

Interviewee: Dr. Claire Quintal
Interviewers: Meredith Deacon and Melanie Hentz
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Transcribers: Meredith Deacon and Melanie Hentz



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Abstract: Dr. Claire Quintal was one of the first women professors at Assumption College. She never married because she chose a career path in lieu of a family, which in her generation were the only two options. She was born in 1930 to a loving Roman Catholic, French-Canadian family where French was her first language. She grew up in Central Falls, Rhode Island, where she had a happy childhood. Claire attended Anna Maria College in Paxton, MA, and graduated in 1952. She taught high school level French, English, and Latin in between college and graduate school and enjoyed every minute with her students. She came to Worcester in 1968, after living in France for ten years and receiving her doctorate. Claire has an overall good outlook on Worcester, MA but feels that there is room for improvement. Claire was not very active politically but was a delegate at the [Houston] International Year of Women Conference in 1975 and was President of the Franco-American Women's Federation of New England for eight years. She did a lot for women with a French-Canadian background. She taught at Assumption for one year before the college became co-ed, finding herself surrounded by men. It was a challenging and lonely experience for her. She prides herself in having founded the French Institute at Assumption College, which has published and translated articles and books relating to Franco-Americans and the immigrant experience.

MD: 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/community involvement. We want to focus today on your experiences. Thank you for your help with this important project!

Can you state your name for us?

CQ: Yes, my name is Claire, middle initial H, last name Quintal. That's Q-u-i-n-t-a-l.

MD: Is it o.k. that we record your interview today?

CQ; Yes, it is.

MD: It's March 17, 2009. What is your full maiden name and if applicable your married name?

CQ: I have never married, and so my name is the same as stated above. Claire, C-l-a-i-r-e, middle initial H., Quintal, Q-u-i-n-t-a-l.

MD: When were you born?

CQ: When?

MD: Yeah.

CQ: I was born on April 28, 1930.

MD: What cultures do you identify with?

CQ: The culture of French Canada, and France where I lived for ten years. I lived in France for ten years and studied in Quebec.

MD: Can you tell me about your parents?

CQ: Yes, my mother was a stay-at-home mom, a bright lady, thank goodness. She passed that on to most of her children. My father was a bookkeeper, was in business, and later in life became the director of housing for the elderly in the city where I grew up, Central Falls, Rhode Island.

MD: Where have you lived during your life?

CQ: Well, I lived in Central Falls; I went to college in Marlborough, Massachusetts. Went back home after college, taught high school there. And then spent ten years in France, in Paris, doing research for my Ph. D. And then doing research also on the Middle Ages. Out of which came a book entitled [The First Biography, it is historical] Joan of Arc, it was a biography of Joan of Arc. And then returned, that is when Assumption hired me as an assistant professor, I came to Worcester then in 1968, from Paris. So from Paris I came to Worcester, and have lived in Worcester since 1968.

MD: So you came to live in Worcester because Assumption College hired you as a professor?

CQ: That's right, that's right.

MD: Where do you live in the city now?

CQ: I live on the West Side, near Tatnuck on Moreland Hill.

MD: Have you live in multiple areas of Worcester?

CQ: I lived downtown when I first arrived; I was living in an apartment in downtown Worcester, in the old Bancroft Hotel.

MD: Do other family members live in this area?

CQ: I have a sister who is the registrar at Anna Maria College, in Paxton, Massachusetts. She is also a religious Sister of St. Anne. The Sisters of St. Anne founded that college after World War II.

MD: What challenges do you think the city still faces?

CQ: Multiple challenges of all sorts, really. Worcester seems to be very unlucky as to how to promote itself. I think it is an excellent city; it has a great deal of potential. Many good people live here. It has stable neighborhoods, for which we should all be grateful. But [in] the downtown area, everything has been tried to revive it without a great deal of success.

MD: What would you change about the city?

CQ: I really don't know what I would change, what I would be able to change. I would just simply hope that those who are in power would be enlightened one day and finally [find] the magic system that can make the city come alive. The city has so much potential. It has, with all of its colleges, and hospitals, and the College of Pharmacy, it has so much going for it, really. And all of the good young people who are here because of the colleges of course.

MD: What changes have you seen in Worcester over time?

CQ: I have seen Worcester try to embellish its downtown, to revive its downtown. To make all kinds of efforts at bringing downtown to life without a whole lot of success. It is about to try something new again and one has to give credit to the powers that be in the city for not giving up on the city. It's too important and too large a city. It's the second largest city in New England which surprises a lot, a whole lot of people, because they think since it's not the capital [while] it's right behind Boston. Well, that is it's number two to Boston, but Boston of course, is way ahead population wise. It's along with Springfield, [it is one of] the three major cities, in the Commonwealth. It has a great deal of potential and I find it to be a comfortable city to live in.

