

Interviewee: Renee King  
Interviewer: Cora Derocher & Michelle Ruiz  
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Transcribers: Cora Derocher & Michelle Ruiz



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**Abstract:** Renee King was born in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1989, to Paul and Barbara King. Renee attended Worcester State University and received a degree in Psychology. During college she started making cupcakes from her parent's kitchen and began selling them. After she graduated she opened up her own business, The Queen's Cups. In this interview, Renee discusses her struggles with balancing work life and taking care of her health. She also has encountered difficult times during her life, but talks about her amazing support system that keeps her going. Renee talks about how this past year has been the worst year of her personal life, yet it was the best year for her business. She believes a balance needs to be put in place to help equal both out. Renee talks about her community involvement and how she gives back to Worcester. Renee has received several accomplishments in her life, including "Best Bakery" and "Best Dessert" in the Millbury/Sutton Chronicle Readers Poll. However, her greatest achievement is making her parents proud.

**Cora Derocher (CD):** We are completing a citywide oral history of the lives of Worcester women aiming to collect stories about a board range of experiences. Based on the goals of the 1850's National Women's Right 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 the experiences of Renee King. Thank you for your help with this important project.

**CD:** What is your full name including both maiden name?

**Renee King (RK):** Renee Ann King

**CD:** Where were you born?

**RK:** In Worcester

**CD:** Have you ever been married?

**RK:** No

**CD:** Do you have children?

**RK:** No [laughs]

**CD:** What cultures/ethnicities do you identify with (family background)?

**RK:** Rural. White. [laughs]

**CD:** Tell me about your parents.

**RK:** I have a—my dad’s name is Paul, and my mom’s name is Barbara. My dad is a food service director. And my mom is a teacher’s aide. And they’re very awesome and supportive. They were both born in Worcester [Massachusetts], and lived in Worcester for most of their life. And then we moved to Millbury.

**CD:** Where have you lived during your life? Did you grow up in Worcester and what neighborhood?

**RK:** I grew up in Millbury [Massachusetts] and then I went to Worcester State [University]. So I lived in Worcester for a few years in the Lincoln Street and Channing Street area.

**CD:** What was the neighborhood like generally?

**RK:** It was kind of shady. [laughs] I don’t know if that’s the right term. I don’t know, it was, it was—there was a lot of different ethnicities and I don’t know, but yeah.

[pause]

**CD:** Do other family members live in the same area?

**RK:** My brother actually lived in Worcester, in Ferning Hill and my other brother lived around June Street. But now we all live in Millbury. And one—my oldest brother lives in Framingham.

**CD:** What challenges do you think this city still faces? What would you change about the city?

**RK:** I think when I lived in Worcester I noticed that there was a lot of unemployment. Especially like the building, the apartment buildings I lived in, I felt as if people didn’t really work. And even, you know, when you leave during the day, you see like a ton of people, just walking around. And not working, I don’t—maybe they work at night? But you know, I think maybe there’s a large unemployment rate.

**CD:** What changes have you see in Worcester over time?

**RK:** I think there’s a huge like push for small businesses and supporting local, you know, there’s been a few different consignment shops, opened up by like young females. “Grime Clothing” and “Trunk & Disorderly” and I think “Crompton Collective” in Kelly Square is on Green Street, is like huge for Worcester. I think the Amy [Chase] has done a terrific job of getting the

community together. And even just, you know, if you drive through you see a lot of art on the buildings now, like Leirim's and at Crompton, they have a huge mural for Worcester. And I think they have a farmer's market now and I think there's a big focus on supporting local small businesses.

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

**RK:** I think there's a lot to do in Worcester. I think we have a lot of great schools, obviously Assumption [College], Worcester State [University], and WPI [Worcester Polytechnic Institute]. WPI is like taking over the world I feel [laughs]. They have a new building every day. It's such a great school, and I think like Worcester Tech [High School] is a great school now too, for kids to go to. And obviously they had the President [Barack Obama] come and speak at their graduation. You know, there's a good night life. There's really great restaurants, there's small businesses, like I said, to go and visit, which are awesome, and there's just a lot that goes on. So I think that's probably makes it what it is.

