

**Interview Subjects: Martha Callahan Annoni, Valerie Barlow Jerabeck, and
Monique Charbonneau Staples**

Interviewer: Laura Ettinger

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Today is July 16, 2011, and I'm Laura Ettinger. We are here in my office at Clarkson University in Bertrand H. Snell Hall, room 269. I am here with three members of Clarkson's class of 1976: Valerie Barlow Jerabeck, who was an electrical and computer engineering major; Monique Charbonneau Staples, who goes by Nikki [and] who was a math major; and Martha Callahan Annoni, who was a civil and environmental engineering major. I am going to start with your family, your growing up years - how you would each describe those and you can say whatever you want about that - and I'll prompt you.

MS: Go this way or that a way?

Well, let's start with Martha.

MA: Okay. I come from a very large family, eight children. I had three older sisters who all went to the University of Buffalo, one after the other. And, when my turn came, I said, "I'm not going to the University of Buffalo. I'm doing something different." And I did really; I told Val yesterday [that] I wanted to be an architect, and my guidance counselor at my high school knew that but he happened to have a Clarkson rep visiting our high school. So they pulled me out of class, [I] came down, I talked to the guy, and I had never heard of Clarkson, but they offered me money, they were trying to entice women into engineering, and he said, "You know, really, civil, structural engineering, you do a lot of that same kind of thing that architects do. It's just maybe not as creative but more science," and I was really into math and science. So I said, "Oh, okay. That sounds good." And [I] went home, told my parents, and they said, "You can't go to Clarkson. It's too expensive." But they gave me grant money, and I had scholarships, and somehow pieced it together, so with loans, I was able to come up here. But that's really how I made that decision to come here. And I had applied to other schools, but once Clarkson was on my radar screen, I didn't turn back. And I never came and visited the school either. (laughter) It was just like, "Okay. I'm going to Clarkson."

VJ: I didn't do that.

MA: I had no idea how long it takes to get there, or what it's like, or anything. But people then didn't do that. They didn't take their kids all over the country visiting schools.

And where did you grow up?

MA: In the Syracuse area. A little town outside of Syracuse. Marcellus. So probably two and a half/ three hours away. But I thought it was a great choice until the day I got here. (laughter)

MS: And then I saw it and I was like, "What have I done?"

MA: Well, these two lived next door to me in Holcroft. I roomed with two other,

VJ: Thank goodness.

MA: Oh, well, we would have been in that triple together if I'd told them on the application that I smoked. (group laughter) I really didn't; I didn't smoke when I filled out the application.

VJ: I know. I didn't either.

MS: Bad influence.

VJ: Nikki had us all smoking....

I just want to follow up on a few things. What did your parents do? I mean, you mentioned a number of siblings and financial pressures.

MA: Right.

What did your parents do for a living?

MA: My mother worked at a university; she worked at the School of Forestry, affiliated with Syracuse University. She didn't at the time that I came up here because one of her benefits was that her kids got to go to Syracuse University for free.

Oh.

MA: But I was already up here by the time she started working there. So my younger siblings took advantage of that. So she worked up there. She was a clerk, and worked in accounts, I'm not exactly sure. My father was a business major. He graduated from Creighton University. Right after World War II, he came back and with the GI benefits, he ended up at Creighton and that's where he met my mother. She's from Iowa. And they got married in Nebraska, I guess, or Omaha, and then they moved to New York State, so he was a white-collar worker, businessman, but still, we didn't grow up real rich. I mean, with eight kids in the family, that money really had to stretch. But, [I] had a very happy childhood though. My siblings and I are all still close. After me, my brother Matt, who became an engineer, went to the School of Forestry, got a degree in wood products engineering, and then went to SU [Syracuse University] for another and got a degree in civil. And Patty went into geology, and I mean, we all were kind of in technical fields. My youngest sister was an accountant, and Rob's also an engineer - my brother Rob. I mean, they all kind of

VJ: You led them.

MA: just leaned toward the sciences.

VJ: Trailblazer.

MA: Yeah.

Okay.

MA: I kind of was because my three older sisters, none of them ended up getting their degree. They went to school forever, but none of them ever completed college. They were like psych majors or sociology majors.

MS: We were a new generation.

MA: Yeah, we were different. We were different.

Thank you.

MA: You're welcome.

MS: I've got to keep some topics, how we differ in particular. I come from a very small family. There's just my sister and me, and we don't stay close at all. (laughter)

MA: Yeah, that's too bad.

MS: I know, but I'm French Canadian, and you're Irish and Catholic. That was a common denominator. You were just....

VJ: Me.

MS: Me.

(group laughter)

MS: But that was always good. We made instant friendships. I was born and bred in Malone, New York - 18 years at St. Joseph's Ursuline Academy, was a 13 year school, parochial school. The nuns baked bread every morning. (laughter) Delivered those milk cartons. I graduated, actually,

MA: Valedictorian.

MS: Valedictorian. I failed kindergarten. Had to repeat kindergarten and I graduated valedictorian.

VJ: How do you fail kindergarten? Only Nik could.

MS: I was uninterested.

MA: You know those nuns!

MS: Yeah.

VJ: Yeah, that's true.

(laughter)

MS: I had to do a sailboat, and I told them, "Here, take your sailboat." So, anyway, I ended up loving math and science. Not particularly good at it. The girls will tell you, but I loved it. And I remember, God - what was her name? Mother Made-to-Order, and she told me that I'd never get into a four year uni—I, I was college material, that was the word.¹

MA: You were on the college track.

MS: right, right. But, I mean, that was the terminology used then, "college material." But, in that way would be sociology, biology - that kind of thing. And my mother was always the one who said, "You don't be a teacher; you be a professor. You don't be a nurse; you be a doctor." And dad was a WWII war veteran. Crash; we endearingly called him Crash Charbonneau.

VJ: We called him Crash.

MS: I mean, we called him Moose; he was a Troop B state trooper in charge of tech communications. And over in WWII, in Germany, he had done broadcasting and a movie with Richard Basehart, and they asked him to go to Hollywood for a screen test,

MA: He was very good looking.

MS: oh! He was a doll baby.

MA: Handsome.

MS: And he said, "No, no, no. I have to return to North Bangor [NY] to marry my honey."² And so they did. I was their honeymoon baby. Nine months to the day.

¹ Staples later wrote to me, "Our picture project for the day was a sailboat. I remember it well. I found the shapes (i.e., triangles for the sails, the hull an obtuse rectangle). I told Mother St Bernard, 'Here take your sailboat.' I was defiant; I was not surrendering my work until I was finished and proud of it as if I had cracked the enigma code. And that's pretty much how I approached things from that day forward. Funny how you remember subtle yet pivotal days from over 50 years ago. So, anyway, I ended up loving math and science. It was difficult for me but I was hooked. The girls will tell you; I wasn't particularly good (fast) at it, but I loved it. And I remember Mother Constance Marie, our guidance counselor, telling me and my parents I was certainly 'college material'; that was the term back then. But it was directed in a very narrow context and was confined to mean liberal (girly) colleges."

² Staples later wrote to me, "All the kids called dad Moose. He was tall at 6' and intimidating in his uniform. Dad's real name was Armand Charbonneau, very French Canadian in ethnicity (born while in transit across the border of Canada to Vermont) as the family relocated annually while my grandfather looked for work during the Depression. He became Tech sergeant in charge of communication, New York State Police, Troop 'B' based in Malone NY, after his stint as a US Marine Corps Radio broadcaster in Germany during WWII. I have all the old pictures and a telexed message from when he auditioned amongst over 1,000 other earnest young Marines for a small speaking part in an old black and white movie ('Decision at Dawn' starring Richard Basehart) being produced on location.

(laughter)

VJ: (laughter)

So you have a younger sister?

MS: baby sister. I was the first one, only one that ever went to college.

MA: Shelly didn't go?

MS: Didn't last for a couple years. Not even a year. So that's basically it. S, Mother whatever-her-name-was said, "No." Clarkson was a very, very well-known, reputable university. We grew up with Clarkson, so that would have been my intended. She goes, "No, no, no, don't even bother. It's impossible." And at that time, there was affirmative action, and I was pre-approved like a credit card. They sent me this stuff in the mail, after we took our SATs.

MA: They were actively searching for women

MS: Yeah.

MA: to come to the school.

MS: Which was actually genius. And my scores weren't all that good, but I guess they were good enough. And, I mean, compared to par excellence these days when kids get A's, I mean, they're perfect. So, I get this card, says I'm in, they gave me a couple bucks, and went down to, that loan - what was it three percent?

MA: Uh huh.

MS: And split it half and half with my mom and dad, and off to Clarkson I came. But I did stop by my guidance counselor and said I was applying to Clarkson, and she said, "Oh, please don't." I said, "I already have. I'm already in."

(group laughter)

MA: Was that the only school you applied to?

MS: No. I went to LeMoyne because it was Catholic,³ and SUNY Plattsburgh because my boyfriend went there, right? So it was real simple.

He was quite a linguist. It runs in the family. French was his first language, English his second and German, his third which he picked up easily. The movie director asked him to go to Hollywood and connect with him as soon as his assignment was over for a screen test. Dad was a young Elvis look-alike with that natural curl on his forehead with brains. He declined. Respectfully. He had his honey waiting for him back home."

³ Staples later wrote to me, "I had been pre-approved [to go to LeMoyne] on the basis of having graduated valedictorian and the fact that my school (kindergarten through 12th grade) was Catholic."

And how did you decide on Clarkson? I mean, since you applied to those three.

MS: You know, up here in the North Country, it's the best college there is. Bar none. Not even St. Lawrence.

MA: Yeah.

MS: Yeah.

Can we go back to your guidance counselor for a moment? You had been told you were college material?

VJ: That's what they did. She's lucky; mine told me to go into modeling. When I told them I wanted to be an engineer, he said, "Be a model."

MS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

VJ: I walked out of his [my guidance counselor's office], and I never saw him again. I didn't talk to him; I just did it. Whatever I had to do.

MS: Had they not been proactive and told me I was already in, I wouldn't have—I would have been deterred.

MA: My guidance counselor was different.

VJ: Yours sounded good.

MA: I mean, he advocated for me. But he discouraged me from architecture because he said, "You'll get a much better job and probably more job offers in engineering than you would in architecture."

MS: And we were on the cusp of a recession. You have to remember - this is play date stuff that's going on right now.

VJ: But engineers are never lacking

MS: yeah.

VJ: in jobs.

MS: Yeah. At least they never were.⁴

⁴ Staples later wrote to me, "Typically engineering is/ was in constant demand. During our time it was a decadent combination. I could name my price at Carrier Air Conditioning. They offered me two positions based on my summer experiences there - which was unprecedented at the time - maybe still is: one in programming in the domestic MSD division (lynde flame cut machines /Heavy Industry chillers) and [one in] Customer Sales and

VJ: Yeah.

MS: I don't know how it is now.

VJ: I mean, business gets tight, but you're really not....

MS: Yeah. So, jumping back into the realm of my mom, [she was] always promoting the higher tier instead of being a nurse, which was typically women; she said, "Go be a doctor." So, then I tapped into the young lady that they had given me the name of, a year prior, and

Here at Clarkson.

MS: here at Clarkson. Ann something is all I can remember, and I did meet her once; she had black hair, and she did end up a doctor.⁵

She was an engineering major here and ended up—?

MS: Yeah.

MA: She went four years here, got an engineering degree?

MS: Yeah. Yeah, and then she did some transfer credits over at [Potsdam] State.

MA: Okay.

MS: And then she went to medical,

MA: She went to medical school.

MS: yeah.

VJ: Yeah, there were a lot of people who did that.

Service (all room air conditioners and small packaged units up to five tons, secondary on 16 Series Chillers, for all countries International in the CIC Division). The latter is the one I chose. The highest paid in the graduating class though at the time was Chemical Engineering and a woman chemical engineer [was] one hot commodity."

⁵ Staples wrote to me later, "Mom was always promoting the higher echelon. For barely graduating by the skin of her teeth from high school, she had spent a couple of years (max) at GE/Syracuse as a secretary and I guess had glimpsed white collar for the first time. She was a native of rural Massena, New York. If one were to propose the nursing profession, she would add 'doctor'; if one mentioned teacher, she'd insert 'professor.' And so it was when I said maybe Math? She said Clarkson! And when I thought aloud about testing the water for a possible OBGYN career and I had asked Clarkson ever so nonchalantly, they readily assisted me in finding a young lady endeavoring in that area of expertise and had her write to me personally. It was a nice, friendly, warm greeting to the school as well, and I had a name of an upper classman the day I walked in."

MS: Yeah.

MA: Yeah.

VJ: But the women had to promise they would practice in low income areas and stuff, after they got out, too.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: They weren't getting in to med school unless they made all kinds of weird promises that men didn't have to.

So you came here thinking that primarily what you wanted to do was to be a physician?

MS: Yeah. And although it took a curious path as well, because as soon as I got here and then I met up with these two, you have to admit, we - 35 years.

VJ: Yeah.

MS: We can't get rid of each other.

VJ: 39.

MS: Yeah. (laughter)

But who's counting?

(group laughter)

VJ: But we thought we'd be 21 and know everything we needed to know.

MS: Oh, that's just like my 20 year old now. (laughter)

VJ: Yeah.

MS: we just hit it off. We picked up all our bad habits, and then we cleaned them up, and then we picked them up again. And, (laughter) four years of engineering, I found was enough. I was totally burned out because I didn't dumb down; in math, you could take, what did we use to call it? Sandbox 101⁶, or you know, some sort of, you know, Walk-Across-the-Raquette-River 101 to

⁶ Staples later wrote to me, "We used to call it 'Sandbox 101,' which quickly translated was 'Sociology, Psychology or Keller Plan Calculus where we taught for an hour privately' and all received automatic A's. But not me; I ended up loading up my extra hours with biology and physiology and premed courses and ended up in organic for a day until I found out it was specifically for the chemists or something. I was always studying which made me a very dull girl with a serious vitamin D deficiency. Always burning the midnight oil. It had to change, which it did."

get all of your credits. And, so instead, I did organic with Rona, and I was taking biology with somebody else,

MA: Oh, yeah.

MS: and psych with somebody else. So, you guys finally had like an easy open class, and I'm sitting there going, "Pfft, how am I going to get through this one?" So I had like five or six solid courses the whole time. So I was burnt, and I figured it was one of those deals where you promise yourself a year from now I'll go back.

To med school?

MS: Yeah.

Yeah. We'll come back to some of this. Val, let me turn to you about your growing up, and....

VJ: I was the youngest of seven.

VJ: I was a mistake. The next oldest is

MS: Midlife....

VJ: yeah, well, everybody's two years apart and then there are eight years, and then surprise! And two girls, one girl's next to the oldest, and me, and one of my brothers went to college - that's it. It wasn't encouraged; it wasn't discouraged. I know if I said I wanted to be a football player one day, when I was little, the next day I had a helmet and shoulder pads, you know? I mean, that's how both my parents were. My father was a retired truck driver; my mother worked managing some things at W.T. Grant. Remember that?

MS: Uh huh.

And this was in Binghamton?

VJ: This was in Binghamton. You didn't know you were poor. You just,

MS: Right. I had a happy childhood.

VJ: Yeah. It was very happy, and you know, had lots of friends, and we had fun, and we were popular with everybody - the rich kids, and nobody really cared. But then my father died right before I got out of high school. And I didn't know from—you're supposed to apply? there are deadlines? there are times?

(laughter)

VJ: What's an SAT, you know? And nobody's helping because I had enough guidance, so I kind of backed into a lot of stuff, thank goodness. But like I told you, my guidance counselor's telling me to be a model, and I'm almost valedictorian - I took driver's ed.

