when you were working here?

AJ: No.

EA: That was when you were at the factory.

AJ: At the factory, yes. It was called Talbert Trading. And it was one of those factories that a lot of people in the city worked at 'cause it was a rag store, like. And they did business with the—well, the second hand stores. And that's what I did, basically, was work the conveyer belt for silks and satins. The lingerie. I got some wonderful stuff. I clothed my kids for six years. Jeans, flannels. And this was brand name stuff, some of them. But they would come in in big bales and they'd put them on these wooden tables. And your women—and they were mostly all women. Your men were your fork truck drivers and your—the manager, the head of it. And you would pull out all of the stuff. The pants. I never realized that there was so many different kinds of wool, of fabrics. You learnt that. Um, raincoats, tweed jackets. And you would just—for conditions. For your second hand stores around the area. Or you know, flannel, cotton is made—did you know windshield wipers are made from cotton?

EA: I had no idea!

AJ: Yeah! So all flannel shirts, cotton—and they would go to Clinton Wiper and they would make—you make windshield wipers out of that. And I did—but it was like slave labor. You know, your basic pay raise, your basic thing. But it was mother's hours: nine to two.

EA: And that impacted what you—

AJ: Exactly. And it gave you that extra little pay in your pocket that you could get—And like I said, it was my social life. I loved it. You could talk to people. You know, you were *out*. Instead of being stuck in the house. And you did your dish—when I got out it was time to get supper going, that kind of thing. But you just, you managed. You managed, honey.

EA: And when you found out about the job at Wendy's, were you just ready to move on to something new or—

AJ: Yes. I think I was tired, of, of— And it was more hours. And it was better money—I knew it was going to be better money. And it was, too. I made fantastic money in here. I really did. There was times I worked six days a week and I would make almost a thousand dollars, in cash. The place was hopping. I was a great waitress—I *am* a great waitress. Remembering people's—what they ate. I can't remember names very well at all, but I can usually remember what you eat. Or just tiny things like that. How you take your coffee, how you—certain little things people enjoy. They like to be remembered. And that's why, look at all my plaques! Look at all my awards and stuff. I even got a Clark University award they gave me five years—six years ago for community service. Graduation weekend. It was nice. They had a little party for me out back. Yeah! They gave me a plaque. I thought it was nice of them. The alumni did it.

EA: Do you see Annie's as having a community service function?

AJ: Definitely. Definitely. Yes, I do.

EA: How so?

AJ: Because of what I do everyday. How I help everyday. Like I said, they know—there are a lot of people that know they can come in here and get a good homemade meal, reasonable prices, and usually some wonderful conversation, and usually the whole place usually talks to each other too. It's not like you're by yourself in a booth. It's funny how many times somebody will turn around and say something. *Interact* with each other. And a lot of that goes on. A lot of it, yeah.

EA: And when you started working here as a waitress, did you find that it served the same social function in your life? Like you said you enjoyed the social atmosphere of the other—

AJ: Being behind the grill cooking is a lot more confined than being able to go around and talk to everybody and even if it is on a—picking up a dirty dish or bringing them a refill or whatever. Being over there, I can usually just about say “hi” or if I do get a break I'll go over and make sure everything's alright. Which I kind of try to do. Especially after I've filled the house up and I've fed everybody, I kinda want to go around and make sure that everybody's getting what they want and coffees are getting done and my waitresses

aren't shooting the shit with their friends but waiting on my customers. Which, like today a couple of my waitresses' girlfriends came in right at lunchtime and the place is packed and I just said, "If either one of you two say anything to her, you're going to be dead. Shush." And they better know better. Because then they just talk to her and they don't wait on my customers. That's the only problem I have is help. And caring about what they do. Not just looking at it as a job, but *enjoy* doing it. You've gotta be happy with what you do or you're going to be miserable in life. So try to find something that you're happy with. Like I said, I—there's no benefits. The money is good, but when I hear people talk about that they—they don't make enough money but they have medical. They have dental. They have sick time. They have vacation day. They punch in—now you're not going to tell me that you punch in nine to three or seven to three that you actually give your employer seven to three. Come on! We already know that that's not even a reasonable question. Stop complaining. There's a lot of people out there for your job. If you don't like it, then change. Find something else. But they bitch all the time about that. [laughs]

EA: And when you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

AJ: I always wanted to be a schoolteacher. And then I remember one time—oh I always wanted to be that perfect housewife—

EA: Oh really?