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

**RK:** I'm not really sure. [laughs] I don't, I don't know how I would answer that?

**CD:** How do you think women have gained over the years?

**RK:** Well like I said, I definitely feel like there's been, you know, [mixer in background]—sorry about that sound—a lot of strong young females that have emerged and have tried to do stuff with the city. My cousin Erika, she, she's only like 30, and she's on the Worcester [Historical Commission]. And she's done a lot, especially downtown. Like I said Amy Chase from Crompton, and I think, females are making a name for themselves. It's not really a huge focus on guys. You know, when I think of Worcester, I don't think of these like head-honcho guys that, I can think of off the top of my head. But when I think of Worcester, I think about these strong, young female business owners.

**Michelle Ruiz (MR):** Now we're going on to education: Where did you attend school?

**RK:** I went to Millbury High School. And then I went to Worcester State University.

**MR:** What were your challenges in education?

**RK:** In college? [Michelle Ruiz shook her head yes] I think—I didn't—I wasn't really exactly sure what I wanted to do at first. I originally thought I wanted to be a teacher and Worcester State is a great school to be a teacher. And then when I was taking my classes and I was doing my student teaching, I realized it just wasn't for me. And I mean, I wanted to be a teacher because when I was young, there was, like we had so much time to brainstorm and be creative, and it was so fun and then when I did my student teaching, it was more about MCAS's

[Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment Test] and standardized testing. And, I think you know, half way through my college career, what am I going to do with my life? And then I switched to Psychology, so I have a degree in Psychology, and then when I graduated, I said well, what do I want to do with Psychology? And I didn't really want to go back to school right away, and I—the psych department at Worcester State is so great. But I wasn't really sure what my options were, what I could do? And, you know, switching majors half way through your career, I mean, through your college career didn't really focus on my GPA enough to get into grad school right away. [laughs] And those were some challenges for me and then being a full time student and commuting and having to work and I also coach basketball, you know, that's difficult too because you take five classes, you work 20 hours a week, you coach. That can make it difficult too. But I made it through, I graduated [laughs].

[pause]

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

**RK:** I thought I could either go back to school or I could find a job where I was a residential counselor or like a family counselor. And I applied to some of those jobs, and I just wasn't into it. So thankfully, I was—with my senior year of school, I was making cupcakes at home. And then I would post the pictures online on Instagram. And then people would say, “Ohhh my god, can I buy these?” And then all of a sudden, I was making hundreds of cupcakes a week, so about the end of my senior year, I didn't have a job lined up or anything. And this building actually was vacant and for rent, so my parents and I meet with the landlords. And we just decided I was going to open a cupcake shop. On a whim. It's worked so far. [laughs].

**MR:** What support networks and monitoring—mentoring, sorry, have been important to you?

**RK:** Well my parents have definitely been my strongest supporters, my best supporters, and my brothers, they're awesome. I have really great professors at Worcester State that I still talk to now. I still go and visit them. You know, most of them are female, and I just really looked up to them because they walked in the room and they commanded respect. And I have always wanted that for myself, just have people have ultimate respect for you. And I think—I grew up in Millbury, so I have had a ton of support from my town too, but even Worcester businesses really support us too. Like Smoke Stacks restaurant, Compton Collective, Grime Clothing they've really supported me too. So I think that's probably where my support comes from.

**CD:** We'll be moving onto Work: what was your first job?

**RK:** Well, I started at a seafood restaurant, a seafood and ice cream restaurant and then I worked in after school program for seven years. And then I started here.