(group laughter)

MA: That was your downfall.

VJ: It was. Driving has always been my—, I got a C.

MS: Typing was mine.⁷

VJ: You know?

MS: I know.⁸

VJ: I lost it [valedictorian] in the thousandths place because of driver's ed. But, anyway, you know, forget it. We won't go there. So, I'd come home and things from colleges would be, literally, on the dining room table, and my dad would point them out, and you get real cocky, and you just start heaving things. I told Mark I found a typo in the letter from Columbia, and gone.

(laughter from MS)

⁷ Staples later wrote to me, "My downfall was and still is typing - my one and only 'c.'"

⁸ Staples later wrote to me, "I too had my high school marks crunched to the third decimal point. Jocelyn 'Jet' Johnston (salutatorian), John LeDuc, and I had been classmates for 13 years. St Joe's began monitoring your marks freshman year and you received points/ credits for sequences of subjects typically, for example, three years of math, three years of science, three years of language—each embodied one category. For me it was algebra, geometry, trigonometry, and senior year calculus, biology, chemistry, physics, three years of French, one year of Latin, American History mandatory preceded by world history, three years of English, and college psychology and sociology (we took at extension courses by colleges at the public high school). Unfortunately, back then, you couldn't get college credit; APs weren't invented yet but we all figured we'd have a leg up. Once completed, you would receive bonus points in as many sequences you successfully fulfilled – more points in the Regents individual exams in which you scored 90 and above, and then another point for those sequences of three that were all 90 +, etc. You also received points for clubs - Student Council, Choir, Yearbook, Cheerleading, Ski Club, Drama Club, and then an extra point for leadership roles. So I was in Student Council, Choir, Hootenanny Singing Group, Supporting Actress in Senior Drama, Cheerleading, the Honor Society, Ski Club, and Layout Editor in Yearbook. These points were all accumulated and then integrated in some unknown formula with the diploma you received from St Joseph's. In private school you received a private and public school diploma (public of course dictated by the NY state Regents requirements). By standards back then, New York had one if not the most rigid strictest high school educational mandates in the nation, which is why we were the most sought after candidates for most universities. Believe it or not, Mother Angela told me months later after it had been announced; I was neck and neck with 'Jet'—that it was she that had gone back to my paragraph in the Regents exam and changed it up by half a point winning me the valedictorianship. Who knows? I also remember the essay; it was about my house and what 'home' meant to me. Formerly, Mother Angela had been a quiet political supporter of Jocelyn. You always knew who your allies were. But lo and behold, I squeaked out a third decimal point victory in spite of my poor typing with Mother Loyola."

VJ: I really didn't apply to a lot of places. I looked at MIT seriously, but you couldn't use a Regents scholarship. Like I said, we had no, I'm not talking,

MA: New York State Regents.

VJ: we had no money. Uh huh.

MA: Uh huh.

VJ: So I couldn't even consider [MIT]. [If] you can't use New York State Regents, then you don't know what kind of money anybody is going to give you. I didn't even know from Clarkson. At SU [Syracuse University], a guy took me out to dinner one day, my brother and I, and wanted me to go Syracuse for five years, and because you can get a masters, you could at that time, a masters degree on the graduate level in engineering, but not undergrad. So he wanted me to do something else for four years and then after five years, I'd have two degrees and....

MS: That was at SU?

VJ: yeah, that's what he wanted me to do. And my boyfriend went there, so I was pretty psyched about that, but my brother said he had a lot of good reasons why I shouldn't, and they were good ones because we broke up soon after.

And this was the brother who had gone to college?

VJ: Yes. On the GI bill. And, then, oh! I know what it was. I ran into Marco, a friend of mine. I ran into him, I just kind of did in the neighborhood, and he told me about this Model Cities Program that they used to have way back when. "Val, you ought to come and talk to this guy. He can help you get money for college," but Model Cities wasn't even—, believe it or not, I wasn't even in the poorest neighborhood. But it wasn't applying to my neighborhood. But we walked over there anyway, and I talked to the guy, and he happened to have gone to Clarkson. I don't think he graduated from Clarkson, I don't know, but still somebody, and he got on the phone and he called Clarkson; he talked to Dean [John] Chapple

MS: Nice guy.⁹

VJ: over the phone. He accepted me; I didn't have to pay a thing. I didn't have to fill out an application. You think I was going anywhere else? I didn't know where it was, I didn't know what it looked like,

(group laughter)

VJ: I didn't know there weren't women in engineering. What do you mean?

⁹ Staples later wrote to me, "Chapple was the MAN. One word and it was done. But again, back then a handshake was law."

MA: That's what surprised me, because I told this to Val - on our first day, when they brought the whole freshman class together, and we had to walk downtown, and I think it was Snell Hall, but it was

MS: Sure. Yeah, yeah.

MA: downtown Snell Hall, and we had to go into the auditorium, they made all the women in the class (inaudible).

VJ: We were late. Remember, we had to sit....

MS: We were always late.

MA: Yeah.

MS: You were late today! (laughter)

MA: I know.

MS: And I was early.

MA: But we had to go down, our whole class is behind us, they made the girls sit in the front row, and I'm looking around like, "This is it?"

MS: "What's up with this?"¹⁰

MA: These are the only females in our entire class, and there were like 450 or so,

MS: There was over 300 and there were 20 girls and¹¹

VJ: Uh huh.

MS: 20 post graduates.

MA: uh huh.

VJ: There were four [women who came in as] engineers, always, one of each.

MA: Yeah. And even then.

¹⁰ Staples later wrote to me, "It was the best kept secret in town. While we knew (women) were in limited numbers, we had never imagined there were so few and the VIP status (i.e., one of celebrity) we were about to assume. Remember : although my neighborhood was full of boys by the dozens, I was surrounded by these genius women - all the religious sisters of the Ursulines."

¹¹ Staples later wrote to me, "The odds were now about 3000 to 30; you do the math. The moms were so happy; we were all going to marry engineers and live happily ever after."

VJ: Not always the same, some switched, but always four.

MA: Even then.

VJ: And all the rest were math majors.

MA: And I was surprised that there were only three. I thought there were only three of us that were in engineering. It was you, me, and,

VJ: Lynn.

MS: No, it was Cindy [Coombs, who later married George Willis, who graduated ahead of us].

MS: Yeah. Soko was a math major.

MA: It was Cindy, because Cindy and Lynn [Hanrahan] switched.

VJ: Right.

MS: Cindy was going to be a chemical engineer.

VJ: There were four, I think.

MA: What was the fourth? I can't remember who the fourth was.

VJ: I don't know.

MA: But I thought the rest, all the other women were like pure math, pure science, pure

VJ: Physics.

MA: physics majors, and there were only three or four of us that were in engineering. That was a total shock to me.

VJ: I know.

VJ: I didn't think it was hard or anything. I mean, unusual,

MA: No.

VJ: because we liked that stuff. We liked doing that. You know?

Okay. I want to go back to you, Val, in terms of coming to Clarkson. Had you been interested in math and science for a long time?

VJ: I was.

Okay.

VJ: I took my bike apart daily, from the time I was a little kid, and put it back together again. You know how it is, you have leftover parts,

(group laughter)

VJ: over the shoulder.

She's throwing those over the shoulder.

(group laughter)

VJ: It was fun. I just liked to do stuff like that. Remember, I tried to fix my hot rollers freshman year? They burst into flames? I was only a freshman.

MS: I am lucky to be alive!

(group laughter)

VJ: But,

MS: I should be on a reality show. But she was always fixing something.

VJ: It was fun, and I liked it. And, like I said, my guidance counselor was worthless. And apparently they write letters to the school; like I said, I didn't know anything. Your high school knows about scholarships and stuff. And I'd walked in because I did stuff in school, and I walked into the

MS: Right, right.

VJ: office and they said, "Congratulations!" And I actually looked behind me like,

(laughter from MS)

VJ: "Who are they talking to?" because they were all excited. And my guidance counselor was there, like he did anything.

MS: Oh, yeah.

You got into Clarkson.

VJ: And got a full scholarship. You know, but he acted like,

MA: He's the rooster.

VJ: yeah, he's back there with the principal. Like, "Who are you?"

(laughter from MS)

VJ: You had absolutely no part in this." But I didn't say that. I wasn't raised that way.

MS: But, see, then coming from convent school, and obviously, with you guys, too, we were all equal when it came to math and science. Because [with the] Regents, you had three languages, you had three maths, three sciences, American history, and it was a really well adapted, broad curriculum that the Regents gave you. And everybody was equal. So, I didn't know either, really, that it was as small a percentage as it was. But that didn't bother me.

MA: Well, I think women were really encouraged or just didn't think about it. Like my three older sisters.

MS: They didn't think about it.

MA: They didn't; I don't think that they felt that there were options other than going into a liberal arts kind of

MS: Right, right.

MA: curriculum and taking that track to maybe become a teacher, or

VJ: a nurse.

MA: I knew I didn't want to teach.

MS: I always thought of that in terms of like my mother. When I was looking for colleges, I thought the world was my oyster.¹²

MS: Uh huh.

MA: I didn't think that I could do this or I couldn't do that.

MS: I didn't either.

¹² Staples later wrote to me, "I was hopeful for the three 'C's. I had only heard of Ivy League in terms of Cornell and Columbia, and if I couldn't get in those, I had Clarkson as my safety. I had my guidance counselor write a letter of recommendation to Columbia - damn good one too; I read it before handing it in and had a call back from Cornell (sad tale to come) and of course with extra cockiness in tow, a prequalification from Clarkson, so I was set. Scholarships from the others were rather inconsequential. Now so many years later and spearheading my daughter's quest for a good school, I'm surprised to reflect that I only applied to a couple - five! schools in all."

MA: Yeah.

So, from what all of you are saying, in different ways, it doesn't sound like when you came here as freshman, you saw yourself as pioneers.

VJ: No! We never thought of ourselves that way.

MS: No.

MA: Right.

MS: No, we'd laugh at that.¹³

Okay. You're all shaking your heads. So, you were pursuing math, science, engineering.

VJ: Stuff we liked to do.

MA: It was stuff we liked to do, and other

MS: Yeah.

MA: people didn't do this ahead of us.

MS: Yeah.

MA: I mean, why was it only a man's field? We didn't get that.

VJ: I remember my algebra teacher in ninth grade, Mrs. McNulty, I'll never forget her, but she used to,

MS: Constance Marie, my guidance counselor.

VJ: yeah. She used to put the brighter kids at the end of the rows,

MS: Yeah.

VJ: and then she put me in the back of the class. So, when somebody had a problem, they'd raise their hand in front of you, and you would were in charge of—; I had to go kind of cover the class. And she told me, "You should go to MIT and be an engineer." I didn't know what I wanted to be at that time. I would have jumped off a bridge if she said, "Jump off a bridge." And

¹³ Staples later wrote to me, "Yeah, it was simply stuff we liked to do, stuff we were good at, stuff we hadn't been taught to be intimidated by or embarrassed about, something we simply took for granted. Again back then, the Regents had standardized our education. We knew precisely what caliber of colleague we had sitting next to us simply by asking what kind of diploma they graduated with - with honors, with 'excellence in.' The understated word being simple [as in "simply stuff we liked to do"]. We were more worried about an ice carnival date, whether we should rush a sorority, or what to wear during orientation week, or whether we 'looked' fat in that dress."

from that moment on, I wanted to be an engineer. You know? I don't care, she could have said anything.

And this was ninth grade?

VJ: Yeah. Ninth grade. But I didn't even know engineer. People would say, "what kind?" I'd feel embarrassed, "So, what kind of engineer?"

(group laughter)

VJ: Mathematical.

(group laughter)

MS: I remember my very last teacher. I filled up my languages with Latin and,

MA: And French?

MS: no, I had finished four of those. And, just like Val, and I'm sure you did, too, I was in everything - student council,

VJ: Yeah.

MS: the stage, key club, yearbook editor,

VJ: Yeah.

MS: you know,

VJ: National Honor Society.

MS: yeah.

VJ: Yeah.

MS: Everything.

VJ: French club.

MS: Choir. I remember being interviewed by Cornell, and he [the interviewer] said, "No way are you in all these things."

VJ: Really?

MS: Oh, yeah.

VJ: Even now.

MS: I said, “Well, here’s the yearbook,” you know?

VJ: Yeah.

MS: Here’s my picture and everything. I did not get into Cornell, I did look at Cornell, because he disbelieved that I could have that many extracurricular activities and as high a grade point average.

VJ: Yeah.

MS: He didn’t know how I pulled it off, but he didn’t believe it.

VJ: I remember telling my brother I was looking at University of Pennsylvania. And he said Penn State for some reason. I never really looked at either of them for some reason. But what was I going to say?

MA: That would have been closer to you.

Val, you were going to say something, when Nikki was speaking, about even now---

VJ: I know.

MA: About maybe the kind of activities you get involved in, even now?

VJ: Oh, yeah. I had pretty much a resume, not really, condensed form; it was in the paper because I ran for school board [recently].

Right. You shared that with me.

VJ: I have people [saying], still, “are you really an engineer? Are you really a nuclear engineer?” Next time, I’m going to say, “No, I lied.”

(group laughter)

VJ: What do you want me to say?

(group laughter)

VJ: “Yeah, I lied. I put that in because....”

Why do you think, now, you get that?

VJ: I don’t know, people still [say], “What are you?”

MS: Well, now we're too old.

VJ: We still don't—. It'll be a long time, even if there were equal numbers of women, they still make 80 cents on the dollar. And, when we were there, it was 60 cents on the dollar.

MS: But, that was good money, you know?

VJ: we had conventions and things.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: Yeah. But you didn't know. We still go blindly, you know, maybe (inaudible).

MS: Yeah, but we did what we wanted to do; we liked what we were doing.

VJ: Nothing ever stopped us.

MS: And we didn't know any better. Ignorance was bliss.

VJ: Right.

MS: And we were all single; we didn't have any obligations except, perhaps, the scholarship I lost real quick. (laughter)

MA: Nikki.

MS: Oh, I did. Oh, my gosh.

VJ: We had scholarships, so we kept our grades up.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: We made dean's list at least, every semester.

MS: I went down the toilet right away. I had faced my (laughter) Waterloo, okay? Because, coming from a very small town into,

VJ: Oh, yeah.

MS: going from like 50 in my graduating class to 300 - the numbers were enormous to me. So, anyway, I was scrounging that first year.

Martha and Val, you came from larger, somewhat larger schools, I assume.

VJ: Well, not really. But you did.

MA: No, [at] Marcellus, my graduating class was 180.

VJ: Mine was 103, 106 or 103. See, in Binghamton, I think we were the last ones. They had January until December classes,

MS: Oh, I remember that now.

VJ: and they had September until, and I happened to be January through, you know, a regular calendar year, which meant, you had a summer in between every grade to forget everything or not. And so you had like grade 4A and 4B going on at the same time. It wasn't confusing to anybody. So I finished high school in January.

MS: Yeah, I remember that.

VJ: And I did go to Harpur College, SUNY Binghamton. I took some classes; three of us did, Anna May and Wendy, my friends, they're still friends from grade school. We just did. I don't know how you could just not do anything. So we took some things, and I transferred some credits. It was like I took an introduction to logic - that was fun. I took calculus.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: That was just a primer.

MS: That was really a leg up.

VJ: I took it. Well, [in] my high school, if you didn't have 15 kids signed up for calculus, they didn't offer it. I thought, what do you mean, you know, "We can't take calculus?"

So, you all had calculus prior to coming (inaudible).

MA: I had a pre-calculus course at my school.

VJ: Yeah, but they didn't offer any....

MS: When I started talking about languages, the (inaudible) put together this calc class, and she couldn't teach it.

VJ: Yeah.