AJ: With the white picket fence and the husband that came home and said, "Hi dear! How was your day?" Maybe that was because of the era I grew up in, too. The 50s the 60s. "Father Knows Best" was on TV. You know, that kind of thing. I don't know—schooling was never one of my—studying. I can never read a book. My attention span just isn't there. I lose track of what I'm reading. The best I can do is a short story, People Magazine, Star Magazine. But if you give me a thick book—it was never one of my to-do: reading. Whereas, my offspring loves to read. I just can't keep it in my head. I don't know, some medical condition—will probably tell me I have some sort of medical condition.

EA: Of course. They like doing that these days.

AJ: Yeah. And they'd want to give me a pill for it. I personally just roll with it [laughs] and just tell people I don't like to read. That's it. I'm much more of a people person.

EA: And how did you learn the skills you need to run Annie's?

AJ: I've just learnt them. I've just learnt them, honey. And I totally already know that I'm a lousy boss.

EA: [laughs] How so?

AJ: Because I'm always the last one working! I should be the first one walking out the door, but I'm usually the last one, ok? I like things done *my way*. [Meghan: Even if something is done, she has to do it herself.] I wish I could do it all. You know what I'm saying? I really do. I wish I could do it all. But I enjoy seeing my finishing touches. I used to cater.

EA: Oh, wow.

AJ: I did catering for—when the kids, well, when the kids were in high school. Well, Jr. High more, early high school—I worked for Charlotte Wolf Catering, a big Jewish caterer...[to Meghan] What do you mean no? I worked—early 80's? [Meghan: Yeah. I was 5.] I worked with them. And there would be days I would leave on a Friday and not come home until Sunday because of catering jobs. And I would manage her—make sure plates, cups, napkins, silverware was all ready to go. And then I would cook and prep things too and then at the party I would make trays and garnish them and learn to do all of these pretty little things like Martha Stewart, you know? And that was great. That helped me out a lot here. The food preparation thing. I think that's when I got interested in food and doing the whole restaurant thing.

EA: Oh, ok.

AJ: But it's hard work. Doing a restaurant is hard work. [Meghan: I gotta bank.] Yes, honey, I know it. I do too, almost. [Meghan: Your husband's sick.] I know. I gotta go. I'm sorry, honey.

EA: Ok, let's see...I gotta prioritize a bit here...Let's see. Ok, well, what challenges have you encountered as a female restaurant owner?

AJ: Being able to survive twenty years owning a business. Paying my taxes, paying my bills. I think that's a big—being able to do that. Just still having a business. And it's a *profitable* business. I'm not—I don't make a lot of money, but I'm very *proud* of what I do. *And* paying my bills. Where a lot of people don't pay their bills. They don't have a conscience. They don't care if they owe. Where, there's no way. That would bother me—totally bother me. I wouldn't be able to sleep at life if I felt like I had this big figure hanging over my head or something like that. Whereas, today, nobody cares about going out and signing their lives away: brand new vehicle for 10 years. Or a house that 3 years later they can't afford. Or even a year later, it's back in the bank. I pay my bills, and I think that's a big step right there. Responsibility.

EA: How would you define success in your life?

AJ: Happ—Success?

EA: Yeah.

AJ: Having a wonderful man, I tell you, is wonderful. My husband loves me to death and he's my best friend. And right back at me. We help each other. We work together. There's no: that's your job, that's my job. We work together. There's no: that's your money, that's my money. There's no fighting. Not that we don't fight. Usually it's about bringing my kids up. He always had a different issue—not every time—but he always wanted to be a lot tougher than I was with my kids. But we worked it out. We worked on it. You just can't give up. You know, we worked on it and, like I said, it's all turned out good. We are a family now. And they will call. They will ask—and they know that. But there was a time when they had a problem with mom being with somebody else. When I was all theirs for like a good seven, eight years that my ex-husband wasn't really. And he never cared. He never took the kids. And I always felt bad that he was such a shithead when it came down to that, but I always wanted to let them know that it wasn't their fault, it was his fault. That it wasn't them, it was him. And that he was the one that was gonna be sorry someday. And I hope he is. Because even to this day, he's never touched base. But to tell you the truth, neither one of the kids—they're ok with it. They know it. They have somebody—both of us. Jerry and I would do anything for the two of them. And we have. We have. But I really have to admit, my relationship with my husband has to be the most successful—because we've worked together to have what we have. So I really do have to say that. Having a good relationship really is the best.

EA: Do you see your business as sort of a product of that relationship?