MD: What distinct characteristics make Worcester the place that it is?

CQ: Well, it's an industrial city. It has an interesting past because it had all kinds of manufacturing establishments. If you know anything about New England, you know that many of the mill towns of New England really were [built around] textile mills, boot-and-shoe. Whereas this city has had a plethora, a variety, of different industrial factories. Of course, unfortunately, these industrial sites and mills have closed their doors. And mill

cities tend to look the worse sometimes from wear and tear because there are neighborhoods which have a lot of red-brick buildings. But they are being revived and all kinds of efforts are being made for the city, including reviving the Blackstone River and the Blackstone Valley Corridor, which will join Worcester to Providence at the other end, you know Narragansett Bay. And that all of the work that has been done in revitalizing that area and to promote [the city] so that the approach to Worcester is prettier and more impressive. All of that, I think, speaks well for the city.

MD: What do you think women's experiences in Worcester have been generally?

CQ: Well, very much like in other places. I think because people who were born here, and who grew up here, had an excellent school system to attend. It has produced good people, good solid citizens, who have no pretensions, who are kind and helpful, and it's not an arrogant city. It's a blue collar city in many ways. The college here, Assumption, of course, is located in the aristocratic neighborhood of the city, which is wonderful. But all of the other neighborhoods really are neighborhoods that have housed for generations people who have worked in the mills.

MD: Where did you attend school?

CQ: Well, I went to a parochial school in Central Falls where I was born. Central Falls, Rhode Island, which was run by the Sisters of St. Anne, who have Anna Maria College, as I said earlier. Went through, well, K through 12, with the Sisters and then attended their college in Paxton, Anna Maria. It started out in Marlborough and since I belonged to the third graduating class, I studied in Marlborough where they had a very prestigious academy that was well-known and well-regarded. They moved to Paxton later.

MD: What year did you graduate from college?

CQ: In 1952.

MD: What were your challenges in education?

CQ: I was just happy to be a college student. I didn't really have any challenges to speak of. I enjoyed studying. I-I had a happy four-year experience in college. Met new, many new people, some of whom I have stayed in touch with. And I wanted to be a French major, and Anna Maria had an excellent French Department so that suited me fine. I was brought up bilingually which helps. I was brought up speaking French.

MD: Interesting.

CQ: And I felt that was an advantage that I should make the most of. And so continued, majored in French in college, went on for a Master's in French, and then taught for a few years at the high school level, and then went to France where I got my doctorate at the University of Paris.

MD: Was it your mother or your father who spoke French?

CQ: They both did, which was very helpful. In fact I think they spoke French to each other. So that, you know, it's wonderful to-when you grow up in that kind of atmosphere learning a second language is not difficult. You know it's part of you.

MD: Do you speak any other languages?

CQ: I have studied other languages, like Spanish and German, but I can't say that I'm fluent in either of them because I don't use them.

MD: What were your challenges in education as a woman? You went to school in the 1960s, I mean 1950s.

CQ: Well, I went to an all-girls school, [and] college. So that challenges were simply the rivalry of who was going to be the best student. But there have been challenges in life. Surely women still work much harder than men to get where, where they want to go. And there is the reality of the glass ceiling [what] is right there for all of us. We-We are living with it. You belong to a generation where some progress has been made, but um-someone said to me one day-he's a judge, and he said "Claire if you belonged to a -a younger generation you probably would have become a judge just like me." But when I was looking at careers, what were the careers for women with a college education? Now if you had only a high school education, what did you become? A secretary, a nurse if you were lucky and your parents could afford to send you to nursing school, a bank teller; you know it was pretty limited. With a college education, teaching was usually where you, you know, ended up. But that was alright, I wanted to be a teacher so that was-that suited me fine.

MD: What support networks and mentoring have been important to you?

CQ: Support networks? Well my professors have provided support when I was in college, a good deal of support. Um, other than that I have not had any support systems. Except the family. The family is always an excellent support system, and mine has been particularly good. My siblings now and my parents who have passed on of course, but while they were alive they were a huge support system.

MD: What was your profession?

CQ: Well, I became-I was a high school teacher. Then after I got my doctorate, I became a college professor-at the American University in Paris first where I also lectured, to different groups-American groups. And um and then when I came here, of course, I became-I started out as an Assistant Professor and moved on up to Associate and then to full Professor.

MD: How did you come to do this work? What made you want to be a college professor?

CQ: Well I was born with the desire to teach, I suppose. I-ah-I admired my teachers when I was in school and I seemed fit, in many ways. I aimed to be like them. And I know that my mother, had she not married, would have become a teacher also. And so, I don't know did I drink it in with my mother's milk? Maybe. I'm not sure of that, of course, and that is probably stretching it a bit, but um well as far back from what I can remember I wanted to teach.