MS: She had no clue. Well, there weren't even 15; there were less than five of us. So, we taught ourselves, which is why when we—.

MA: we were all a shoe-in for the Keller Plan.

VJ: Yeah, really.

MS: Exactly! And, all three of us,

VJ: I didn't (inaudible).

MS: You didn't?

Wait. What is this?

MS: Okay. There was a Keller Plan that we could come in and teach the other kids, it was at your own pace. They had their booklet. Keller was,

MA: Keller was a professor here,

MS: Right.

MA: and he came up with this plan for how to teach calculus. It was not a lecture. We were in a big lecture hall, and he handed out unit by unit, and you could go at your own pace, and I think there were 15 units per semester.

MS: I think so too. I've one back at home.

MA: I do too. I kept mine, which is good because my son failed calculus his first year in college.

MS: (laughter)

MA: But we got our unit, and then at the end of the unit, there were problems you had to work out, and then you had to take an exam. Before you could go on to the next unit, you had to get a 100 on the exam. And I think the exam was four problems. Now, you took the exam, and they graded it right there. There were tutors walking around in the lab, graded the exam right there. If you failed it, you took the exam again, or you went back and studied what you missed, and you took the exam again. There were ten exams for each unit. So, you could flunk up to ten different exams, you could flunk up to nine, and still, if you passed the tenth one, you got to go on to the next unit.

Which is why this was the easy A.

(group inaudible)

MA: But you learned from it. Yeah.

MS: You really did.

MA: Because you kept going over and over. So, you go on to the next unit, three or four units a week, if you were good at this and knew the material, or....

MS: and we were better students from being good teachers. So we were tutors.

MA: The following year, sophomore year, we were tutors, Nikki and I tutored the freshman

MS: Can you imagine?

MA: and as you're tutoring, you're learning the material again.

MS: Yeah.

MA: By yourself, even better.

MS: And that was the easy A because they just gave us an A for showing up.

MA: They gave us an A, and they paid us. We got paid for that, remember? We got a little paycheck.

I don't sense you remember that, Nikki. (laughter)

MA: Nikki, we got paid. We were tutors.

VJ: She doesn't remember. She just spent the money.

MS: I think we got one credit, and we got an A, so that was an easy A - teaching.

MA: Yeah, but we also got

MS: I don't remember getting paid. I don't remember having any—we were starving students.

(group inaudible)

MA: Like a work/ study.

MS: No kidding.

MA: I think it was something like a \$1.89 an hour. We recorded the hours,

MS: there you go.

MA: for years after, I would go to a Clarkson function, and guys would come up to me and say, "You know, you flunked me on a test."

MS: (laughter)

MA: "Good, well, you deserved it."

MS: Right?

MA: Exactly.

MS: That's character building.

Right.

(group laughter)

MA: I remember I used to flunk kids all the time.

So, I want to go back to your freshman year where you all met each other, and you were all in Holcroft, right?

VJ: Uh huh.

And I can't remember - that year, was that the only place for women? Or did Moore House also have women that year?

VJ: Well, these were freshman women.

Okay.

MA: Right. The upper classmen were in Moore House or the new dorms.

MS: The upperclasswomen were treated like hockey players.

VJ: Yeah.

MS: And we couldn't wait until we got up to Farrisee [a dorm] and (inaudible).

I have my own assumptions about what that means, but explain what that means - to be treated like a hockey player.

MA: (laughter)

MS: We were celebrities! By that, I mean, we had gone from (inaudible),

The upperclasswomen?

MS: we had no idea that there was any difference amongst us, to it wasn't a trailblazing medal of honor, it was—those of us that lasted that first year—. If you can remember what she's talking about that first day at Snell,

Martha?

MS: yeah. We were up in the auditorium, and we were in the front row, and if you remember this, God bless his soul, the one that dropped dead at commencement, said, "Look to the left and look to the right,"

VJ: It wasn't commencement.

MS: yeah? Oh, it wasn't commencement.

VJ: It was [Clarkson's Chancellor John W.] Graham.

MS: it was Graham. Oh, there you go! He said, "Look to the left, look to the right - those people will not be here."

VJ: Yeah.

MS: So they pulled no punches once you walked into Snell, that this was going to be a tough ride. And fasten your seat belts because it wasn't going to be easy, and it wasn't. By my sophomore year, I was damned proud to be here, I deserved a decent accommodation, and the fact that they would respect me in that particular way by giving me a decent place to live,

VJ: And how do you even notice some of this stuff? How do you notice all this stuff?

MS: well, I just said, "If they're there, I should be there."

VJ: Yeah, but I didn't notice....

MS: And the other girls. I wasn't talking about the hockey players so much, as I was about the,

VJ: Yeah.

MS: you know, if the girls lasted that long, they get to go there. I want to go there too.

So, you mean in terms of being treated well - getting a nicer place to live?

MS: Yeah.

Is that what you mean?

MS: Yeah.

Okay.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: Holcroft, looking back, was really a nice place.

MA: Sort of a tradition.

MS: Yeah, it was a beautiful house.

VJ: I remember pulling in,

MA: It was a beautiful place.

VJ: and the cars, and I had a U-Haul, my brother rented a U-Haul, and my niece rode up, and there were three of us, and it was packed. You know, you bring everything. And they told me our room was on the third floor,

(laughter)

VJ: my brother's—, and they had guys that were called, what? They had a fraternity, a service fraternity?

MA: A service fraternity.

MS: Oh, God.

VJ: They helped carry things up. And the only thing that was left for us was a plastic lamp.

(laughter)

VJ: And my brother was thrilled. I'm just....

MS: Yep.

VJ: You know, we weren't bad looking. And I was used to male attention and you can get somebody to do anything you want. So that was like, "Yeah, what's different about this?" But you didn't have to carry (inaudible)

(group laughter)

VJ: It's true you guys, and you know it. So....

MS: They were shocked that we didn't suck,

VJ: Yeah.

MS: big trains take a dirt road.

(laughter)

MS: When I got here.

VJ: C'mon. C'mon.

MS: (laughter) It's true.

VJ: Yeah, we moved in; Nikki wasn't in the room, but I saw a bunch of shoes, and I knew I'd like her.

(group laughter)

VJ: I knew I'd—, and then

MS: Well, you had already done your homework.

VJ: we had to come early.

MS: Oh, yeah. And you'd already done your homework.

VJ: And then they'd give us out, we went to something, and they'd give everybody the class of '76 t-shirt, which I still have.

MS: I still have.

VJ: But what Nik and I did was we got it wet, and every time we had to wear it to something, we just told them it—, every time it got dry,

MS: Oh.

VJ: we'd put it on the roof, because our room overlooked the little roof, we'd pour water on it, throw water,

MS: Can't get that, can't do it.

VJ: "Oh, it's black."

MS: "It's wet. We can't...."

VJ: I don't know why we did that. We did absurd (inaudible).

(group inaudible)

MA: But those were ugly shirts.

MS: They were awful.

So, let me get this straight.

Okay.

So, the two of you roomed together.

VJ: Uh huh.

And Martha was?

VJ: And Martha was next door.

MA: I was next door with Cindy and Lynn.

VJ: Lynn.

MS: She had the triple.

MA: And, yeah, we had the triple,

VJ: And, she came to our room to smoke, that's how we all started. So Martha would come over to our room to smoke,

And, Martha, do you know the last names of your roommates?

MA: Lynn, it was Lynn Hanrahan,

VJ: Lynn Hanrahan.

Okay.

MA: And Cindy Coombs.

Okay.

VJ: Cindy didn't graduate, did she?

MS: She left.

MA: She left.

VJ: But I don't know where she ended up.

MA: She married George.

VJ: Yeah.

MA: And I can't remember George's last name. Remember great big (inaudible)?

MS: George?

VJ: Yes.

MS: But, Lynn, didn't she marry somebody from here?

MA: Scott Hanrahan.

VJ: Well, Scott Hanrahan. Last I knew, they were somewhere south, like Chicago or New Mex, not Chicago, like Texas or....

MA: I thought New Orleans or Texas.

VJ: Yeah, you thought New Orleans.

MS: Yeah.

MA: Yeah.

VJ: She works for a chemical company.

She was a chemical engineering major.

VJ: Yeah.

MS: Oh, this is probably your fourth.

VJ: So, it's probably,

MS: Me, you, Val, (inaudible).

VJ: (Inaudible).

MA: She started out as a pure chemistry major, and she

VJ: Yes,

MA: switched to chemical engineering.

VJ: switched to engineering.

MA: Cindy started out as a pure chemistry major.

VJ: Right.

MA: Franny!

VJ: No, she was math.

MS: No, she was math.

MA: Right.

MS: Barb was math.

MS: They traded. The two of them traded.

Fran [Frances Tambasco Scancarello] who used to live here [in Potsdam] eventually was an engineering major.

VJ: Yeah, yeah.

MA: Mechanical. Yep.

VJ: Yeah.

MS: Even Pammy [Pam Morin Nelson '76], I think if we look way back, I think

VJ: I don't remember.

VJ: We ended up with just four engineers.

MS: Yeah.

Now, who's Soko [short for Sokolowski]?

VJ: Lynn Sokolowski.

Okay.

MS: And she'll be here.

Okay.

MS: Yep, because she's coming up today.

VJ: Maybe you can grab her. Yeah.

MS: Yep.

And so talk about your freshman year. Talk about classes, social life....

MS: Oh, I'll tell you one.

VJ: Uh oh.

MS: You remember this one.

VJ: Uh oh.

MS: Mister....began with an L, women did not, would not, could not learn computer science.
Mister...began with an L.

This was the computer science professor?

MA: I don't remember that.

VJ: You mean that timid little guy?

MS: No, he was big and he was extraordinarily,

VJ: Oh, yeah!

MS: Lam, Lampton, Lan....something.

MA: You have to pull your yearbook out.

MS: I know! Uh,

I wish I would have had....

VJ: And the one that's missing, apparently, from Sheila's class of '76.

okay.

VJ: But,

MS: Oh, and he wasn't a professor, he was like a clerk from something, and he goes, "You women should not be here,"

VJ: yeah, you heard that all (inaudible).

MS: oh, yeah.

VJ: I don't even remember him.

MS: Yeah.

MA: My first impression coming up was first of all, my parents dropping me off, and me watching them drive away, and crying, saying, “How could you leave me here?”

VJ: Really?

MA: You know?

VJ: My brother drove away, gave me 20 bucks and said,

MS: See ya.

VJ: “See ya.”

(laughter)

VJ: And I remember trying to get books with 20 dollars.

MA: My parents—, and I was nervous and scared, that first day,

VJ: It didn’t bother me.

MA: and by Thanksgiving, I didn’t even want to go home.

MA: I never wanted to leave this place. But I had a boyfriend like within three weeks.

VJ: (Inaudible).

(laughter)

MA: Like right away.

VJ: (Inaudible).

MA: Do you remember like how many dates we had the first couple,

VJ: (laughter)

MA: the first week we were here. Guys were like calling us, asking us out.

VJ: Everything.

MS: Well, it was really unusual because [Potsdam] State was known as being the girls’ school. And so then all the guys would just swim across the river to these women.

VJ: Yeah.

MS: Right? And now it was in-house.

MA: Yeah, and we were cute.

MS: We were cute!

MA: And,

MS: (laughter) And yeah. We had a lot of dates.

MA: Yeah.

MS: We had a lot of dates.

MA: But, then I remember, distinctly, sitting in chemistry,

MS: Egon [Professor Egon Matijević]. Do you remember that?

MA: yeah.

VJ: Uh huh.

MA: and sitting in his lecture hall, and I kept looking across the lecture hall at this one guy,

MS: Oh.

MA: he kept looking at me, and I kept looking at him, and the next thing you know, he was my boyfriend, and we (inaudible),

MS: For a long time.

MA: two and a half years.

MS: Okay.

MA: Two and a half years we were together. But that was like the third week of school. So I had three weeks of like dating and then, but then it was no one but Elliott.

MS: Yeah.

MA: And, his roommate, Bruce Derrick, yeah.

MS: They, they -

VJ: I remember when Bernie, this is like (inaudible),

MS: oh.

VJ: but Bernie, he was, what? He was a year ahead. He was year or two ahead of us.

MS: He was two, I think.

VJ: And he kept saying things, and calling me up, and, and I'd been going out with Steve, which was a fraternity brother of his, and I don't think that's something you do, but you know, Bernie was kind of trying to move in.

MA: We were treading on (inaudible).

VJ: And I was a freshman, so it bothered me, and I remember going downstairs to talk to Joan, our TA or RA, resident advisor,

MS: (laughter).

VJ: about, I'm getting the resident advisor to advise this freshman.

MS: (laughter)

VJ: And, I'm telling her about this upperclassman, and guess who was her boyfriend?

MS: Oh, Bernie! Do you remember?

MA: Oh, that's right.

VJ: And he was in the other room. I think either he was in a lot of trouble or they had a good laugh, but either way, you know....

MS: No, you were spitting bullets when you came out of there.

VJ: I found out later; I didn't know then.

MS: Well, neither did we, or we wouldn't have let you go down there.

MA: Yeah, really (inaudible).

VJ: So, anyway.

MA: I remember the first hourly [exam] I took, do you guys remember the first hourly we took was in physics?

VJ: Yeah.

MA: Do you remember that? We had to walk down and we had to take it downtown,

VJ: Yeah.

MA: they made us take our hourlies downtown.

Uh huh.

MS: We had to walk, on Saturdays.

VJ: They alternated on Saturday, physics and then the next Saturday was chemistry,

MS: Chemistry.

VJ: and then the next....

MS: And, then you had us singing the periodic table.

MA: Yes.

MS: Because we couldn't bring in the periodic table.

(group singing) Hydrogen and helium and lithium, beryllium, boron, carbon, hydrogen....

VJ: I can't remember.

MS: All the way down, all the way down. And, then, so the minute I get in there, I froze

VJ: (laughter)

MS: because you guys weren't there to sing it with me.

(laughter)

MA: But we remembered it. (Inaudible) sing it.

MS: Well, you have to, I don't know how they do it now, but if you were a math major, back then, you took every single thing, freshman chemistry,

MA: Everything.

MS: everything the engineers took.

VJ: They do stuff.

MS: Okay. For the first few years, anyway. So, it was three, what? Semesters of chemistry, three of physics, I think,

VJ: It was two.

MS: two.

VJ: And I double majored in physics or tried to, so I took a lot more, but

MS: Well, I thought it was three.

VJ: no.

MS: It just seemed longer.

VJ: Two, yeah.

MA: But I remember like half studying for that first

MS: You (inaudible).

VJ: Wait - (inaudible) - yeah, you're right.

MA: hourly, and I don't know how, I don't remember how (inaudible).

MS: You had me bring the physics TA over so we could -

VJ: No.

MA: I remember, I didn't do as well as you guys.

MS: Oh, it was Pammy [Pam Morin Nelson '76]. Pammy had me,

MA: (Inaudible) physics, that first hourly, and I was like, "Oh, shit."

VJ: I know,

MA: (Inaudible) study here (inaudible).

VJ: we had people in our class, but not these guys, who would absolutely not speak to you because you got a better grade on the physics hourly. Barb didn't.

MS: Well, it started (inaudible), oh yeah. She never spoke to me at all. Yeah.

VJ: And, it was like,

MS: Yeah, she was (inaudible).

VJ: you know, I didn't get grades to beat anybody. You got grades. Period.

MA: It was a personal challenge to try and

VJ: Yeah.

MS: Right.

MA: get, I always felt like if I studied just a little harder or spend more time on the homework, I can get a better grade. And after a while, a B just wasn't acceptable to me.

VJ: Yeah.