**CD:** What other jobs have you been, you had, and what do you do now?

**RK:** Well I own a cupcake shop. So I do all the baking and everything else here.

**CD:** What has this work meant to you?

**RK:** For me it's a lot more than the cupcakes. I think it's awesome that I believed in myself and went for something because a lot of people get scared, and I, you know, obviously I was definitely scared and I had no idea what I was doing. And even now two years later, I sometimes feel like I don't know what I'm doing. But, you know, to be 25 and work for myself and run a successful business that means the world to me. And it's also awesome because I work with a lot of—I have young girls who work for me and like I said I coach basketball, so I'm connected to these younger girls who want a role model to look up to. And that means something to me too. I have a lot of people that come in and say, "Ohhh, I read your story, I follow your story, I see your Instagram and it's so cool, but I love to bake at home. And I really want to do what you do. And you just went for it." So that's meaningful too. That people look up to me. And I'm so young and I always look up to other people.

[pause]

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

**RK:** Well it's definitely difficult because when you own a business that's obviously your first concern always and I work 75 hours a week, sometimes more especially with the holidays coming up. So it's difficult and especially in the beginning I just tried to do everything myself. And you can't do that; you're only one person. And I just was unhealthy. I just, you know, I wouldn't eat, or just eat really late at night. And I wasn't taking care of myself and I was miserable and now I just try to really make sure that I find something for myself every day. Whether it's yoga or Pilates or something, just to clear my mind. Because it can be consuming, you know, people are always contacting you, or you're working. And there's not a lot of time for yourself, so I think as time has went on, I definitely have tried to focus on having some time for myself and making sure every day I do something that I enjoy, because you can work all you want, but if you're not happy, doing what—If you're not happy as a person you're not going to do well at your job.

**CD:** How do you feel about the choices you've made in your life? Do you have any regrets?

**RK:** I don't have any regrets. I think I've, I made the right moves. I started out coaching basketball first, that's my first love, and I still do that now. And I guess, I don't really have any regrets. I think being young when you're first in college, and you're 18 to 21 all your friends want to go out and you turn 21, and everyone wants to go out and party on the weekends and stuff. And that was something that I missed out on because I was always up early to go coach basketball and now I'm up early to work. And I kind of missed out on some of the fun that my friends had, but I just try to look towards the future and work hard now and vacation later, so I

think I made the right moves. And I think that, when people think of me in 10 years from now, 20 years from now, they'll respect me and what I've done, so I don't really have any regrets.

**CD:** How did you come into teaching basketball?

**RK:** I played in Millbury High School, we had a really successful basketball program. I played basketball pretty much my whole life. And my best friends are my teammates and I just really loved it and I loved my coach and loved working with him. [People enter The Queen's Cups, Renee greets them] "Hi, how are you today?"

**RK:** What was the question again?

**CD:** Your basketball...

**RK:** Oh basketball. Do you want me to start over or did you get the last part?

**CD:** I think we're good.

**RK:** Okay [Laughs]

[Pause]

**MR:** Now we are going to talk about politics and community involvement. So do you consider yourself active politically?

**RK:** No, Not at all.

**MR:** Have you been involved in volunteer or community work?

**RK:** I don't really have the time to volunteer myself necessarily but we definitely do a lot of work with the community. I sponsor every sports team in Millbury: basketball, baseball, tee-ball, and soccer. And I also sponsor the East Side Babe Ruth team in Worcester and we donate a lot, especially around the holidays I donate whatever cupcakes we have leftover I donate them to Worcester shelters, sometimes I drop them off at the hospital. We've donated a lot, especially with the Boston Marathon Bombings. When it took place we donated over 2,300 dollars. So I wish I had more time to volunteer, I think eventually I will but I work too much, but [laughs] we definitely try and stay involved for sure. Because it works both ways. It makes us feel good and a lot of people come in from it too. And sometimes I'll just leave like a six pack of cupcakes outside the door and just say whoever gets here first it's yours for free as long as you pay it forward and do something good for someone else. I think that was something that I really wanted to do from the beginning. I wanted to make sure I gave back because that makes a difference. You can make all the money in the world but if you don't do anything with it, anything positive, there is only so much clothes and things that you can buy that when you do

something for someone else it just makes you feel so much better. So I think as time goes on [I] will definitely be more involved and be able to volunteer but for now we just donate.  
[Machine noise in the background]