MD: What has this work meant to you?

CQ: My teaching? As I look back, it was interesting. When I started out in teaching it was not easy to begin with, but I grew into it. At that point I was teaching high school, and um high school students. I taught English interestingly enough and Latin, and some French too. Of course French was had been my major. And there was a closeness with high school students that I have not experienced at the college level. Because you are with them every day, not all day because you had periods, but it was an everyday thing. Whereas [at the] college level I think there is more of a distance between the professor and the student because you meet what twice or three times a week. And students are older; they are less dependent on you. I happened to be the-the first and only lay teacher in that high school and I know I was able to mentor students who would come to me because they would hesitate perhaps to go to a religious, to the nuns. Not that they were distant or forbidding or any of that, but there was-there was an affinity because I was a lay person. Um and I became very close to those students. I taught for six years at the high school level, before going to France, and um I cherish that time in my life. It was not an easy time, I had huge numbers; I had forty-eight freshmen in an English class. I was always faced with a mountain of papers to correct. It seemed like a mountain to me. I would never get to the bottom before I would have to add to the pile. And so I worked hard, not intellectually so much as physically; you know teaching that many people at once and then doing all that correcting. I really had very little free time.

MD: How have you balanced different priorities, responsibilities, roles, and interests in your life?

CQ: I became very active, at one point after being in Worcester. By the way, I also taught at Clark when I first came to Worcester because of the Worcester Consortium. The head of the French Department at Clark came to the head of the French Department. At the time I had just returned from France and started working here. They [Clark] needed someone to teach French Culture and Civilization, so for two or three years I divided my time between Clark and Assumption, which was an interesting experience because Clark students are very different from Assumption students. My first year here, I must add, was difficult because they [the students] were still all male. They were going to start accepting women the following year. I don't know if you know the history of Assumption's women, and how they accepted freshmen initially, then freshmen and sophomores, then, you know, it took four years, and five in my case, because I had been

here a year before. And I remember when I first walked into one classroom, it was Intermediate French, and it was all boys, of course boys, men. And I could tell from their reaction that they thought Assumption had hit bottom, that Assumption College was really going to the dogs. They were against it; you know, the men who were here at the time did not want [the school] to accept women. And there was an inaudible groan, if I may put it that way, but you know-you don't hear anything, but you know [how they feel]. And it was in the gym, and it was a terrible place to teach besides. You know they had classrooms beneath the gym, so if they were rehearsing above you heard the pounding of the balls. Let me say that that first year was interesting because I was teaching intermediate French and I was also teaching a senior seminar. And the senior seminar went famously, again all men. And I enjoyed them, and I am still in touch with some of them. But the Intermediate French [class]-they didn't want to be there for one thing, you know when you really don't want to study French, but you have to because it was the rule at the time that you had to have so many semesters of a foreign language. And then to have a woman in front of you besides. So that was a humbling experience, and it was balanced, luckily, by the senior seminar. They were more mature, they were leaving anyway, they were not going to have to worry about having women in the classrooms with them. And then in the second semester, I began teaching at Clark. And that was very important for me because the students at Clark were used to having women in front of them, you know as professors. Whereas here it had been all male. There is only one woman who preceded me here; she taught Russian. Madame Ziss was her name, Z-i-s-s. She was a White Russian who had left Russia at the time that the Communists took over. So that the guys here were not used to having women teaching. So there were, you know, there are still prejudices even today. And I remember you know when Hilary Clinton and Barack Obama were running and someone mentioned to me that Gloria Steinem had written an article saying it was going to be easier for a black man to be elected than for a white woman. And-that was [true]-she was right, you know. So that those experiences are still very real in my mind. There was not much of a support system here at Assumption for women in those early years. For one thing there were some priests on the faculty and they had to be, they couldn't get too close to the women, because people would start gossiping, you know, and say "Oh". And the lay, the lay professors, well they, you know, had their own families to deal with and so forth. So let me just say that there was not much of a support system since I think that was the gist of your question about support systems, even today. But I am a fairly independent woman. I cannot say I rely on a great deal of support. I do have family members with whom I am in touch with on a regular basis. But beyond that, I don't know if I need to get beyond my teaching and my outside activities, or is that going to be a question coming up?

MD: You are one of the first teachers at Assumption-first female teacher-at Assumption

CQ: Right

MD: And what was that like? How would you characterize your professional and personal costs of that chosen path, because it could not have been easy and what were the benefits as well?

CQ: Well, the only benefit I can think of in retrospect is that you felt that you were like a pioneer and were helping to lead the way for those who were going to come after you. Ah, but it was a lonely time. You felt very much alone. Because the priests, as I was saying, did not want to look like they were paying too much attention to you. The married men were not going to pay much attention to you either because their wives might have become jealous. So you are caught between a rock and a hard place at that point. So that, ah-I don't know if I have answered the question. Can you ask the question again, it was?