MA: I had to have an A. If I knew I could get an A by studying harder, I would do it. And so that's what we did; we studied hard and we played hard.

MS: Played hard, yeah.

MA: That's, it was (inaudible).

MS: Eighteen was the drinking age.

VJ: Yeah.

MS: And it was nothing to study 'til twelve midnight, and go downtown 'til two.

MA: Oh, yeah. (laughter) I actually went downtown when Nikki wanted, so we got there in time for last call.

MS: Last call. (laughter)

MA: Nik took forever to get ready.

MS: (laughter)

VJ: I told you about the Nik factor?

Well, I want to hear about the Nik factor.

VJ: I had an equation, you put it (inaudible).

(Inaudible).

VJ: I don't remember the equation, but it was estimated time of arrival and plus Nik,

MS: (Inaudible). (laughter)

VJ: plus NF, which stood for the Nik factor, and....

(laughter)

MS: I wish I had pictures of this stuff. And, then we drew a picture (inaudible).

VJ: It was the estimated time of departure, whatever it was,

MS: This is an estimated time.

VJ: it was delayed by NF.

Right.

MS: (laughter) So that first week, they gave us those little games and things, and we had to go get tissues and all that. What do you call that stuff?

MA: Like a scavenger hunt?

MS: Yeah, we had a scavenger hunt.

VJ: Oh, yeah.

MS: Same time as we got the t-shirts. And, one of the other things we had to do, do you remember this, we had to learn the,

VJ: (Inaudible).

MS: the root song or something.

VJ: Oh.

MA: Oh.

MS: So, that was (inaudible).

VJ: Nik and I learned the last word.

MS: The last word of every (inaudible), to chime in. Going strong, and so they thought that we (inaudible).

(laughter)

MA: Was that the O'Tannenbaum?

VJ: Yeah. (Inaudible).

(group inaudible)

VJ: But we did; we learned the last word; it was great.

MS: There were tricks to be had, and we were unintimidated. I would say,

VJ: We really weren't.

MS: And if there was a personal challenge, that was a good thing. I still have nightmares, (laughter) there was some tests that went in that I hadn't opened the book until then.

VJ: Never for, Martha and I are a little more diligent.

MA: Yeah.

MS: Yeah. Yeah.

VJ: But,

MS: But see this one got a boyfriend in three weeks.

That's Martha.

MS: That's Martha.

Nikki pointing at Martha.

(laughter)

MS: Vanna White.

Yeah.

MS: And you didn't take long.

No.

VJ: Yeah, but you know, I dated one guy all through high school, and into freshman year.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: And then he went to SU [Syracuse University], and I just said, he's taking some kind of class called physics for non-science majors.

MS: (laughter) That would have been your first clue.

VJ: Yeah, and I said, we just went this way. And it wasn't anything he did or anything he said, but it was like....

MA: You just saw the writing on the wall

VJ: Yeah.

MA: that you just weren't going to be on the same track anymore.

VJ: Yeah.

MS: And I was stuck with the old boyfriend from home.

MA: Right.

MS: And, see, while you're crying, I'm like, "Bye Mom, bye Dad,"

VJ: Then, I dated,

MS: because I'm only 30 minutes away [from Clarkson].

VJ: yeah.

MA: Well, Ruth and Crash had any excuse to come over and visit you every (inaudible).

Your [Nikki's] parents?

MS: Yeah.

Okay. Yeah.

MA: I mean, they might be out of toothpaste, we're here (inaudible) toothpaste.

MS: (laughter) And, Dad, of course, had the bubble top police car,

VJ: Cruiser.

MS: (laughter) And he had this territory, so it was very easy for him

MA: Yeah.

MS: to swerve in.

So, this is why you all knew Crash quite well?

MS: Yeah.

MA: Very well.

MS: And, (inaudible).

VJ: You got to cut this out, or I'm telling you right now,

MS: About the flushing of the toilets?

VJ: Yeah. We don't have to....

MS: Well, I'm sure they've heard of marijuana.

VJ: okay. It was the '70s.

MS: When Crash would come barreling in to visit his first born, the flush!

VJ: It was unbelievable.

MS: No, it went from here straight to (inaudible) center. Ch-choo, ch-choo, ch-choo. (laughter)

MA: The car was right in front of the building.

MS: I just hated,

VJ: It was really funny.

MA: It's a raid! (laughter)

MS: Who called this in? The hockey players are throwing their stuff down.

MA: It's just Crash.

MS: Yeah, it's only Crash.

So he was famous on campus?

MS: Famous.

(laughter)

MS: Famous, yeah.

Or, something, right?

MS: Yeah. It was, will you please, and how many,

VJ: Yeah.

MS: they got calls for days, I got calls, “When your father comes and visits the next time, will you please....”

VJ: It was funny.

(laughter)

MS: “please, please notify the hall.”

(laughter)

MS: Yeah, it was pretty funny.

MA: Uh huh.

So what was it like living in Holcroft?

MA: I think it was sort of like a sorority kind of feel.

MS: Yeah, because

VJ: Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

MS: none of us ended up in a sorority.

VJ: They wouldn’t let Clarkson women join sororities when,

MS: Then.

VJ: our freshman year, maybe,

MS: But Pam and Soko did later,

VJ: yeah, I know, that’s later.

MS: yeah.

VJ: And there weren’t any sororities at Clarkson,

MS: Yeah.

VJ: but I remember us talking about it then, and we said, “You can just put Greek letters up in Holcroft.”

MS: Yeah.

VJ: You know? And we knew everything about everybody.

MS: We were (inaudible).

VJ: We just didn’t have any kind of rituals or anything to go through. But,

MS: (Inaudible) gets spiked.

VJ: who needs them?

MA: Well, do you remember the bar?

MS: Oh, yeah.

VJ: Oh, yeah. We had a bar. It was called the Troll House, by the way. We won’t go there, but we had, you know,

MS: (laughter)

MA: I mean, really, it was like a bar.

VJ: And they didn’t serve dinner on Sundays, so we used to put Frannie [Tambasco] whose Mom would cook,

MA: Frannie had a huge

MS: Oh!

MA: suitcase.

MS: Suitcase!

MA: Full of (inaudible) under her bed.

VJ: Meatballs, and we couldn’t wait for Sunday’s dinner because it was Frannie’s Mom’s; it was fantastic.

MS: Between Crash coming in (laughter) and visiting, and Frannie’s Mom’s suitcases.

(laughter)

MS: And the Troll House Bar, we had everything that life had to offer back then. And add to the Troll House Bar was a magnet to all the boys.

MA: Yeah, guys would come up, too.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: Yeah.

MS: And then we'd have some play offs and

MA: Yeah.

MS: oh! Remember poor Billy, (laughter)

VJ: Yeah.

MS: they, they put me up against Billy,

VJ: (Inaudible) drinking contest.

MS: and we had a drinking contest, and they filled his and gave me, (laughter)

VJ: Yeah.

MS: not that I couldn't hold my own, but they took off,

MA: (Inaudible) Flanders? Billy Flanders.

VJ: Yeah, Billy Flanders.

MA: Right, okay.

MS: Because, he was from around here too. And they just, poor baby, they set him up.

VJ: I know.

(laughter)

MS: We had a lot of fun.

MA: Yeah. We did.

MS: We had a lot of fun.

MA: We were all close,

VJ: Yeah, the whole class.

MA: maybe there was a little competition between the third floor and the second floor.

MS: Well, yeah, I would have just said, I was much closer with the (inaudible) on the third floor.

VJ: And, I couldn't party (inaudible) on the second floor.

MS: No.

MA: Well, Nancy [Colarossi] and, and Soko [Lynn Sokolowski] were (inaudible).

MS: Yeah, they, they quickly (inaudible).

VJ: Yeah, Nancy and Soko, but who else?

MA: Rona [Riche, later Rona Riche Anderson] was on the?

VJ: No, she was on the third floor.

MS: She was on the, yeah.

MA: Rona was?

MS: Yeah. Yep. Who was?

MA: Oh, she was downstairs.

VJ: Because you know what? Half the class finished, and half the class didn't.

Uh huh.

VJ: And I'll bet you it was the second floor.

MS: Yep.

So it was 20 of you there in Holcroft that first year.

MS: Yep. In fact, there's a picture hanging.

VJ: In fact, there were 21 but one girl never came out of her room that beginning weekend,

MS: (Inaudible). (laughter)

VJ: and I never saw her (inaudible),

MS: You were trying to remember last night.

VJ: and then she disappeared. Yeah. I don't know her name or what she looked like. I couldn't tell you.

MA: Yes, there were 20 of us.

And, then after freshman year, where did you all go? Did you stay roommates?

VJ: Pretty much, Martha - you and I were roommates at Moore House.

MA: Yeah.

VJ: And, then

MA: Nikki and Val.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: Martha was a suitemate on the other half of the suite, with Lynn.

MA: With Lynn.

(group inaudible)

MS: We had Pam [Pam Morin Nelson '76] and Nancy next to us.

VJ: Right.

MS: So,

MA: Right.

VJ: Right.

MS: if you did a sociological deal, we were always in the same nucleus. You know,

VJ: Yeah.

MS: whether we roomed together, shared a bathroom, or were across from (inaudible).

VJ: And, then I moved off campus but I finished one semester [early].

MS: You really screwed things up.

VJ: I know, I shouldn't have done it. I graduated, I finished early because I overloaded all the time, and I was starting grad school. And somebody talked me into it; I really shouldn't have, I'm sorry, you guys, I just never should have.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: Because when I moved off campus,

MS: Because we had fun.

VJ: and it was okay. But I don't know.

MA: Well, where were you junior year?

VJ: I had work to do and to TA and (inaudible).

MA: Were you in Farrisee?

MS: Yep.

MA: Junior year, we were in Donahue.

MS: Yeah.

MA: You and I were in Donohue because,

Yes.

MA: and you started rooming with Nikki, or with Nancy,

MS: Yeah.

MA: and Val and I roomed.

VJ: Yes.

So, Val and Martha, you were in a Donohue, and Nikki - where were you?

MS: Farrisee.

And that was your third year?

MS: Yeah.

Your third year. And senior year? Were you all in Farrisee?

VJ: No, I moved off campus.

Right.

MS: She moved off campus. I stayed in Farrisee.

MA: Yeah, and I didn't have a roommate then because Val moved off.

VJ: Yeah. Why did you let me do it?

MS: I know.

MA: I tried to talk you into staying because they just stuck me with (inaudible). Remember my roommate? Was she tiny?

MS: She was the tiny one?

MA: Her name was Nancy, I think. But she was a year younger than us. And I didn't have much to do with her.

MS: Yeah. You just had your coffee and came over (inaudible).

MA: I know, it was like I lived in your room.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: You shouldn't have let me do that.

VJ: (inaudible) blame you.

Val, at some point, I want to come back to your decision to go to grad school here, etc. We'll come back to that.

VJ: Okay. That was easy anyway.

So classes here. You were talking about that a little, with calculus freshman year, and then when you did (inaudible)

(Inaudible).

tutors, your second year, but how would you describe your experience with classes here? And, also with men and women in the classes? You were obviously an extreme minority. I don't know how much of a difference that made, if it made a difference?

VJ: Yeah, I think, the guys were great,

MS: Yeah.

VJ: and they never, I think they actually graduated, they (inaudible) treated women differently. I don't know, or if they didn't, we put them in their place. But, you know, we were some of the smartest kids in the class.

MS: Right. Yeah.

VJ: They asked us for help with their homework.

MS: (Inaudible).

VJ: We weren't asking them.

MS: I'll tell you, the same Billy Flanders, because it was affirmative action—I hate to interrupt again—this was important because Billy taught me a very, very important lesson. Because we all had the same grade point average, and we were all lining up for the same list, and all conducting the same interviews, and all the women got the jobs that year. And the boys didn't.

VJ: I got a job at every interview I came out of.

You mean when you were graduating?

MS: Right. And I went to Billy, and so to answer your question, start backwards moving, or the end going toward the beginning, but (laughter) Billy said, “No, don't feel bad.” I said, “I can't take this job because you took the same stuff I did; you got the same points; we were hand in hand.” Just like you said, they came to us for help; we went to them for help; we were a very cohesive group. We were (inaudible),

VJ: (Inaudible) was great, it really was.

MS: and I said, “This is not fair.” And he said, “Don't worry about being fair. Don't,” he said, “If the shoe was reversed, I would take that job. Okay, so get out and go.”

MA: (Inaudible).

MS: And, so they were very nice people. They,

VJ: If there were any—, if there was anything different, I didn't notice it.

MS: No.

MA: Yeah.

VJ: And, (inaudible).

MS: They were very supportive. They were like brothers. Yeah, they didn't (inaudible).

MA: They treated us well, and I think, I mean, face it, engineers have a reputation of being nerds.

MS: Nerds.

MA: There were an awful lot of nerds.

MS: Too.

VJ: We were nerds but we didn't care.

MA: I think some of those guys were a little intimidated by us.

VJ: Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

MA: Or, were just really good friends with us.

So, may I ask why, why intimidated? Because?

MA: Because we were confident. We (inaudible).

VJ: We were strong women and men are always intimidated by strong women.

MA: And yeah.

VJ: And they still are. They're always going to be, I don't care. But,

MS: But we didn't wear it on our coats.

VJ: No, we didn't wear it on our sleeves. We weren't out burning bras and,

MS: No.

VJ: you know, we just did our thing.

MS: And, that's....

VJ: we did what we wanted to do, what we were good at, what we were interested in.

MS: Yeah.

MA: And we had to try, maybe we tried harder to prove ourselves. Because there were,

MS: Well, that went on into the business

MA: yeah.

MS: as well.

VJ: I don't think we did, I think we just did that for something that we had to do. If you knew you could get an A, you studied hard. That's just something—, you know, even when I was in grade school, I remember doing math homework when we didn't have any. Just because I liked that stuff.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: So, you just did it, you know, and you got A's because A's came naturally.

MA: (Inaudible).

VJ: And, if I came home with a B, my mother.....

MS: A's felt good.

VJ: you know, yeah.

MS: But, but it wasn't like the,

MA: But, we earned them here (inaudible).

VJ: Yeah, we did.

MS: Yeah.

MA: I mean, we,

MS: Yeah, yeah.

MA: I remember (inaudible).

MS: I think the guys respected that, too.

MA: Yeah, I think they did.

VJ: I mean, we didn't get straight A's, we're not going to try and tell you (inaudible),

MS: No, no, oh, no.

VJ: went out and partied as much as we did. But we did pretty well.

MS: We checked out pretty easily. (laughter)

VJ: That's true.

(laughter)

VJ: But, you know, we did pretty well. And, uh,

MS: I don't think, Laura, we were out to prove anything.

VJ: Yeah.

MS: We did what we did, and either the guys, the friends we chose, that chose us as friends,

VJ: Was, yeah.

MS: it was mutual.

VJ: It was kind of a lead, follow, or get out of my way.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: That, you know, we just didn't care.

MS: Yeah. We didn't hang too much (inaudible).

VJ: We'll mow you over or you can walk in and hang with us, but you know,

MS: Yeah.

VJ: you've got to do something.

MA: And I don't think any of us came here because we were trying to prove something.

MS: Oh, no. That was, no.

VJ: (Inaudible).

MA: And it was because we, we liked the type of (inaudible).

VJ: Like I told you, I knew nothing about (inaudible). Absolutely nothing.

MA: We didn't want to teach, we wanted to be. We

MS: Yeah.

MA: wanted to be engineers. We didn't want

VJ: Yeah.

MA: teach.

VJ: I was kind of shocked when

MS: We lived the dream.

VJ: we were like the, I was the only double E [electrical engineering major], and forever. You know,

The only female double E.

VJ: yeah.

Yeah.