**MR:** What role has religion played in your life?

**RK:** I've never really been a religious person at all. My dad grew up religious and my mom did too but they never really, I don't know, forced it is the word for it, but they never really put that on us, so I'm not really religious at all. I don't go to church, I've never made my first communion or anything. I've had people who pass away that I really love and really miss and so I think of them when I am having a hard time or if I need some guidance or something. Especially my grandpa he was definitely my biggest influence so I guess that's my religion. I think of my grandfather. [laughs]

**CD:** Moving onto health. How have health issues impacted your life or those around you?

**RK:** Well my mom had breast cancer in 2013 and she finished her treatments the day before my 25<sup>th</sup> birthday in February of 2014. And I think for our family that was eye opening. They caught it early, but she still had to have surgery and there was more cancer than they thought. And to see someone you love go through—have radiation seven weeks every single day [that's] really difficult, but it makes you appreciate the smaller things. And I think that some of my other family members have always dealt with depression and that is kind of sad too and it's easy to get kind of lost in that and stay miserable, but you know it's been a tough year for my family. To see what my mom went through, my dad had some issues, and I really realize now that taking care of myself is the number one thing and especially if it's in my family. If my mom had breast cancer, I'm more apt to get it. If my dad's had issues, I'm more apt to get it because it runs in my family so I'm just trying to focus on my own health now because of some of the things they've been through.

**CD:** What are your experiences in accessing quality, affordable healthcare?

**RK:** Well I'm 25 now and I'm turning 26 in February and then I won't be on my parents' health care anymore. Which is really scary because your whole life you just—you're on your parents' insurance so you can just go to the doctor. I went to the nutritionist last week just because I wanted to see one. When I turn 26 if I do that my bill is going to be really high, so I need to start looking at my options, but it's kind of scary because I don't have any full time employees here. I am the only full time employee. And I hear other business owners talking about how they offer health care and they pay for their health care and it's a couple thousand dollars a month. And I'm young and I have so much student loans to pay for, so that is kind of scary to think about, but hopefully I can find something that's beneficial.

**CD:** Are you responsible for any health care besides yourself?

**RK:** No

[Pause, people talking in the background]

**MR:** Now it just the conclusion. So how do you get through tough times?

**RK:** I [ ? ] myself. [Laughs] No, not very good, no. [Laughs] That is what my staff says, “I know when you’re stressed because you just don’t talk to anyone.” I’m trying to work on that though. I’ve recently been doing a lot of yoga and Pilates and I feel awesome from it. So I’m trying to exercise to get through the tough times because it’s just the time to yourself you don’t think about anything else.

**MR:** So what kinds of thoughts keep you going?

**RK:** Well, my parents have done so much for me and they helped me start my business and they have their own full time jobs and they come and work here. And they have to deal with my stress more than anyone else especially around the holidays when I’m mega grouch and like stressed to the limit and they deal with that. So what keeps me going is knowing that if I keep working hard I’ll be able to do something for them. Like this is their retirement plan and I don’t want to put my parents in a nursing home when I am older. I’d like to be able to do something better for them—not better, that’s not the right thing to say, but I’d like to take care of my parents and make sure that they are set, that they can retire and not have to worry about it. I really want to get into real estate and own some apartment buildings and stuff one day. They can sell their house and live there for free. That is like my ultimate goal. So that’s something that definitely keeps me going and I just know that if I keep working hard that things will pay off. So I’ve always wanted to—I’ve really respected my mom that she always loved her job and she never really cared about making a ton of money or anything. She just wanted to do what she loved and on the flip side my dad has always made a little bit more money, but has always hated his job. And growing up and seeing that I just want to be happy like my mom. So for me I just want to continue to do something that I love and not worry about anything else. So if I keep working hard and still love what I do, then that’s what keeps me going.