MD: How would you characterize the professional and personal costs of your chosen path?

CQ: Oh, there were huge costs. Professionally, not professionally, but personally. There were huge costs. Because you are very much alone. You are doing what you like to do and you enjoy doing it, but you have depend on yourself and yourself alone.

MD: Do you consider yourself active politically?

CQ: My family had been in Rhode Island. My grandfather had been a member of the School Committee; my father ran for mayor of the city of Central Falls where I grew up. He lost; I remember I was seventeen and riding my bike that day and wondering what it would be like to be the daughter of a mayor. But he lost, so I didn't have to deal with that. He ran on the Good Government ticket after World War II. The city was corrupt. The Democratic Party had been in power for too long and you know-absolute power corrupts absolutely. Well, it was a corrupt system, [and] returning veterans-although my father was a little older than the returning veterans- decided they were going to clean up the act, the city's act and run [for office]. And they lost that first year, but they won the next time around, but my father was not a candidate the next time around. I actually have a step grandmother who also ran for mayor of the city; she lost also. But, when I came to Worcester, I did not become involved in politics. I think if I had stayed in Rhode Island I would have because I had connections in Rhode Island that I did not have here. And I became an Independent, neither a Republican nor Democrat, and got myself involved in other activities, other than political; did not really ever engage in political activities. Although in 1975, I was a delegate to Houston for the International Year of Women, so I did do a certain amount of-of work outside-you know outside- the cultural and ethnic affiliations that I really became involved in.

MD: What was that experience like, being a delegate?

CQ: It was awesome. I don't like that word because it's overused but it really was interesting, fascinating really. And it was the period of the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] you know-when states had to vote [individually] and we lost. We didn't get it, finally, because not enough states voted [in favor]. So in any case, ah-to be surrounded by all these women from all over the country was pretty impressive. There-and ah-you know, there is support in-in being with a large group like that and all of the same mind,

so to speak, where there not have been that [before]. I had attended many meetings here in Massachusetts including some that I hosted here on campus from women we had agendas that we were discussing throughout the country, they were the same ones to advance the cause of women generally. And so I am glad that I did get [involved] in fact the current mayor of Worcester was also a delegate Konstatina Lukes, our mayor here in the city, was a delegate to that convention. I got to know her that way.

MD: Have you been involved in volunteer or community work, other than that?

CQ: It-it has been ethnic and cultural community work rather than Worcester community work. I have presided over the Francophone, Franco-American Women's Federation of New England. It is-it was a region-wide organization. I was president of that organization for eight years; from ah 1973 to 1981. And I have been involved mainly in any number of French and Francophone organizations. It's through my involvement in these organizations I was able to attend conferences in Paris, in Senegal, in Quebec, and let's see there were two in Paris; I was also in Tunisia but not with that particular group. So I did get to see other French speaking countries who are linked to a commonwealth of nations like the British do- the French one started in 1986. And there are a lot of former colonies in Africa where they speak French because they were French colonies who belong to this group-this organization. And it-it was a wonderful experience-you get to see the world that way, you know. You go to places you wouldn't normally go to. And-and so I cherish those memories also.

MD: What role has religion played in your life?

CQ: Well, I grew up in a religious household. Both my parents were extremely religious. And ah-they would not have thought of sending us to anything but religious schools. And so I went to Roman Catholic schools from kindergarten through college. And only after college did I attend a university which was secular. So that I would say I am fairly close to my religious roots and continue to practice my religion.

MD: What was it like working with religious figures and not being one yourself? I know you worked with priests...

CQ: Well, I worked mostly with nuns. They were my teachers. Then-when I taught at the high school level, the other teachers were all religious, I was the only lay person. And they were very kind, they accepted me, but I was still apart. It was like coming here and being the first lay person-not the first lay person, the first woman and in the other instance there were all women [students] in the high school, because it was an all girls' high school. But the difference there was they would go to their convent for lunch and [after classes] and I would be apart. I can't say that I suffered from that at all, I had wonderful relationships with the students; got along very well with them. And I look back on it with a great deal of comfort. I met some of them, one class, celebrated its 50th anniversary [of], graduation from high school about two years ago now. And they invited me and it was fascinating for me to see how you recognize them because people don't

change that much. Ah-you knew who they were and they were all very welcoming and delighted to see me and so forth; delighted to see that I could still walk (laughter). Anyway, it was a good feeling to see them again.

MD: How have health issues impacted your life?