VJ: But then again, I didn't look around and say, "Oh, there aren't any other women." You know, I didn't even,

MS: Look at me! (laughter)

VJ: yeah, I just didn't. I just took the class.

Yeah.

VJ: But whatever class it was.

MA: You know, I'm in civil and

VJ: Yeah.

MA: deal with mixing concrete, and playing out in the dirt, and taking soil samples - it was only ever just me and the guys.

VJ: Right.

MA: You know? You just got used to that

VJ: Yeah.

MA: sort of environment, and it's still that way.

MS: Yeah.

MA: And, you know, I still, on a daily basis, meet with contractors and feel very comfortable, you know, and

MS: I think it would be great.

MA: I have a lady inspector

MS: Yeah.

MA: that goes around and inspecting, but (inaudible).

VJ: And that's what they think, they won't say, if a guy was doing that, they'd say, "Oh, he's the project engineer," or something, but they'll call her an inspector. They'll put any other label until they learn that she's just as qualified, if not more,

MA: Yeah, they're surprised, "Oh, you're a PE [licensed as a professional engineer]?"

VJ: yeah.

MA: "Yes, I am, in three states." (laughter)

(laughter)

MS: (laughter)

VJ: And, then I used to have to walk, wear hardhats, and be a project manager

MA: Yeah.

VJ: in Texas. And they pull things that, the millwrights send you into town for,

MS: (laughter)

VJ: ten nails, you know, and then they'd, "Oh, we need—." They'd send you back, then you'd catch on.

MS: Or, "You forgot the insulation."

VJ: Yeah.

MS: (laughter)

VJ: Yeah, something really stupid. And, then they'd send you, or they'd say crude, this is Texas, and the oil, well, not oil fields but close,

Uh huh.

VJ: They'd say pretty crude things, and one time when one guy,

MS: Oh!

VJ: I had about had it, and one guy said,

MS: (laughter)

VJ: "So, when are we going to fill in the blank," and I looked at him, (laughter) and I said, "You couldn't keep me awake."

MS: (laughter)

VJ: And that was the end of that.

(group laughter)

VJ: I was the project engineer, I was managing the job, that's it.

(laughter) He got the point.

MS: Well, what you're hearing, and I'm being reminded of, is we all ended up in construction.

Uh huh.

MS: Even if you were a pure mathematician [as I was], I ended up going to Carrier Air Conditioning, ended up being a director of international sales. But, on my way, I took a job with a contractor, which taught me the ten nail rule. (laughter) And, also a consulting engineer.

VJ: (Inaudible), you know, stuff.

MS: Yeah, but we were all the minority. We all felt very comfortable. We all were accepted. And because all you had to do was prove that you knew what you knew. Either you learned or you knew it already. You proved your worth by what you did, not by what you said. And, like anybody else, I don't know what the big difference is. I didn't know what it was then, I don't know what it is....

VJ: I think any young engineer, they sent for pen nails, you know, they did that too.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: I think they thought it was funnier because I was a woman, but....

A kind of hazing in a sense?

MS: Yeah, yeah.

VJ: But they do that to any, like I said,

MS: Yeah, any rookie.

Yeah.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: Yeah.

MA: Initiation (laughter) of the rookie.

VJ: Yeah.

I want to go to the founding of SWE, the founding of the Society of Women Engineers.

VJ: We were there. It was in the

MA: It's all there.

VJ: (inaudible). It was what's her name. I can't think of her name. She was a year ahead of us. Anyway, we were,

MS: (Inaudible).

VJ: (inaudible) that was part of their whole planning, the girl - what's her name?

MS: Oh, you sucked us in.

VJ: She was the first president.

Kathryn Stockslader [later Hosford] was the first president. Class of '74.

VJ: she spearheaded it, really. And we were in Moore House and we met in the meeting room

MS: Yeah.

VJ: or whatever it was,

VJ: and we met. We did some talking and stuff, and then we had all the women,

MS: (Inaudible). (laughter)

VJ: we had all the women meet in the lounge at Moore House.

MS: Yeah. It was in the living room area.

VJ: And that's when we formed it and we decided what to name it,

MS: Yeah.

VJ: and I don't know, Kathryn Stockslader knew more about Jean Smith Newell¹⁴,

MS: Yeah.

VJ: who, I guess, was the first the first engineer,

MS: Oh, speaking of which, (inaudible),

VJ: you know, that graduated from Clarkson, and I don't know what kind of an engineer she was. But it was Dr. Green, I'll go back, this is off the track, and then we formed it and then, Kathryn was president the first year, and the second year, you guys elected me president. And we won more awards that year.

MS: Don't ask me how.

VJ: I know how.

MS: (laughter)

VJ: I know how. We did it, first of all, we had....

MS: For the girl who never looked at a brochure (inaudible),

VJ: Yeah.

MS: she was (inaudible).

VJ: (inaudible).

MS: (laughter)

VJ: She did.

¹⁴ Clarkson's SWE chapter was named after her. Jean Smith Newell (1918-1992), a 1939 graduate of the Potsdam Normal School (now SUNY Potsdam), was a director at the Newell Manufacturing Company in Ogdensburg, NY and the first female trustee at Clarkson.

MS: I still do.

VJ: You know,

MA: (Inaudible). (laughter)

VJ: (laughter) yeah.

MS: It's less trouble. (laughter)

VJ: These guys always,

MS: (laughter)

VJ: it was great.

MA: But Val would never ask us to do something, she would tell us to do something, and we just did it.

MS: (Inaudible).

That's why I'm getting this interview with all three of you, (inaudible).

(group inaudible)

VJ: And I was vice president of something, I was president of most things, I just,

MS: No, you....

VJ: I don't have time to ask people. Just get it done, and even when I worked, it was like....

MS: well, one of the lessons you had given to me

VJ: (Inaudible).

MS: and you get it done. No, no, no. She [Val] taught me diplomacy.

VJ: Yeah, I probably,

MS: Yeah.

VJ: I really am not that much of, you know,

MS: The ambassador, (inaudible).

VJ: am I, c'mon?

MA: No.

MS: You didn't,

MA: You never told (inaudible)

MS: We were always together.

MA: You know, we cooperated.

VJ: You can do this, and this, and this.

MS: Uh huh. (laughter)

VJ: We won. We were new. We were two years old, so we won best new student section. We won best student section, period. And, then (inaudible).¹⁵

MS: I think there were probably two by then.

VJ: And something else, and I don't remember what it was.

MS: We couldn't have had some huge competition, but we kept, every time we had a meeting,

VJ: (Inaudible).

MS: We were winning something.

VJ: Oh, I know. And we did stuff. We had the student convention up here,

MS: Uh huh.

VJ: student section convention, and remember we went to see Dean [Edward] Misiaszek [Associate Dean of Engineering]. Were you helping me? Somebody was. And,

MS: I did something (inaudible).

MS: What year was that?

VJ: Sophomore year. It was the end of soph—, it was the summer,

¹⁵ Jerabeck told me later that she still remembers part of the speech that Chancellor Graham made at a dinner in honor of the Clarkson SWE chapter receiving its charter. She wrote to me: "He said, 'you have to work yourselves out of existence. There is no such thing as a woman engineer, so you need to work yourselves out of existence to the point where being a woman and being an engineer are not mutually exclusive.' Of course, I can't remember the speech verbatim, but I'll never forget this part."

MS: Okay.

'75, right? Because it was founded in '74,

VJ: Yeah, it was '75. Right.

Oh, no - it was founded October 1, 1973.

VJ: Right.

So, it would be '74, right?

VJ: Right.

Would be the end of your sophomore year?

VJ: Yeah.

1972-73 was your freshman year?

VJ: Because we didn't do it in the summer because there were no classes. It was wintertime,

MS: Yeah.

VJ: I remember showing up and it was winter.

MS: But then you sent me to Pittsburgh.

VJ: Yeah.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: For what? I don't remember.

MS: I was the first SWE representative to a convention.

VJ: The one I went to was in Denver.

Okay.

MS: I loved Pittsburgh.

VJ: The second year we were in existence, and,

MS: (Inaudible).

VJ: (inaudible), and because of that, Alcoa gave us scholarships. I remember one of you guys, standing there when Alcoa presented it to Dean Misiaszek, and looking down, and I had never seen a check but it was 5,000 dollars, and that was big.

MS: Back then.

VJ: I mean, Clarkson cost \$2,800 a year, and that was, you know,

MS: Huge.

VJ: and, (inaudible),

MS: Our annual salaries were 13,000.

VJ: I remember looking down. I remember mouthing the words,

MS: Yeah.

Five thousand dollars, right?

VJ: Yeah. It was a big deal.

Why did you start SWE, and to all of you, what did SWE give you or not give you? I mean, obviously, there were tangible things like Alcoa giving Clarkson this money.

MS: It was something to add on the resume, and,

VJ: It wasn't for that. I don't know.

MS: I don't know. It was, I guess,

VJ: I should say more.

MS: Well, I know, there was,

VJ: We should have (inaudible).

MS: there were some leadership skills involved.

VJ: Uh huh.

MS: And it sort of separated the women from the boys, and it was a club we could, because we were all club-oriented,

VJ: Yeah, there were no sororities, don't forget.

MS: right.

VJ: at the time.

MS: So, you know,

VJ: and men had all these—, there was that service fraternity women couldn't join,

MS: yeah, so, it didn't fulfill any of my dreams by a long shot. Because I never dreamt that.¹⁶

MA: It was probably just because, looking forward,

MS: Yeah.

MA: we knew that this would probably look good on a resume.

Uh huh.

MS: Absolutely.

VJ: Kathryn Stockslader [Hosford '74] had a lot to say about (inaudible), and we have to talk to her. I haven't seen her in years. But she had probably more to do with talking us into it,

MS: Yeah.

VJ: yeah, because I don't think it was my idea. I didn't wake up one morning.

MS: Somebody threw you the ball,

VJ: Yeah.

MA: And you got us all on board with it.

VJ: We went together.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: Pretty soon, we had very well-attended meetings, wherever we had them. I used to have weekly meetings, and I, sometimes, wouldn't have anything to go over because we covered it last week.

¹⁶ Staples later explained that she was disinterested in SWE and had not been looking for another thing to do, but Jerabeck sold her on the idea. During her sophomore year, she took her first plane flight to represent Clarkson at a SWE conference in Pittsburgh. Though she was initially very scared to do this, it turned out to be a great experience. Staples met women from all over the country and returned to Clarkson and gave a report on what she learned. She now sees that conference as "my introduction to the real world."

Uh huh.

VJ: I remember everybody that was up on the hill. It wasn't Moore House,

MS: When we first started, it was.

VJ: But I remember meeting one time, and I had absolutely nothing to say.

(laughter)

VJ: And I felt bad because this lounge, packed, and I think that's when we decided to meet once a month.

MS: A month, yeah. (laughter)

VJ: I said, "Well, does anybody have anything to say?" I showed them, I think I had just come back from the convention, so I showed them all the freebies I got. And,

MS: Oh, you made me write a report and everything.

VJ: Well, that's what we did. That's how we won a lot of stuff.

MA: And you were good at writing too.

VJ: yeah.

MS: I loved to write.

VJ: And we, I could do it, too, and we'd turn the slightest little thing that we did into,

MS: Major.

You were good at PR.

VJ: Oh, yeah.

MS: Right. And,

VJ: And Dean Misiaszek's secretary, Mrs. Richards, was fantastic.

MA: Uh huh.

VJ: Because we had typewriters.

MA: Right.

MS: Right.

VJ: We didn't have computers. And, she would type the whole thing, and we made our hospitality committee sound like....

MS: (laughter)

VJ: you know?

MS: The White House.

VJ: It was great. That was our report. And that's how I did things anyway. The little over the top, but that's how I've always done them all my life - you, too.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: Then we sent it in. And, we won, I remember. We sent her a dozen roses after we sent it in just because she worked

MS: Tediously.

MA: Yeah, she did.

Yeah.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: Because she had to type it all.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: Every last thing.

MS: Yeah, but you look back at those days and they're incredible.

VJ: I know, I remember walking into Mr. [Donald T.] Mills' office, and I would stick my head, he was the [director of] financial aid, Millsy, and I'd stick my head in his door, actually, and he'd say, "How much do you need?"

MS: (laughter)

VJ: And I'd say, "Oh, tuition went up." "Okay." But I worked. My mother worked for W.T. Grants, and even though I had a Regents scholarship and all that stuff, my mother kept bugging me to fill out this scholarship application for Grants, and I was in no hurry because I already had

one, right? Finally, I did, and I was late with every one of those, with just the W.T. Grant thing. And they would let me have a little bit of grace period, and then,

MS: (laughter) Two years.

VJ: no.

MS: Well, by the time you graduated.

VJ: So, I finally did apply, and they gave me a thousand dollars a year

MS: Wow.

MA: Well, Clarkson was 8,000, I remember, a year, including everything.

MS: What?

MA: Room, board, tuition,

VJ: Was it? I don't remember.

MA: it was right around 8,000 a year.

VJ: I have no idea how much it was.

MS: (Inaudible).

MA: Because, you weren't paying for it.

MS: Well, I did half.

VJ: And I actually gave money back to Clarkson. I remember, I went in, because when you read the (inaudible), you wouldn't accept other scholarships beyond, so I remember going back into Mills, Millsy's office and saying, "You can have this much back because—," so he kind of owed it when tuition went up; that's the way I figured it.

MS: (Inaudible).

MA: Well, you were looking around 50[,000] at Northwestern [for Nikki's daughter].

I am conscious that I now wish we had many more hours; we have about half an hour.

VJ: (laughter)

MA: Is that it?

I know, see, you guys, you're good.

MS: I told you.

So, I have one more question about Clarkson, but then I want to turn to your life post-Clarkson too. How do you evaluate your time at Clarkson differently post-Clarkson? The joys, the challenges.

VJ: It was a lot carefree.

You had two kids go to Clarkson,

VJ: Oh, yeah.

and that must affect how you evaluate it, too, but....

VJ: No, I don't, they have their own--But discounting them, it was so carefree. We all would meet in the lounge and watch, you didn't always, but I was nerdy enough that we met to watch Star Trek.

MS: All the time. We had (inaudible) watching it.

VJ: Yeah.

MS: We had the boys next door watching Star Trek and the soaps.

VJ: I don't remember.

MS: remember? Because you couldn't copy them

VJ: But that was our only distraction,

MS: Yeah.

VJ: but you know, it was Star Wars every Sunday or whatever.

MS: Yeah.

MA: We didn't have,

VJ: Cell phones, we didn't have....

MA: we didn't have computers, we didn't have cell phones,

MS: We didn't have cable. We never looked the door. Never.

MA: Yeah.

MS: We didn't, yeah. There were no cell phones. All we did was natural.

VJ: We had to make friends with, you know, bloom where you're planted kind of thing.

MA: Yeah, I look back on this time as a very nostalgic time.

VJ: Yeah.

MS: Yeah.

MA: And, also, our relationship, I mean, going from high school and then, you had this four year stretch where you're here. [In] these four years, we really grew up.

MS: Uh huh.

MA: We sent from high school kids to,

MS: Yeah.

MA: income-earning adults. We were on our own, we were buying cars, we were paying our bills, and (inaudible).

MS: (Inaudible).

VJ: And we all kept in touch.

MS: Yeah.

MA: We kept in touch, but we know everything about each other.

MS: Everything.

MA: We,

MS: And we can go ten years, sometimes,

MA: Right, and not see each other. Like I hadn't seen her for more than ten years, and it's like I just saw her yesterday.

VJ: Yeah.

MA: Saw her yesterday. We just picked up where we left off because we had that special relationship. We were bonded so closely

MS: Yeah.

MA: for our four years.