**MR:** How do you define success in your life and has this definition changed over time?

**RK:** Well, I’m one of those people where I don’t really care about statistics so to say—but in some sense I do. They say more small businesses fail within their first year so we’ve made it through our first year. I think it’s like 80 percent of small businesses fail in the first year. We’ve made it through year one. Year two it’s like a little bit lower but it’s still like 50 percent of people can fail. In year three they say if you get through year three then you’re good you’ll be fine. So I’m like timid to say that we are successful yet because we’re not through year three yet. Anything could happen. I could walk in tomorrow and not have any business, but so far so good. And I think the success part is seeing other respected businesses choose us, being on WTAG [Worcester’s News, Talk, Traffic & Weather Station] reach out to us. Reliant Medical

Group, their corporate event they are reaching out to us. TJX is reaching out to us and I was just saying to my mom yesterday that yesterday we had so many new customers, like I barely recognized anyone that came in yesterday and it was just all day long. And to think that I just started in my parents' kitchen, my apartment kitchen. Just making these cupcakes and had no goal to owning my own place and having new customers all the time and being able to be a part of people's weddings and these corporate events and stuff like that's success to me. At the end of the day, I don't care about the money because I don't pay myself that much. I just pay myself to get by, but the success part is seeing other people that are successful respect us enough to choose us. So it is definitely changing. When you're younger you kind of have this vision of like, "Oh my God, I just want to be rich, and have all these things and have this huge house." And I probably thought the same way when I was younger, but now it just so much more than that. It's like what you're able to do for people and providing jobs. I have two girls in high school that work for me. That's a job for them. They get to say, "Oh, I work at a cupcake shop." That's cool, you know. My assistant, she goes to Worcester state too. She actually grew up next to my grandfather. This is a job for her. She is a super good friend of mine. So that's success too, that's cool that people work for you and they like you and you like them and you get along. It changes over time. It may change again I'm not really sure, but I'm a little timid to say that we're successful yet, but we'll see. [Laughs]

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

**RK:** I think that you can do like anything as long as people, as long as you have a good support system around you and you really are willing to work hard. You can't do anything in life unless you're willing to work hard for it and you have to make a lot of sacrifice. Like I said, I sacrifice a lot of time when my friends were out partying and doing whatever they wanted and they didn't have responsibility in the morning. And I always did and that was a sacrifice to me. But the advice I would give is you have to sacrifice if you want to be successful and that's something my parents gave—always taught me. And ever since I was young, my mom always said that she wanted me to grow up to be a strong, independent woman who didn't need anyone else. And that's a goal that I always set for myself and that is what I wanted to be like. So if you set a goal that you want to be that person, then that's who you'll be.

[Pause]

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

**RK:** Especially because it's a Worcester women's project I think that—I said there's so many strong female business owners in Worcester who are really taking everything by storm. And I think that is something that should definitely be included. These small businesses are popping up at—are growing. Crompton Collective is one of my favorite places in Worcester because it's, it's an artisan mall of all local people who Amy [Chase] is providing a job to and they are so

busy there. She does so much for the community and they started a farmers market and they do a lot of like community events and it's providing jobs for people and being so young and seeing that, that's like really cool. It's something that people look forward too so I think its inspiring too. I think that so many people are creative, but they are stuck in jobs that they hate and they—we go to college and we aren't sure what we want to do. We get the degree, we have to take these classes, but they don't really teach you what to do when you leave, you know? I have a psych degree, but I would have to go back to school to learn how to do something with the degree. So you get the degree and there is that, but seeing these other people who just go out on a whim and they believe in themselves, they have a good support system, they just go for it, that's inspiring. So I think that's something that should definitely be included.