CQ: Health issues? I have been fortunate. Health issues have not impacted my life. I-we-my sister and I, took care of our mother who died at age ninety-six, a few years ago, but she was not really very ill. She needed companionship more than care. And I really thank God that I really have not had health issues that would have prevented me from doing what I wanted to do and accomplish what I have accomplished. Because you know I founded the French Institute here, that's my picture there, I don't know if you noticed, hanging on the wall in the [office]-in 1979. In addition to that, I began teaching here, then taught here and at Clark, and then became Dean of the Graduate School here. Then in 1979, I founded the French Institute, and taught, and administered, and did fundraising. And we held a colloquium each year. We would invite people [academics] to come in and deliver publishable papers and we would publish them. Each colloquium would have a theme: schools, religion, newspapers, almost always revolving [around a Franco-American theme or subject, focused on Franco-Americans] because the French Institute measured journalism and French-language newspapers. What people don't know is that there were a number of them right here in New England in cities like Worcester, Fall River, Lowell, and Manchester, N.H. Most of the cities where large numbers of French Canadians had immigrated in the 19th century and settled. And for all of these French-speaking people, before they learned English, French-language newspapers were published. We [also] talked about folklore, we talked about [traditions]-and we published all those keep those proceedings have all been published by the French Institute, including the last one, called *Steeple and Smokestacks*. We published in French initially and then decided that your generation would never read them in French and so we had to publish them in English. And [we] did that with *Steeple and Smokestacks* and we were lucky enough that *Steeple and Smokestacks* went into a second edition. In 2003, we published a second edition. But, of course, then I retired and so Professor Choquette is now in charge.

MD: So you retired in 2003?

CQ: 1999.

MD: 1999...What are your experiences in accessing quality, affordable health care?

CQ: Well, I cannot complain. The Fallon Community Health Care here in the city, I think, is a wonderful organization. And as Assumption professors we could affiliate with it or with Tufts, there are a couple [of] others we could affiliate with. But I chose to stay with Fallon because it was local; it was started by Dr. Fallon years and years ago. And I've been very pleased with the health care that I have received. Luckily, I have not had to receive a great deal, but ah-I-ah am very happy with the health care system that I am involved with.

MD: What major historical events in Worcester have occurred during your time here? Did they impact you personally?

CQ: I can't really think of anything except on a broader level. I was not here during World War II, I was growing up [elsewhere]. The Korean War, did not affect [me]-as a woman I was not impacted directly, I did not have to serve, in the Vietnam War. Let's see, when I came to Worcester. Actually I was more impacted during my stay in France: the Algerian Crisis had broken out there. And I remember walking up the hill where I lived, and going, having to go by a police station on my way home and noticing that the policeman guarding the entrance to the police station had a –I want to call it a sub-machine gun or AK-47, I don't know enough about guns to [identify it properly] though my goodness. That was because it was a wild time in Paris. There were two things going on. You had the Algerian terrorists who wanted to-who were fighting for their independence. And you had the French Algerians who were trying to sabotage any attempt on the part of the French government to give independence to the Algerians. And so you had two groups fighting.

I remember going to a play at the Ode' on a wonderful theatre. Jean-Louis-Barrault, who ran it, [was] a great French actor. And um-at one point from the balconies people began throwing things down onto the stage and into the audience. I was sitting in the orchestra; there were stink bombs and smoke bombs to scare people, but you didn't know if they were going to set [a] fire. But they were protesting against Algerian independence and I remember, Madeleine Renaud, a famous French actress they started pelting her, she was on stage; I thought then that if I had been she I might have retreated into the wings. But she stood there and she simply with her arms outstretched and her hands waving to them, in other words throw at me what you want to throw, I am not going to retreat. I found that extremely brave on her part, very impressive; she um-a great actress. But this play, these people were protesting, they were white, they were not Algerian, they were French people but who lived in Algeria who stood to lose everything if Algeria became independent. And they were fighting for their holdings, their land. Algeria was like a jewel in the [French] crown-like India [was] for the British-and they, the French, had invested a great deal of money in Algeria, a rich country, minerals you know and they had huge olive groves. The French had moved there in large numbers.

And so-I don't know if you have seen the film "The Battle of Algiers" it shows terrorism in action. And so I lived through that and I have to admit that I think I was more touched by it because the other thing that was happening was that they used plastique [an explosive]. I knew a woman who had a bookstore down the street from where I lived. She lived around the corner from where I lived also. And some right-wingers mistook [her apartment] there were like two apartments per floor and there was a left-wing professor [who lived in the other apartment] you see it was right versus left at that point and they were very right-winged the people who were fighting for their lives, their lands, and their belongings in Algeria. And they put the plastique at her door rather than at the radical professor's door. Luckily they were not in the apartment [when the bomb exploded], but I remember lying in bed and thinking, looking around the room and saying to myself, I'd say "What if they put it at our door", you know. Because it was an older building and you

know about armoires right? They were our closets in these rooms, and they had these huge armoires that served as closets; but they weigh a ton and I thought well, if one of them falls on me it's the end of me. Well, luckily they did not [bomb the apartment], but I was very keenly aware of that possibility because it had just happened to her and she lived just around the corner. Polytechnic Institute was just down the street from where I lived, and the professors were very liberal, as you can imagine, and left-wing and [one of them] had spoken out I'm sure in class and they were going to get even with him. Luckily, my friend was not hurt. But, you come home to a devastated apartment, you know, so I cannot, I have to admit that I was more um-how shall I say-touched by what was happening in France because it was from 1958 to 1968, very volatile times.