AJ: I do. It's a lot of it. Definitely. Like I said, without him helping me, and vice versa—the kids and I have landscaped. We've ploughed. We've shoveled. And if that's what it took to keep the business going, we've done it. Gotten up at all hours of the night to shovel in the winters 'cause he ploughs the counts. And we've gotten up to do it. And he was in the hospital. We took care of it when he was in the hospital. I learned to plough [laughs].

EA: That's great.

AJ: Yeah. Maybe not as good as he did, but we managed. We did it. We did it. But I mean I think that's my best success, I think, honey. Yeah.

EA: So now that we're working to tell a more complete story of women in Worcester than has been included in the past, what do you think we should be sure to include. Or what would you, what would you say to future generations of women in Worcester?

AJ: To look at all aspects. Don't just look at your far lefters and your far righters that blame Bush for everything and enjoy Clinton for everything. Learn how to—I don't think anybody's going to know the whole story, the true story. But try to see people for a lot of aspects. Not just one quality. Because they wear a brand new suit and have this hundred dollar tie on or something doesn't make a person. The person with a shopping cart, a homeless person, could be just as smart in their own way. Do you know what I'm saying?

EA: Mmhmm.

AJ: They seem to look at one angle. Especially your women's studies. Your—that department... But I think it's all growing up, too. I don't know any original hippie that still has the same viewpoint that they had in 1969. I'm serious. I know plenty of real hippies that are voting Republican today. So I think it's about growing up. And hopefully you learn not to take advantage of your parents, not just looking for handouts and things. One of my favorite sayings is: It's easy to be a socialist when you can call home to Mom and Dad. I mean, you're all going to try to save the world, but how exactly are you going to save the world when you can't even support yourself. But it's growing up, honey. And you do learn. You just gotta hope you learn in the right way.

EA: And what do you think is the most important thing you've learned over your lifetime?

AJ: Being able to get along with different classes of people. Being able to *talk* to different classes of people. People enjoying you. I love that idea. Nobody talks bad about me. They better not. What do I do? I only try to put smiles on people's faces. And I think that's what a lot of things... Try not to road rage—but then again I can be a truck driver when I want to—with my mouth—if I have to. Which is another bad thing and I try to zipper it up a lot of times. I don't even talk a lot of times I just let people roll off the heads what they're saying to me. Because you're never going to agree with everyone's viewpoints. But you can't be mad at them. It doesn't make all the person just because they have another viewpoint of you and I try to explain that to the kids. Just because I feel different doesn't make me a bad person. This is America. We *can* do that here, can't we? And that's how I try to—come on here. You should see him when I tell them: “Guys, I didn't vote for Bush once, I voted for him twice.” “You DID?” “Yeah, and I was raised Roman Catholic Democrat in my house. Kennedy hung next to the Crucifix.” But you'll find all politics are crooked. I don't care if you're a democrat or a Republican. I don't care you're Clinton, Kennedy, Bush. They all got their skeletons in their closets and they all look good on TV when they're going to do something good, but as soon as that TV camera's off, come on. It's all about the rich staying rich. But politics—it's all about your power and your big money. And then people who don't vote! I don't get that anymore either. You can sit there and bitch and give me an opinion when you don't vote? “Well, my vote's not going to count.” What kind of attitude is that? Vote, stupid! I mean even if it doesn't count it might count someday. And you voted, didn't you? As far as I'm concerned you guys don't have the right to talk about anything. Keep it all to yourself if you don't vote. Are you kidding? My mother's still mad at me. I'm a registered Independent now and not a democrat. My mother's still mad at me.

EA: Really? Wow.

AJ: Yeah. She just says, “I keep believe you can vote—” But I own a business. I know how hard it is to stay here, pay your taxes, do what you gotta do, and I do not believe that the far left will help you at all there. They'd rather give it away to people who— [laughs] Come on! Who don't need it—or don't deserve it, I should say. But that's a whole 'nother issue. Around here it's a little hard. Come on, it's a liberal college here, honey.

Talking about foreign policy, talking about women's studies. You gotta watch out. But it doesn't make the person. I have friends every—I have gay friends, I have lesbian friends, I have all walks of life friends. Older generation, senior citizens—right down. I have my own viewpoints and I do what I'm going to do. Like I said, it's America. I can do whatever—as long as I stay against the law, right?

EA: Well, there you go.

AJ: There you go. [laughs]

EA: Well, thank you. And is there anything you'd like to add?

AJ: Is that enough, honey? No, I just think you're wonderful, and thank you for including me in this.

EA: Yeah. Thank you! It's been great.