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

**RK:** Well, definitely Amy Chase, from Crompton, but she probably already got nominated for this. [Laughs] I think Molly McGrath at Grime Clothing. Molly is someone who I really respect too because when I started here I really wanted to start small. Sometimes you go to these new places and they're really elaborate and they are really beautiful. And people take out these huge loans and they're not sure whether they are going to succeed or not. And for me I was like, "Well, I don't know if people are going to buy cupcakes every day? I don't know if we're going to be able to make it?" and I wanted to start small and Molly started small too. She had a place that was probably just this size [points to room] and she sells consignment clothes and stuff, but like nice clothes. And they have new clothes too and they sell jewelry and shoes. But she started really small and now she has a place on Shrewsbury Street. It's awesome. It's an old garage and she redid it inside and to start small and grow to something like that on Shrewsbury Street, which is prime real estate, I think that is so cool and it just kind of shows that she was a little fearless. I would definitely say Molly—Molly and Amy for sure. And actually, my cousin Erika Dunn, too. She is on the Worcester City Council [Worcester Historical Commission] and she's done a ton for Worcester. They call her Miss Worcester actually.

**CD:** Just a few more additional questions and then we'll be done. What did your parents' education consist of? And what do they do?

**RK:** Neither of my parents went to college. My mom worked at Blackstone Valley Tech for 14 years. She's just like a great person. Everyone really looks up to her and especially younger kids. She coaches volleyball and she does so much for everyone. She's really respected. And my dad actually dropped out of high school and then got a GED [General Education Development] but he's probably the smartest person I've ever met. He knows how to fix everything; he's a huge history buff, watches the History Channel for fun. [Laughs] He knows everything like that and he's a food service director, he's the boss. And he's done that—he's been working in the kitchen since he was 15 so they both didn't go to college, but they both make a living.

**CD:** Did you go through any difficult transitions from childhood to adulthood?

**RK:** No, I mean not really. I lost my grandfather when I was 15 and he was like my best friend in the whole world. So that was traumatizing. I would have liked him to see me get my license and go to prom and all of those things. We literally were together every day and when he got sick I was the one who found him, so that's kind of—that's difficult. Other than that, you change as a person so much and I'm not the same person I was when I was 18. You grow and some years are harder than others. This year has been probably the worst year of my whole life, but it's crazy because personal life wise it's been the worst year, but business wise ever since my life started going downhill, my business has done awesome. So I don't know, I guess it has to balance out somewhere right? [Laughs]

**CD:** Do you have any memories of historical events that took place when you were growing up?

**RK:** I use to go to—I went to Friendly House my whole life, which is in Worcester, and I ended up working there. Friendly House has done a lot for the community too, but some of the friends I met there, they had different backgrounds, they were like different ethnicities. I remember going to the festival that they had in Worcester. The Spanish Festival and there was one other festival I went to and I just remember thinking that was really cool but other than that, no.

**CD:** When you were not at home, where did you usually spend your time?

**RK:** With my friends or going out to eat, playing basketball.

**CD:** And do you have any hobbies you do, you do or any regular leisure activities that you do outside the home?

**RK:** I feel like I am always at Target [laughs]. Like I said I like yoga and Pilates and spin, but I think—you know I work ten hours a day, sometimes more so. I like to be home. I just moved into my own apartment by myself so I like to be home. Other than that I like to be with my friends, my family.

**CD:** Well thank you for doing this interview.

**RK:** Thank you.

[Unfortunately, Cora Derocher and Michelle Ruiz, forgot to ask a question, so they emailed Renee King.]

**CD:** Do you, Renee King, have any accomplishments or achievements, which you are proud of?

**RK:** We were rated five stars from *Worcester Magazine's* Cupcake Tasting. We were voted runner up Best Cupcakes in 2013 and 2014 in *Worcester Magazines* Readers' poll. The Queen's Cups was featured as a Local Up & Comer by Go Local Worcester. And lastly, we were voted

Best Bakery and Best Dessert in the *Millbury/Sutton Chronicle* Readers Poll in 2014. These things are great and I am so thankful for them, but my best accomplishment thus far is being in business and making my parents proud.