Then the French elected DeGaulle back because they needed a steady hand. Then in 1968, we had the student uprisings. And I remember watching the students march on the Boulevard St. Michael II. If you ever you get to France. Maybe you've been to Paris, you probably know it. It was wall-to-wall students marching, curb-to-curb I should say rather than wall-to-wall, very impressive...you know, when you stop to think [what it represents] to keep that going. And then in 1968 the students erected barricades; and I lived on the Place du Pantheon, and I-but I was *penscom* eating my meals at a Placeon which is on the other side of the Luxembourg Gardens, if that rings a bell. So I would have to cross the barricades, but you could [do so] if you could identify yourself as a resident of the other side. And the students were manning the barricades; and actually the students were pretty good, [about it] you know, they let you through. They would build barricades they-you know some of the streets of Paris are still [paved] like the Romans had built them, beautifully. I don't know if you've ever stared at streets, as you cross the street. But if you lift one of the cobblestones you can get at all the others. And they built these barricades to keep the cops away. The people of Paris were really very pro-student at that point. They would help hide them because periodically the police would come at you or at them.

It happened to me one time but indirectly because I was not marching. I had gone to a small restaurant in the area with a friend of mine and you know it was all fine and we came out and started in the other direction and suddenly we heard like a mob behind us. The students had been demonstrating down the block, and the police had run after them, come after them. And I remember beginning to run and thinking to myself, "You'd better not fall because if you do you're going to get trampled." And of course students by then I was in my late twenties I was no longer a student, in fact I was teaching at the American University in Paris and I thought [to myself] they can run faster than I can probably, you know. But we I didn't fall and the cops gave up. The police decided it wasn't worth it after all. You see they'd push students away from certain key areas and then they'd disperse into the side streets.

So-but it was an exciting time to be in Paris. On the other hand, I taught at the American University, as I have said, all the French universities were closed, the students were on strike, but not, the American University. But nothing was running, the buses weren't running, the Metro wasn't running; it was a long walk to and from the American University from where I lived. So I remember thinking at the time [that] it is easier to read about history than to live it, you know. It's exciting on a certain level, but it's also very exhausting. It's interesting because the city was like split in two. If you lived on the

Left Bank and certain *arrondissements* near the *Soribonne*, near the university then you were in the thick of things and that's where I lived. But if you lived on the Right Bank and near the *Arc de Triomphe* you know and the 16th/17^t *arrondissements* you could forget all this was happening because it wasn't really touching you. It was an interesting [phenomenon] it was like the ice storm that we had in December, you know, parts of Worcester weren't affected at all and the rest of us were heavily affected. And so there was a dichotomy there that was fascinating. That-that was the excitement for me. Because as a woman, I didn't have to go fight in the Korean War or the Vietnam War. Although there were times when I thought I wouldn't mind going because all those veterans were getting all kinds-getting all kinds of advantages like the G.I. Bill 12 to study at university. They'd be paid to study and all that. And so I was a little bit envious of all these advantages that they had.

MD: What was it like being like an independent American woman in a foreign country at that time?

CQ: You know, I could blend in with the population because I spoke French. And I did not-I cannot-say I had a hard time of it. I quickly learned, [in] the early weeks, of course, you have to adjust; it's a different society, [a] different culture. But I was excited about being there and getting to know it, and know the people better. So it's more exciting than difficult. I ah-and as I say, the fact that I could blend in so well sometimes could turn against me because some people would look at me because I'd ask a question in my best French and they thought I was native born and so they thought-I could tell by the way they were looking at me- [when] I needed advice on how to get to a certain place, and they'd look at me as if to say "There is something wrong with this woman. She's a native. If she is French, like we are, she shouldn't have to ask these questions"? Whereas if I had spoken English, they would have said "Oh, she's an American, we've got to help her." The Parisians when I lived there were not that patient with tourists.

MD and MH: They still aren't. (Laughter)

CQ: They were not the kindest people in the world

MD: No.