MS: Because it probably comes full circle back to that ten [women] that graduated, and we, for some reason, some magic, we were all connected, we all stayed together, we all had a common denominator, and we had so many things,

MA: So many things we knew about each other.

MA: Yeah.

MS and MA: (laughter) (Inaudible).

MS: We went from children to

MA: Adults.

MS: earning adults.

MA: Responsible adults and real jobs.

MS: And, women, I mean,

VJ: Yeah.

MA: Right.

VJ: We didn't think about moving back in with our parents. We were excited to get out there.

MS: Yeah. Our sexual exploits were here.

MA: Right.

MS: During the '70s. I mean, we learned about life and love here.

MA: Well, we all went to the birth control place [Planned Parenthood] together for the first time.

VJ: You know, there was a lot of stuff....

MS: Yeah.

VJ: Oh, that was hysterical.

MS: Oh.

VJ: I don't know if you want to....

It was in Potsdam?

MS: Oh, yeah.

VJ: we weren't.....

If you're comfortable talking about that.

VJ: Well, we may edit that out, but I'll tell you.¹⁷

MS: All of us gained 20 pounds.

VJ: They give you a brown lunch bag,

MS: A paper bag. (laughter)

VJ: and you know, we looked inside it, and it was a treat bag but it was full of condoms and stuff, and

MS: (laughter)

MA: (laughter)

VJ: and Nik and I laughed, and probably Martha came over, and we were like, laughing at these red, black, yellow, and Nik, and we blew them up, we filled them up with water,

MS: (laughter)

VJ: and our room overlooked the front,

MS: (Inaudible).

VJ: and we were bombing people out the window. But, the next day, we forgot, they were dried up on the sidewalk.

MS: (laughter)

VJ: And I got a birthday card every year from somebody who didn't sign it, with a condom inside.

MS: (laughter)

VJ: I don't know who.

¹⁷ All three interview subjects decided that they wanted to leave this section in the transcript.

MA: Somebody who knew your birthday.

VJ: Obviously. It's got be somebody who knows my birthday. But it wasn't you, and it wasn't you.

MA: No, not me.

MS: I bombardiered all my,

VJ: I have not a clue.

MS: you have to remember,

VJ: but only while I was here, so it had to be a dean, some administrator, something, but it was funnier than heck.

MS: You had to remember though that the potency of those things [birth control pills at the time],

VJ: Yeah.

MS: because we were trailblazers on some medical things too,

MA: Right.

MS: but all three of us, 20 pounds, oh! they were awful. And, then I got German measles.

Oh, no.

MS: Yeah.

MA: The only thing I got really bad here was hives.

MS: (laughter)

MA: Do you remember when I got hives?

VJ: Yes. Before every test.

MA: No. I only got it the one time when Elliot and I were working because he was a photographer.

MS: You were always working. (laughter)

MA: And he was developing

VJ: Right, yeah.

MA: his own pictures in the darkroom, and I was helping him.

VJ: You made your own down parka, I remember.

MA: I did. I made my own down-filled parka.

VJ: Yeah.

MA: But, anyway, I had the chemicals on my hands, and I

MS: Oh!

MA: accidentally rubbed my eye,

MS: Ouch.

MA: my eye swelled and I got hives from head to foot. That was freshman year. I was in such agony.

VJ: I thought you got them every time before a test.

MA: No, no.

MS: I hope you get a better clinic here, too.

VJ: Then, I got tonsillitis every other month, freshman year.

MS: You really did.

VJ: I did.

MS: You had some bronchial issues.

MA: Well, we all smoked.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: yeah,

MS: We used to smoke a lot.

MA: We had the “Potsdam Plague” every year, we called it. Remember that?

VJ: I know.

MA: We went to the infirmary and got the reds. Those were the only things they handed out.

MS: I never used them. (laughter)

MS: I never went to the infirmary back here.

MA: Really?

VJ: He'd look down your throat with a flashlight, with a cigar in his mouth.

MS: (laughter).

MA: Yeah.

VJ: But I remember he told me I had tonsillitis, and I should see an ear, nose, and throat guy.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: So, I told somebody, and we went when I got home, over the break or whatever, and he said, "Okay. Open." He said, "Oh,"

MS: (laughter)

VJ: this is the ear, nose, and throat guy. So, it was summertime,

MS: Aren't the doctors supposed to remain calm? Ahh!

VJ: and you can't eat anything, and

MS: Yeah.

VJ: They all say how you can eat ice cream because I couldn't swallow a thing. I was 19 first of all,

MS: Yeah.

VJ: older but nothing.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: It was awful for about a week.

MS: Hmm.

VJ: And you can't leave town. He said. "Don't leave town,"

Oh my.

MS: (laughter)

VJ: I was in Binghamton, but "don't leave town."

MS: Oh, come on!

VJ: Because if you hemorrhage you can....

MS: (gasp) Really?

VJ: you have to be in town.

MS: The worst thing that happened was that when I lost my teeth in the hockey game, and

VJ: Yeah, that was bad.

MS: they started putting the fake ones in,

VJ: they broke mine off trying.

MS: Oh, that's right. But they gave me the truth serum, and I swear to God, they were betting on the hockey games because I woke up blabbering about the hockey team.

MA: Oh, really.

MS: Blah, blah, blah (imitating someone who has been medicated)

MS and at least one other person: Our relationship with the hockey team. (laughter)

If you wish to discuss that, feel free.

VJ: Well, where do you want to go? What do you want to get kind of?

Well, I'm just trying....

MS: Inspirational wise.

Let's come back to the hockey team. What I do want to hear from each of you about, I want to hear about so many things. But I want to hear about your first jobs after graduation, and also what your paths have been. I realize that we don't have time for as much as, I'm sure, you'd like to say. The other thing is from what I've read, some of you were stay-at-home parents for a while. So I'm not only interested in your professional

trajectory. I'm also interested in whatever you want to share about your personal one as well.

VJ: [I have] ten minutes. And I'm going to go first because I really have to leave, and you guys can stay.

MA: Oh, okay.

MS: Do you need a ride?

VJ: No, somebody's going to meet me. Is that okay?

MA: Yeah.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: What did I do, I graduated, I went to grad school.

How did you come to do that?

VJ: Because I finished a semester early, and who wants to leave? Right?

MS: All your friends were here, and your boyfriend was here.

VJ: Yeah. And it was still free. I was surprised that when you get to grad school and you get to TA, they pay you. And the summer after we graduated—well, I was in grad school—I worked for Alcoa Research Labs, up the road here, and they were paying me, too, to work on my thesis.

MS: You were double dipping.

VJ: I know.

Smart.

MS: (laughter)

VJ: So I had to build an electrostatic cage and all this stuff, and I got the wood done at Alcoa, believe it or not.

MS: (laughter)

VJ: They're huge. They're big eight foot circles or something. And then I had to get copper screening to go around the outside, but we didn't build the cage there, because you can't move it, right? So, we brought it here in the power lab, and started putting it together, and then, like I thought, he [her thesis advisor] was unavailable. I did what I could, alone. Also, remember -

there weren't laptops, there weren't powerful computers. So, I had reams, I had spools of paper tape, punch tape. I had a guy working for me at Alcoa, so I had three by five IBM cards,

MS: Uh huh.

VJ: not three by five, IBM cards punched. That was my program. It was year and a half of my life. And you're going to love this. At that point, I'd left grad school. I figured I could come back, right? I was working, I was going to nuclear power engineering school, that's part of where I was. But I got to go to nuclear power school, and my sister called one day and said, "Did you want that box of paper tape in your bedroom?" And,

MS: Uh oh.

VJ: yeah. "George took it to the dump." Because why would you call me the next day! To tell me that you've thrown away all my work, everything! I couldn't have made it up if I tried.

Oh.

VJ: Yeah, it would have been just impossible to do. I know, I thought I was going to,

MS: How do you duplicate all those results?

VJ: you can't. You can't. Yeah, it was really bad.

A year and a half....

VJ: It was bad, worse, because if you knew I might want it, why, why.

MS: Right.

VJ: You know? So that was the end of finishing the masters in double E, but then I went to nuclear power engineering school.

MS: And everything happens for a reason.

VJ: Again, first woman ever admitted in the States or for that matter the world, and oh, really? You know, I was like....

MS: (laughter)

VJ: I'm just doing this, you know? And, well, GE had offered me a choice of several different jobs, and this one sounded more interesting. And I didn't know no women had ever done it. I went there, and it was finals week every week, no joking around. You had to learn everything there was to know about a submarine, and operating things, and the design of the pumps, and design of, you name it - electrical circuits, depending on whatever circuit you were, whatever subject you were on.

And this was in Niskayuna, [NY], right?

VJ: At Knoll Atomic Power Lab.

Okay.

VJ: And then you had to know it. You had to like almost instant recall something. And most of the guys who graduated were from the Merchant Marine Academy or something, and they went out to train the sailors in operating a nuclear plant, or a lot of them went out to the prototype; I could have done that. Oh, wait! This is another story, but there was a prototype site in,

MS: (laughter)

VJ: Ballston Spa. You see half a destroyer or part of a submarine. Just pretend, just a mock up, they'd go there and be teachers there or whatever. In fact, Bear's up there.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: As far as I know he's still there. Or you'd go to a different project. I was asked to be on S8G [Submarine 8th Generation General Electric] and design. So I wanted to do that. But when I went to the site, when they took the students up there, to the prototype site to give us a tour, they wouldn't let me in the power plant because I might be a distraction.

MS: (laughter)

VJ: You know me, by then, I'm like, "What do you mean? Well, I shouldn't be operating nuclear submarine power plants if I'm going to be a distraction! What the heck are they...?" But it didn't matter. And I got to sit with the nurse while the guys got to actually see this. I was livid because that was unfair. And I remember answering this question in class, and this killed me. You had to know a nuclear particle has to go through all kinds of materials before it leaves, and what the reaction is of it. The guy who taught it knew it, of course. You had to go into his room, and it was an oral exam, and I had to go through all of that. And you have no idea how many layers there are. (laughter) I think I got mixed up a little bit, and he said, "You mean it goes...", and I agreed with him because he got it right,

MS: He got it right. (laughter)

VJ: Anyway, the same teacher was asking a question of the students—I don't know if it's classified so I won't tell you the question—but it probably isn't, [it was about the] position of control rods in a reactor over time. And they're all answering this one way. And then, I raised my hand [and] said, "I think it's just the opposite." And you know what he said? "Unfortunately, Miss Barlow is right."

MS: (laughter)

VJ: And I remember saying, “What do you mean unfortunately?”

MA: If the entire class was not getting it, you were the only one that did; that is the unfortunate thing.

VJ: Why? No, because I was the only woman.

MS: No.

MA: No.

MS: because unfortunately, everybody else is a moron. And Miss Barlow is right.

VJ: Hmm, I was right anyway,

MS: (laughter)

VJ: the way he said it,

MS: Yeah.

VJ: it didn’t sound like he meant it that way though. I don’t think he meant, “Unfortunately, she’s right.”

MS: I could have told him not to screw with you.

VJ: Oh, really.

MA: So then you went to Texas.

VJ: Then, I went graduated from nuclear power school.

MA: Yeah.

VJ: And, I worked. I did design nuclear power plants.

For GE? In Schenectady?

VJ: Yes, but back up, we do want to gloss over, up here, a lot of stuff was going on - Watergate, Vietnam, but we didn’t really pay that much attention; we were studying.

MS: Yeah, we were studying. I have this flashback every once in a while of this group coming up trying to recruit us for just voter registration. And we didn’t have a clue - they go, “Well, McGovern’s running.” (laughter)

MA: Yeah,

MS: Who's that?

MA: we did not know what was going on in the outside world.

MS: We were so remote and so rural,

VJ: Yeah.

MS: and like I say, I'm a flaming liberal progressive now.

MA: The only reason I knew Nixon resigned is because it happened in the summer.

I was just going to say, one thing I did is that I went through the [Clarkson] *Integrator* [Clarkson's newspaper] on all of you,

VJ: Oh, yeah.

and Nikki, there was something about encouraging people to vote yes on the ERA, and you were one of the people, as a senator,

MS: I was a senator.

VJ: Oh, right. Right.

[who] encouraged people to support the ERA. You're welcome to have this if you want. That was one place I found you in the

MS: How funny!

in the *Integrator*.

MS: [Bill] Ciminelli [another Clarkson senator who signed this letter to the editor on October 28, 1975, asking their fellow students to vote to amend the New York State constitution with the ERA]! What, where's Magellen [the student body president]?

VJ: I don't know.

Well, there was one person who said he was discouraging people from voting for the ERA, and I realized I cut that off.

VJ: Oh, no.

Just that one person. But I can find that person for you.

MS: I told my daughter I was part of the student council. I forget what they called us.

MA: Senators - remember it was.

VJ: I wasn't on student council. I remember senior year, the trip to the Thousand Islands or the boat trip?

MS: Yeah.

MA: Oh, I remember that trip.

VJ: Somebody said, "Have you heard any good senate jokes?" And I said, "I'm looking at one." I don't know who it was. I'm

MS: (laughter)

VJ: trying to think.

(laughter)

MS: How funny. Did you really? Larry Gould, oh my God.

VJ: That's who it was. Larry Gould.

MS: Larry Gould. Holy smokes! I hadn't seen these names in [so long].

Val, so you were about to take us to Texas, and then you said you wanted to back up about

VJ: Oh, that summer of Watergate and Vietnam.

things were going on but you all were focused on studying.

VJ: So, right. Then, I was working for GE

MS: (Inaudible). (laughter)

VJ: doing my thing, and BJ graduated after I did, and we were going to get married. He was looking around for jobs. He was an ID [Industrial Distribution] major. And, I told him -

And, when did you meet him?

VJ: up here.

No, but when?

VJ: I was a grad student.

Okay.

VJ: And then he was a sophomore. But he took a year off after high school,

Uh huh.

VJ: so it wasn't quite that, and then, I told him, "I don't care where we go, but you need to find some place that has a big enough city that I can just transfer." So he picked Texas Instruments in Dallas. And I had three offers from GE down there, and one with medical and one was operations and something. And I forget the other one. Clearly, bottom of the list. Anyway, so I went down there and I did a lot of things. I was project manager, I was project engineer, I was training, eventually I was in charge of on-site training for the southern half of the United States. And I remember going to some conference or some class, or something, in Disney World; it was great.

MS: What?

VJ: In Disney World.

MS: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

VJ: You've got to work there, you know?

MS: Yeah.

VJ: Whoever was teaching the class, I was talking to him about something, and there was a kid in the class, he was a male, of course, and kind of had an attitude. He was a little younger, not much younger, and I remember the teacher—I wasn't aware of a lot of this stuff—he said, "She's [the] one who schedules this stuff, she's like the highest ranking technical female in the southern half of the United States." And this kid still wouldn't believe it, yeah, right, you know? I just wanted to punch him. Yeah, you do, because guess what? I outrank you by a mile. I don't know what we were doing, but something. So, now I didn't know this though; I didn't know I was the highest ranking technical female in the southern half of the United States. There's a whole division in the southern half of the United States.

MS: Yeah.

VJ: But, yeah, I didn't know this stuff. I just did my thing.

MS: The managers and the people who were placing us were the ones who were keeping stats. We had no clue.

VJ: Let them do it. I don't care. Then, GE had a big reorganization, and BJ was getting his MBA from Southern Methodist University, and he was in the middle of doing that, and they told me I could keep my job and work for research and development labs or something, but not in Texas.

And you just didn't do that then. So I ended up working for RJR Nabisco, and we decided, well, if we're going to have kids, this is the time.