CQ: It was easier to blend in and just act like you were one of them. And hope you didn't need their help you know (Laughter). Because they weren't necessarily pleasant. The French Government when I lived there tried very hard to get the Parisians especially-people if you left the city the French were very kind, very lovely, but Paris people are impatient, they're nervous, they're-they can't be bothered, they're quick, they want to move on, and etc.

MD: How were girls treated when you were in school?

CQ: I went to an all girls' school so-well we had boys only through 5th grade. And then after that they went to a brothers' school which was in my hometown. And the-and the sisters, we had women teachers, so I cannot say that I had any problems with that. But I have read how teachers will say that they treat boys and girls the same in the classroom and then they videotape these same teachers and they realize that they pay much more attention to the boys than they do to the girls. So the boys are more rambunctious, they attract attention, they need it and they get it there's no doubt about that.

MD: What were your most significant extracurricular activities?

CQ: Well, I went to a small high school which really didn't have many athletic facilities. And that wasn't pushed much when I was growing up in any case. But I remember [that] we played, you know, I pitched softball would you believe it and did a little bit of basketball, but very little because we didn't have a good gym and ah so those things were not pushed. You were talking about extracurricular activities?

MD: Yes, anything in the arts at all?

CQ: Yes, well actually, in the arts-actually I was more involved in French Clubs throughout-you know that was more my focus. And I wasn't in theatre. For one thing, we didn't have a theatre arts program in high school or in college. Ah-we did have decent art history courses and things like that. But my extracurricular activities really were focused on French-French clubs and French [activities]-going to the theatre when I could, going into Boston, and that sort of thing.

MD: What difficult transitions did you go through in moving from childhood to adulthood?

CQ: None at all. I don't recall that there were difficult transitions. I think I was so focused on studying all the time that I just moved right on you know, did what I had to do, and I was just always very focused. So, I can't say I had very many difficult transitions.

MD: How do you define success in your life? And has this definition changed over time?

CQ: Success in my life corresponds with the work that I did here, especially at the French Institute, the colloquia organized, the books that I published. And has it changed over time was that part of the question?

MD: Yes

CQ: No, I think one, to a certain extent you feel your way. You don't always know in advance what it is when you're twenty other than [that] you have to earn a living, so you're going to have a profession and you want to do-it right. And slowly, but surely, you get involved. I remember writing a speech one time for the American Association of

Teachers of French in which I wrote that after my ten years in France I was very much into the French thing, culture, civilization, theatre-I [had] spent a lot of time at the theatre when I lived in France and in art galleries and museums to make the most of my stay there. And I stated [in my speech]-[that] when I got back, I realized that all around me in New England, in Worcester but also in other cities, that there were reminiscences of the people who did not necessarily still speak French, although some did, but who had French roots via French Canada. And that's how I became involved in studying that group. It's all well and good, the French are going to be able to deal with their own French culture but there aren't too many people who can who are knowledgeable enough and close enough to the community to do something for that particular French-Canadian community which is called Franco-American in the Northeast; here, we include New York State that's why I say Northeast instead of New England.

MD: How do you feel about the choices you have made in your life? Do you have any regrets?

CQ: No. I -my choices were limited. I belong to a generation in which women's choices were limited. But with a college degree, I was able to have a profession. My choice then would have been [either] to marry and raise a family or-it was a kind of either/or situation in my generation. Today a woman can marry, have children, a career-it's not easy-but you can do it. In my time, I think it was harder. And I didn't meet anyone who bowled me over. I had my chances, but I thought, well, I just want to be my own person and do my thing and so I never did marry and chose a career over marriage and family.

MD: Based on your life experience, what advice would you give women of today and of future generations?

CQ: Well, of course, every person has to decide for herself, every woman has to decide for herself what is best for herself. I don't know if I have any amount of good advice except to follow your star. You know, dream big and feel that you can accomplish a great deal. And not, and not allow yourself to be limited by the society around you. That is easier said than done, by the way, because we are socialized to follow in the footsteps of those who came before us. Breaking out is not always easy. And you can feel very lonely for a long time before things fall into place. So I would say, by all means, you know, follow your star, your dream, whatever that happens to be. And if the dream is to have 12 kids by golly go for it you know! I think that I followed a career path, but I could just as easily have had a bunch of kids you know. But again as I said in my generation it was an either/or situation as I saw it rather than you can do both. I have a niece who has a law degree from Columbia University; she now has two children, she works for an NGO [Non-Government Organization], lives in Jerusalem. But I can see her, the balancing act she has to go through in order to manage the two-the two things at once. It is a lot easier for the men, let me put it that way. The women do all the heavy lifting-but there you have it. Any advice it would have to be on a person-to-person basis on advice, I would have to know the person very well in order to give proper advice. So, generally speaking, just aim for the stars is the way I would put it.

MD: Do you feel you have a legacy?