MS: You walked in after a week,

VJ: Because I won't have one,

MS: you called me. And you told them. (laughter)

VJ: told them, I know. (Inaudible) it was awful. I actually interviewed at a lot of places that were better jobs, and I knew I was pregnant but I was upfront about it. And all of a sudden the job ceased to exist or some bullshit about,

MS: Uh huh.

VJ: because they knew they could get sued - I didn't know I could sue them.

MS: Uh huh.

VJ: So I stopped telling people.

MS: Uh huh. We were paper-thin anyway at that time, so

VJ: you know,

MS: three months.

VJ: it took a while. But I looked like (inaudible). Anyway, I took this job with RJR Nabisco. It was a cut in pay, but it was no travel. I had traveled all the time before, and it wasn't that much of a cut in pay anyway, and we were both getting high salaries, so it didn't bother me. And the work - I went in for an interview and he [the person interviewing me] is showing me all these charts and things, and he said, "Have you ever done these?"

MS: (laughter)

VJ: And I actually said, "Yeah, this is the kind of stuff I had to do in my spare time."

(laughter)

MS: (laughter)

VJ: And I regretted it as soon as it came out of my mouth, but I got the job. I knew it, so I actually told him how to improve on it.

MS: This is when we started getting more qualified.

VJ: Yeah, we really were. But when we were interviewing from the get go, people would say, “Oh, where do you see yourself in five years or, in ten years.” I’d say, “What do you do?”

MS: (laughter)

VJ: I usually said, “Your job.”

(laughter)

MS: (laughter)

VJ: If it’s something that sounds good. You know?

MS: I just didn’t stop laughing. I don’t know what I’m doing tomorrow,

(laughter)

MS: you know. Fate determining the consequences,

VJ: But I had 23 job offers before we left in junior year; well, it was the end of junior year.

MS: Uh huh.

VJ: But I didn’t take any of them. I went to grad school because I couldn’t make up my mind.

MS: She was wallpapering the bathroom with all of her offers, and we were,

MA: We were,

MS: we were scrapping. (laughter)

MA: Yeah, we had a few rejections up on that.

VJ: You know why? I had a trip. Every time they’d say, “Well, do you have any questions?” and I’d say, “Well, I’m sure I will after I visit....”

MS: (laughter)

VJ: and they’d give me a job

(laughter)

VJ: every single time. And I had to explain every single time, “Don’t have a rental car waiting for me; I don’t have a license.” I didn’t; I was 23.

MS: I know, Desi [Nikki’s daughter] is going to be just like you.

MA: Oh, yeah.

VJ: That's okay. Look how good I was at driver's ed.

(group laughter)

So, Val, going back, how long were you at RJR Nabisco? So you were pregnant with Allison then.

VJ: Yes. She's the only native Texan, she likes to tell us. She was born in '86, and it was,

MS: January of '86.

VJ: Yeah.

MA: You went back to work in March, right?

VJ: Yeah, it was about a year, I'd say not even. I blurted it out; that's another thing I did wrong. And I blurted out the fact that I was leaving, and he [my boss] said, "Oh." Because he'd called; I never had a boss in the same state, and he was calling me to tell me I got a raise.

MS: (laughter)

(laughter)

VJ: I guess I won't put (inaudible).

MS: Our timing sucked.

VJ: I know.

MS: You know?

VJ: I know. I know. But....

MS: But we really didn't care. It's like you said, you had two huge salaries coming in.

VJ: yeah. Well, huge isn't....

MS: No, it's all relative.

VJ: Yeah.

[Suzanne Smith from Clarkson's Department of Marketing and External Relations stopped by. She was scheduled to interview Valerie Barlow Jerabeck after this interview.]

So, Nabisco.

VJ: so I worked for them about a year and then we were going to have a baby, obviously, and it was like do it now, or do it or die. You know, do it now, or I'm just going to have a career. It's not going to happen.

MS: This was the girl who was never going to have children.

VJ: I know. I was the first one married. I really wasn't going to get married.

MS: No, no.

VJ: And,

MS: Never have children.

VJ: forget it. You know.

MS: Never go through childbirth.

VJ: No.

MS: No.

MA: Wait, did you get married first or Soko?

VJ: I think I did.

MA: Oh, okay. Then Soko.

VJ: And, then,

MS: Then you.

MA: Then me.

VJ: Then we moved to Skaneateles [NY], BJ, my husband, was looking at jobs. He said, "Where do you want to go?" I said, "I don't know." I wanted to have a big city at least nearby, to do stuff.

MS: Shopping.

VJ: So I thought Boston. We both agreed on Boston, and he took the *Boston Globe*, and we'd peruse it. The Sunday *Boston Globe*. Pam [Pam Morin Nelson '76, one of their fellow Clarkson friends] is texting us all.

MS: No, you know what it is? I've got to call my daughter and wake her up.

VJ: Okay. And we took the Sunday *Globe*, and looked at that. Welch Allyn, which is a company in Skaneateles, kept showing up, and that looked like something he really wanted to do, or was really interested in. So he interviewed. They brought him up, gosh - three times because that's how they did things. Welch Allyn doesn't like to fire people. He's been with them for 20-something [years] since we moved there, and they're sure of what they do. Anyway, I said, "Well, take that one, it's totally in the middle; his parents had moved to the Rochester area by then, from Connecticut, and mine were in Binghamton, well my family. So, it was kind of in the middle of those two, and we went to Skaneateles, and [have] been there since '86. I taught at the community colleges. I taught lots of computer courses and things. And I got involved in the community. As I was driving, I was thinking, we always thought I'd go back to work. I was driving home—I'd get lost—again, my driving skills are not,

MS: (laughter)

VJ: and it's very rural. So I'm driving around, and I was stuck behind a school bus. It was Marcellus/ new Seneca turnpike,

MS: Uh huh.

VJ: and I was just stuck behind this school bus, you can't pass, it's a two lane road, and Allison's in the back seat. Crawling, stop, crawling, and after a while you start looking, it didn't take long, you're watching the kids as they get off the bus. Some of them, you knew, for example when somebody was home because they'd bound off the bus, and they're all smiles, and the kids who were either latch-key kids or apparently not coming home to the best situation anyway, dragged off, just dragged. Heads were down and dragging their backpacks. And it was then and there I decided on staying home with them, so I did. And, you know, they have no idea what I gave up.

MS: Uh huh.

VJ: And I even reminded them, you have to admire that. There are times when you have to say, "I didn't have to have you." (laughter) No, I'm joking.

Right. (laughter)

MA: (laughter) Well, that's the line I always use on my daughter when she says, "Well, you're the one that decided to have me." I said, "Yeah, I decided to have kids; I didn't know it was going to be you!"

VJ: Yeah.

(laughter)

MA: That's fun. That's not a bad thing.

Yeah.

VJ: So, and then we had Allen. And he almost killed us, so we don't have any more.

(laughter)

VJ: I don't think we slept until he was five years old. And they both went here [to Clarkson University].

MA: Well, Allen's still here, right?

VJ: Allen's still here and Allison went here, and here I am. Oh! I got really involved in the community,

Right.

VJ: in the Rotary, as the first women to be in. You do things not knowing,

Yeah.

VJ: like breaking ground again. It was the Skaneateles Rotary Club. And three guys quit because I joined, because they let a woman in. I know.

And this was back in the late '80s or something?

VJ: '86, mid-'80s.

Mid-'80s.

VJ: No, it was later because I was just pregnant with Allen, so he was born in '89, so....

Late '80s.

VJ: yeah.

So, since I know you're going to be leaving, what advice would you have for current women engineers. You had what sounds like kind of a traditional path for a while, and then chose to become a stay-at-home mom, and then got really involved in your community.

VJ: Oh, really involved. I'm on the school board, you know?

Right, I mean, clearly, you're a very energetic person and have turned that energy into all sorts of things in Skaneateles. What kind of advice would you have for either today's Clarkson women engineers, or in general, women engineers? Young women engineers.

VJ: Study hard. Do your thing. Do your own thing. Don't worry about what anybody thinks, or who's done it before and who hasn't done it before. Follow your own path and have fun.

Thank you. And thank you for taking all this time.

VJ: Thank you.

Val, it was a pleasure meeting you.

VJ: [To Laura] Call me anytime. [To Martha and Nikki] Bye. I'll see you later. Well, let me know what you're doing?

MS: Alright. I'll go buy a couple souvenirs.

MA: Yeah, we have to go down to the bookstore.

MS: At the bookstore.

VJ: Which one?

MS: Downtown.

MA: The one downtown.

MS: The big one.

VJ: See if they have anything good.

MS: I know.

.

VJ: Ask them what they'll give us for our old, original slide rules.

MS: Our original slide rules.

VJ: Yeah. (laughter)

I thought you were going to say t-shirts.

MA: T-shirts.

MS: Oh, no. They can't have that.

VJ: Where is my? I know I had a t-shirt collection. Remember

MS: Yeah.

VJ: the only rule was they had to be free.

(laughter)

MA: I have a t-shirt collection. I'm going to make it into a quilt.

MS: Yeah, I know.

VJ: Then my daughter took them. I found some in her room. I took them back.

MA: It's dangerous to let my daughter take t-shirts. She cuts the sleeves off and the neckline off.

VJ: Yeah.

MS: Oh, yeah. Dirty dancing or whatever.

MA: Yeah.

VJ: So, that was the rule though; you never paid for any of these.

MS: Well, one of the arts major people over at St. Margaret's where Desi went to high school—her daughter was in the arts too, and every production she was in, she took the sweatshirt and made a quilt out of it.

VJ: Yeah, I do that.

MA: It's really nice.

VJ: You know what I did for Allen's graduation party; I strung them all and

MS: Oh, cute.

MA: Oh, that's a good idea.

VJ: and then, through the sleeve,

MA: Yeah.

VJ: and it was cool; it decorated the side of the fence. It was fun, and the rest of the time I had posters from all the plays,

MS: Yeah. I filled my entire office.

Thank you, Val. [Val left to be interviewed by Suzanne Smith, from Clarkson's Marketing and External Relations office.]

VJ: Okay. You're welcome.

Thank you very much.

MS: We're only a cell phone away.

VJ: Alright.

Who of you would like to go next? Talking about your trajectory post-Clarkson.

MA: Mine's quick and easy. I just did two jobs.

MS: I think I was probably more analytical as you might well have figured, being a mathematician.

MA: But you went to Carrier right after.

MS: right. Carrier was a big recruiting arm for Clarkson. And I think if you look back then, I don't know about now, but a lot,

MA: A lot of people went to Carrier.

MS: I dare say 30 percent of the people here, especially your IDs [Industrial Distribution majors] went to Carrier. And because Syracuse was the nucleus. Back then, Rochester was Kodak, Syracuse was Carrier.

MA: And Rochester was also Xerox.

MS: Yeah.

MA: And you worked in the summer for them.

MS: Yeah. What was really, really neat, and we were talking about it last night, is it wasn't like Pratt Institute or anything of the mini universities, where you would get credits. They actually came up here, they interviewed you, you went and worked for a weekly salary, and you got credit toward your employment if you joined on with them.

You mean over the summer?

MS: Yes.

Okay.

MS: So, you could get like seven or eight weeks.

So you did that. That was after your junior year?

MS: Sophomore summer and junior summer.

For Carrier?

MS: Yep.

Okay.

MS: And, interestingly enough, the other thing that was roaming around in my mind was something Pam [Pam Morin Nelson '76] said yesterday: we were a very supportive, collective group. And our competition was within ourselves because Pam just moved into mechanical engineering, I guess.

Uh huh. And this is Pam Nelson?

MS: Yep.

MA: Uh huh.

MS: And Pam...and they hired women on the spot. It was all affirmative action or whatever you wanted to call it back then. "Oh, we have friends," and they said, "Well, get them on the phone." So, the next week we were down there and we interviewed; we started like, literally, the next day.

MA: Nancy went, and I went, and Pam, and....

MS: And Soko.

MA: and Soko.

MS: Yep. And I think a couple other girls.

MA: And Tom [Kassouf, Lynn Sokolowski's future husband] worked for Carlisle.

MS: Yeah.

MA: Soko's....

MS: Yeah.

MA: that's where she met him.

MS: Even though he went to Clarkson,

MA: Yeah.

MS: everybody ended up at Carrier. So, the first year,

MA: I didn't.

MS: No, I know!

MA: I remember they gave me an offer. I'm like, "I'm a civil engineer."

MS: yeah, but the thing that we found out was sales was where the money was.

MA: I know. Well, see, I wasn't (inaudible).

MS: We were the purists, you know, yeah. So, I started with the domestic division the first summer; it was called MSD. All these acronyms. Machine Systems Division. I programmed some of the laser

MA: I remember that.

MS: equipment.

MA: Yep.

MS: that made the big heavy machinery. And, then the second summer, I remember because we were in the scaffold, and I was in the manufacturing TR1, and because everything was TR, Thomas Road, and they had factory after factory. That's when our skirts were still up to here, and I was up on the scaffolding, anyway. Like, I would be surprised, there'd be a couple oops,

MA: We were blazing trails,

MS: Oh, man!

MA: women in a man's field. I went to work every single day in a dress, in a pair of high heels,

MS: Oh, yeah. And,

MA: every year for 11 years.

MS: do you remember the commercial we made for Clarkson?

MA: We made a commercial for Clarkson.

MS: And, then I made a commercial for Carrier.

MA: After our freshman year, they called us and asked us if we would be in a commercial,

MS: You probably could find it somewhere.

I want to see this commercial.

MA: Yeah.

MS: They come up to our dorm,

MA: yeah.

MS: I got a picture of them picturing us.

MA: Yeah.

Could you email that to me?

MS: It's an old Polaroid.

Well, could you scan it into a PDF?

MS: I could try that.

I would love that.

MS: Remember the basketball team came over. It's us and the basketball team.

MA: I should remember.

MS: Oh! It used to be on [in] Plattsburgh [NY] and everything.

MA: yeah.

MS: Yeah.

To try to get students to come to Clarkson.

MS: Yeah.

MA: To try to get women to come.

MS: Women, yeah. Primarily, yeah.

MA: Do you remember we were sitting in the lecture hall, and there were guys. Nikki was over here, and I was over here.

MS: I went out and got a pink polka dot shirt and a pair of pink (inaudible).

MA: Something like that. I don't remember what I wore.

MS: I remember like it was yesterday.

MA: Yeah, we did [that].

MS: So, the only reason I remember is because [later] I was doing the same thing for Carrier. So, the second summer...another thing Carrier would do, which was very neat, is they never put you in the same place twice. You had to rotate.

MA: You had to rotate.

MS: So, Pammy would start in like research, and ended up, I don't know where she ended up, she blew up the lab one year. (laughter) She was too afraid to go back for days. I ended up in the international division; this is why I would, again, tell people, "Don't worry about it because it will all connect the dots all by itself." I went to the international division, and I did service work. I think technically it would be customer service, but I fixed things over the phone; I was given a product line. But you didn't have a phone, you didn't have fax, you had a teletype. Letters cost money, and you had to be very succinct—and me, rambling the way I do—[had to be] very succinct, very articulate, and very precise on what you were telling them and to check before warranty kicked in. So I would be meeting with the research scientists. I had a fire in Saudi Arabia. I had to go to British Columbia. You made friends all over the country. I would start in the morning with Europe and end up with Guam, Philippines, and China in the evening. And, poor Gina, Gina my secretary, you were teletyping all across [the world], and we would just get little slips of paper - yes it worked, no, it didn't - so then I'd have to go to research, we'd have to relieve the situation,

MA: You were like a troubleshooter.

MS: I was a troubleshooter. Yep. I solved the problems in Saudi Arabia, and saved the company millions and zillions of dollars.

So I have a question. Here, I'm reflecting my own ignorance - you were a math major

MS: Right.

doing engineering, right?