CQ: Well, I think the legacy that I shall leave behind are the books I have written, edited, translated: there about twenty of them. If you Google me, I think you'll find all those titles. In recent years, I've done mostly translations and have done a lot of editing work. And this past year-I should show you the brochure that's on Professor Choquette's desk- this past year I was very much involved with the city of Quebec in celebrating its 400th anniversary in 2008. I spent a lot of time last year collecting money for a monument that we erected on the banks of the St. Lawrence. I felt that it was important that the French in New England show that they had not forgotten from whence they came. And um-we felt that a monument-we chose granite so it would survive for a long, long time in that climate especially, and I don't know if you have seen the brochure have you?

MD: No.

CQ: Remind me to get a copy for you so that you can see the monument that I worked hard-and then, not only did I collect money for it but I wrote the homage, it had to be bilingual, French and English. And then [I researched the cities and towns of New England where French Canadians settled] the cities and towns---end of tape 1.

Tape 2:

MD: Meredith Deacon interviewing Claire Quintal part two.

MD: Now that we are working to tell further story-a fuller story of the history of women than has been recorded in the past, what should we be sure to include?

CQ: It's true that women's history or that history generally, has neglected women unless they were queens, you know. And there was a movement in France, which still goes on, and I was not caught up in it, but I was aware about it, interviewing the little people, interviewing the people in the street, getting to know how people live and that includes men, of course. But I think that if we followed that approach, women would have a better place, will find a place in history. I don't think you see women [mentioned] unless they had careers [they] were not talked about very much. I read the obituaries always in newspapers because I am always curious [about] what people have accomplished, what schools have they gone to, what is their background, what advantages have they had, and I find unless-unless you had [a career]-now that doesn't mean that you have to have a career to be recognized, but you need to get involved as a woman, I believe in activities outside the home, if you're going to be remembered and talked about. There was a woman in the *Boston Globe* today who got involved in preserving the Public Garden, beautifying it, protecting Commonwealth Avenue; those are the kinds of things that a woman can do. Have a family, the children grow up-children have a way of growing up-and they're free then, more free at least then when the children are young, to do this sort of thing. So I would encourage women if they want to be talked about and want go down in history to become involved in their communities and in activities outside of the home.

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

CQ: I haven't really thought about that. I'm sure [there are]-Worcester is a large city, there are a lot of good people. Well, you could, you could just go down the list of your female professors here on campus and you would find a treasure cove of knowledge really. Because each one of the women on this staff, on the faculty, and even in the library would have a good story to tell there's no doubt about that.

MD: I just have, what's it like now knowing that the majority of the students here are girls because of your first experiences at Assumption? Would that be...?

CQ: Quite the contrast isn't it? And of course, I'm sure the college works hard to maintain somewhat of a balance; you don't want it to be, to become just women, there's no doubt about that. And if it becomes, if there is an imbalance, the men will hesitate to come. But I think that women still have a long way to go. Women have to-even in the Church-for example-you know the Catholic Church does not do as much for women as say the Episcopalian or Protestant denominations. So there is still resistance on the part of the hierarchy regarding women. Um-yes, well the question again was what Meredith?

MD: it was just how you feel now looking at Assumption?

CQ: Oh yes, yes with the majority, what is the percentage now?

MD and MH: 60/40

CQ: 60/40. It's not too awful,

MH: Yea, well...laughter

CQ: it's alright. I have a niece who came here and graduated in 1996 and I think that friendships can be formed at the college level that will last you all your life-it's really important to live on campus you know and make the most of the social scene. And if there is a nice-looking guy you have your eye on (laughter), I'm sure in the 40% that there is someone

MD and MH: laughter. It's hard.

MD: Can you tell us more about, I know you never married, but more about your brothers and sisters? How many you had...

CQ: There are six of us-there were six of us. I am the oldest of six. And the two who followed me died, relatively young. One in her mid-forties and I had a brother who died in his mid-sixties. The others are still living. As I said, I have one who is a nun, a religious Sister of St. Anne, who is the registrar at Anna Maria College. I have a brother

whose career was in information technology, he worked for IBM and then for AOL and has retired early. I think if you work for these companies you can retire early. I have a sister who lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico who's a medical librarian and who has done very well and who now plays tennis. She retired young too, so she plays tennis and manages to play it on the senior circuit at the national level; she's good, she was always a good athlete. And ah-she's not getting any younger, but looks ten years younger than she really is and so I think [she] fools the opposition or whatever. But she went to Nationals one year when she was sixty-five years old, which is pretty impressive. Let's see, have I talked about every one of them? Ya. Those who are alive-there are four of us left. So Albuquerque, the information technology IBM fellow, and the Registrar. Yes

MD: Well, that's all we have for you. Thank you very much.

MH: We appreciate your coming in.

MD: We appreciate your coming in.

CQ: You're welcome.