MS: Of course. Yeah.

Was that typical?

MS: No. I was the first one that they ever did that with.

Okay.

MS: Women or male,

Okay.

MS: Because I had all of the same academia that these girls [did]. Back then in math, you were either theoretical or applied. And I was an applied mathematician.

Right.

MS: So yeah, it just came naturally. So I'm an engineer. And I figured today or tomorrow and it ended up 25 years. So, as the big fish ate the little fish in the '80s, UTC [United Technologies] bought Carrier, very bitter, hostile takeover, and I ended up upstairs; I was now on sales. Somebody had told me about this big bucko business, being sales, upstairs with machinery and systems division, which now went back to my first summer job, but I was on the air handling side.

And you were still in Syracuse all this time?

MS: Yeah.

Okay.

MS: Yeah. And I solved the major problem there and was offered a job, because I was still corporate, in the field. And that was supposed to be some sort of diamond in your cap because you were actually working. I mean, elbow grease, instead of behind the desk kind of thing. And UTC was firing left and right.

MA: So, it was good to get it over.

MS: Get out.

MA: Right.

MS: Hide under the desk or get out.

MA: Well, when did you go to Detroit?

MS: That was '81. So I was promoted to customer sales in Detroit. They used to own the majority of their distributorships, and I had my own accounts, the worst accounts on the planet, hadn't bought anything in twenty years; Bay City, Flint, and Saginaw were my territories. And I had a company car. I thought I was gold. And,

MA: Well, and Nancy moved too at the same time.

MS: she moved; by this time, Kodak [in Rochester, NY] was laying off because they were getting

MA: Yeah.

MS: into the—not the DVD business, but photographs weren't the big deal anymore. Do you remember? Something to put the photographs, cameras out of style. I forget. Maybe it was the video.

MA: Maybe it was the digital?

MS: I don't know.

MA: I don't know.

MS: Yeah.

MA: Digital? Maybe that came after.

MS: So Nancy didn't have a job but she just....

Nancy?

MS: Colarossi [Clarkson, class of 1976].

Colarossi.

MS: So she just called up because she had worked for Carrier too.

MA: She worked for Carrier.

Okay.

MS: And had her summer experience documented and was working the next day. So, she ended up rooming with me; actually, we didn't room together. No one would room with me. (laughter) Which is another story.

MA: Well, Nancy was a neatnik and Nik was not so much.

MS: Yeah, we were like the odd couple.

MA: Yeah.

MS: I was like - what was his name? Oscar, I don't know.

MA: (Inaudible).

MS: Oh, yeah. This would be redone in five minutes, okay?

(laughter)

MS: yeah. That's what I said, "Go for it. I have no problem with that."

MA: Yeah. And, Nik, in four years, never once made her bed.

MS: no.

MA: They were the odd couple.

(laughter)

MS: We had a ball.

MA: Yeah, she never studied at her desk; she had to study in bed. You know.

(Inaudible).

MS: I had heaps and mounds of stuff.

MA: Yeah.

MS: We all had little idiosyncrasies, so now I'm in Detroit, and it was during as close to a recession as you could possibly get to.

MA: Yeah.

MS: And Chrysler, Lee Iacocca was saying, "be sure to shut the light off when you leave," and there was black Thursday, and everybody was fired. Those of us that couldn't do it all. And, I mean, do it all. I would inspect the equipment, I'd call on the customer, I'd do the drawings, I would write the synopsis, I would type it, I would copy it, I'd deliver it, I would present it, and I'd order it and I'd expedite it. I mean, you had to wear every single hat, which in the long run, ended up being a blessing in disguise.

MA: Oh, yeah.

MS: Because there was nothing I couldn't do.

MA: Right.

MS: And there was nothing that they could tell me. You couldn't give me a story

MA: Right.

MS: that I couldn't revive. So, anyway, now I'm on into like 10/ 12 years, and the funny thing that happened on the way to the,

MA: To Southern California?

MS: (laughter)

(laughter)

MS: what's the name of that musical? Oh, On the Way to the Forum.

MA: On the Way to the Forum. Yeah.

MS: Yeah.

(laughter)

MS: There was a contractor, who was what they called design and build. And nobody knew the equipment better than the salesman, so he stole me away for a large sum of money, which is really stupid. You know, if they ever had a course, (laughter) "How Not to do Stupid Things," but I gave up 10/ 12 years now of seniority and went to get a real sales job at this design and build conceptual field, and a contractor, who was really, really well known. And the truth of the matter was I was dating my boss,

MA: Uh huh.

MS: and we were getting married, right before you got married,

MA: Uh huh.

MS: and I needed a new job. But that didn't pan out,

MA: (laughter)

MS: and I don't care who you are, ugh, and,

(laughter)

MA: Yeah, that didn't quite,

MS: That didn't quite pan out.

MA: You did come to my wedding though.

MS: Yeah.

MA: You brought him to my wedding.

MS: Yeah, yeah.

MA: And his name was John, too.

MS: yeah, yeah. There was a J thing going on there.

MA: Yeah.

MS: And then (laughter) I ended up needing to go back to Carrier, but in between there and that, a consulting engineer came across my name, in Detroit, and they needed somebody to budget a large job that knew all the equipment. Again, that had design and build experience, and they were going to get me my PE [Professional Engineer] degree because now, at that point, they said, "If you're already out of school," and I'd been doing so much engineering by now, the only way I could get my PE and be like Martha, is to go to work for a consultant engineer. So I did that and I found it was way too much work.

(laughter)

MS: So, a year there, I also worked with the contractors and the consulting engineers and the like, and waited for an opportunity to arise with Carrier again. As soon as it did, they called me, and what was I in charge of? International, which I had done during the summer; design and build, which I worked in Detroit; commercial sales, which I had worked in Detroit now, and "could I leave tomorrow?" So it was international sales, commercial, and design and build; it was everything that I had learned. And if I would be the manager, which was later on director. And the guy was taking a 55 and 10 package, so if they were 55 and had 10 years, they were taking the package from UTC and leaving, and I was a cheap date. I was not married. I didn't have kids. I didn't have a home to buy.

MA: Yeah, you didn't have to sell a house.

MS: No. I was out the next day.

And this was to Southern California?

MS: Southern California.

Okay.

MS: Well, actually, technically LA. But I ended up in Southern California. Interestingly enough, listening to you guys as well, I don't know if this is just something I picked up on today or not, we all had these really....she's working in nuclear, I had security clearances out the ying-yang, because I ended up doing Chevron, other oil rigs, and all the U.S. embassies. So I was specking out all the equipment for Russia, and Honduras, and I went down to Honduras, and they said the

same thing, “You’re a distraction.” So when I went down to Honduras, I had to dress...they told me, “Shabbily. Okay? Dress shabbily.” I thought, “I don’t care. (laughter) I don’t care.” And, so I wore long blazers and linen suits, and you just did your job. You don’t take offense. You know, having come from the international side anyway, and the Bin Ladens had been there. I met all those people; you just know that you’re going in the back door. I would tell this to the people that would come in after me, “You’re not going to change two million years of culture in 20.” I didn’t have to be a sociologist just to figure that out.

MA: I kind of viewed that as more like, “It’s not my problem. It’s their problem.”

MS: Yep.

MA: You know? They can’t accept me.

MS: Just let me in the door.

MA: I had a job to do.

MS: I don’t know, I just....

MA: Deal with it.

MS: The parade can start later. (laughter) Give me all the awards later. So I used to carry around all that U.S. embassy work with me, on the plane, work on it there. (laughter) Things were extremely carefree. And all those ductworks you would see in *Mission Impossible*,

MA: Places they could hide bombs.

MS: all there.

So what was the name of the place you were working for in LA?

MS: It was all Carrier.

It was all Carrier still.

MS: Still.

Okay. I didn’t realize.

MS: Because they had a domestic division, and they had an international division, but if you want to come full circle and connect all those dots, I started with the international division, even doing the trouble shooting work, so all the people that had had started now 10, 12, 15 years ago, were now general managers of all these places,

Right.

MS: and if I wanted to sell a job overseas, I would just get them on the phone, and we'd make the deal.

MA: Because you knew what you were doing.

MS: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

MA: Networked in with all those people

MS: Yeah.

MA: at that point.

MS: So really, don't worry about it. I could not have custom made, I could not have choreographed it to have started in international, finished in international, known the entire stream of the air conditioning line, worked on, troubleshooted it, sold it, specked it, and so I ran my own division in LA, and the rest is history. So all these girls who were never going to have babies, never get married, got married, had babies - I was the one, the little north country girl that was never going to leave Malone, New York, ended up in LA. I got married; I was almost 40. My daughter was a honeymoon baby and is 19.

MA: Just like you were.

MS: Just like me.

And what's your daughter's name?

MS: Desiree.

Desiree.

MS: Desiree Nicole.

She's 19 now.

MS: She's 19, and she's a musical theater major at Northwestern, with a minor in film, commercials, radio, and television.

Wow. And are you still working at Carrier?

MS: No, I resigned and retired after 25 years. She [Desiree] was four years old, and I transferred everything over, because most of those that, I know yours is too, are five year sort of projects,

MA: Yeah.

MS: and I stayed on to either affiliate the person that was coming in, or you know, I still did a lot of work on a hand shake. And I made certain promises that were to be kept. And they all were. And, then my daughter started acting, we put her in a private school, just like I had come from. And, instead of being Catholic [like my school], it was Episcopalian, and we had moved to Southern California by then. And her teacher, lovely story, decided she should network with the other girls and boys, and she said, "There's an audition today for *Annie*, and I think Desi should go and meet these other girls and boys." And I said, "Oh, please, no. Lord, she doesn't sing, she doesn't dance, she doesn't—, I don't even know if she reads."

(group laughter)

MS: I haven't been home. I just literally retried. And I was an at-home mom kind of a thing. I said, "Oh, don't put her in that; she'll die of embarrassment," and so I walked her over with the teacher and to her manager, or director, Darcy Rice, and we ended up being really, really close to him, and I gave them the whole, whole schpiel, "I'm an engineer. She's an engineer." Because she's smart as a whip, you know, she's the best (inaudible) in the gene pool; she's smart, but she's got Moose's, Crash's [her father's] gift for gab and she could memorize anything, she can sing - Crash could sing.

MA: Uh huh.

MS: He was a tenor. And she got on there, and she just took off like a rocket. And Darcy looked at me and said, "She's a natural. Get out of here.

(laughter)

MS: Get out of here."

MA: She's not going to be an engineer.

MS: And she did, and so I produced her plays for Darcy, so I could catch a glimpse of my daughter while she went through lower, middle, and upper school. And she took early decision to Northwestern for musical theater.

Wow.

MS: One of 200 in the country.

Wow. Says her proud mother.

MS: Says her proud, bragging rights....

Absolutely. So I've got the same question for you as I had for Val, and I can't remember who was in and out at different times: what advice would you have for women going into engineering -- women your daughter's age?

MS: Follow your instincts. There isn't a book unless you write it. There isn't a book. Follow your instincts. It'll all happen, and it will all evolve. I truly believe that. If there hadn't been some divine intervention that said, you know, go here, the path, the forks in the road are going to happen. You'll make the judgments whether they're Nabisco and they're lower paying, but the value is more. Or, you're presented with things; you can't make decisions about options you don't know about. You know, you can't ask questions about things you don't know exist yet. You learn about the sales aspect

MA: Right.

MS: later.

MA: Yeah.

MS: And,

MA: You can't be afraid to try something.

MS: yeah.

MA: It's almost like if they're going to entrust me with this job they're offering, I guess they think I can do it, so I can.

MS: I must be okay.

MA: I must be okay. You know, what makes me any different than the same position they would offer to a guy? I mean, he's got just as much experience as I do.

MS: Well, I walked into that office,

MA: You know, they can't expect me to be out there doing this job at 100 percent level the first day, the first week, even the first year.

MS: It was like that first day behind the wheel when you get your driver's license; I walked into my office, and I said, "Okay. Let's make it happen." And it somehow does. The advice is just relax; trust your instincts.

MA: Go for it.

MS: It'll be okay. And I wish somebody....in fact, somebody did tell me that. I was flunking so poorly, so badly, my first year here [that] my mother actually took me to a doctor. I had almost forgotten this. And she said, "Well, give her a tranquilizer or something." (laughter) "She needs a valium." They were plentiful back then.

MA: Yeah.

MS: I forget the doctor's name - it'll come to me later - but he brought me in and we sat at the little baby table, and he said, "I'll give you your prescription," but he said, "I'll tell you something. [whispering] I almost flunked out in med school," and he said, "Just take it one day at a time."

MA: Uh huh.

MS: And I said, "Good. Give me the prescription. I will tear it up, and I'll take your advice." And because nobody told me you could fail.

MA: Uh huh.

MS: And that to me was failure.

MA: Yeah.

MS: If it wasn't an A, you know.

No, and plus, you'd been valedictorian of your class.

MS: Right, right.

You were used to being very successful.

MS: There was no place to go but down (laughter) at that point, right?

Yeah, yeah.

MS: And shook hands, walked out, ripped up the prescription, and the rest is history. I did relax.

Martha, what about you, post-Clarkson? What was your trajectory? Your path?

MA: Of course, everybody, we were applying all over. There's a good placement office here at Clarkson, so we had interviews on campus, and as it happens, my sister worked for Union Carbide in Buffalo. And they were not recruiting, they were not looking for civil engineers, but she pulled a few strings, and they called me and said, "Would you like to come for an interview?" So I interviewed with them, and they liked me and they hired me. And it was

MS: Union Carbide.

MA: so easy for me; this was the Lindy division of Union Carbide. And it was so easy because my sister worked there, so she made it simple for me. She had an apartment I could just go move into. She drove to the same job every day. So I didn't have to have a car right away.

What did she do? Because I know she was not an engineer.

MA: well, she was not an engineer, but she kind of came in through the back door. She started out in an area of Union Carbide called service drafting, where all she really did was trace drawings onto mylar. And, from there, and she's smart; she was really smart.

MS: Yeah.

MA: And she picked up things fast, and she ended up working in the control systems where she was laying out control panels and things like that, where all the instruments go within an industrial stream, and so she,

MS: She just didn't get the title.

MA: she didn't have,

MS: (laughter)

MA: she did not have the title, she didn't have the degree or the salary, but she knew what she was doing. And eventually, she left Carbide before I did and ended up working for a company called APB, which was a British company, but she worked there for 25 years, doing control systems and designing control panels for things like yogurt factories and breweries. And she was sent all over the world. It was really an interesting job. It's a side note. Well, my family's all very technical.

Yeah.

MA: So, anyway,

MS: Little did we know.

MA: yeah, I know. Yeah, my mother was a homemaker and great cook and everything, but my father was the mathematician. He was, and I never learned until after I was an engineer and worked for a long time, that his dream, sort of before he went to the war, was to be an engineer. He never shared that with me until a long time after. I was like, "Really?"

MS: My dad cried. He cried.

MA: Yeah. Oh! My dad was so proud of me.

He cried when you graduated from college?

MA: Oh! Yeah, they were so proud of me.

MS: They were so proud. Yeah.

MA: But, so anyway. I ended up working for Union Carbide for 11 years. In the Lindy division, and I just stayed in my same department but I started out as the staff engineer, and then I became

an assistant staff engineer. I don't know what the progression was, but I ended up being a senior engineer. And there was one other woman that was higher ranked than me in the technical end, and there were probably, I think, between 2,500 and 3,000 employees at that location. And she left the company, and I don't know where she ended up.

MS: Ta-da! (laughter)

MA: So I was the highest ranking technical female in Union Carbide Lindy division in Tonawanda, New York. I was making a really decent salary then. So I met my husband and we got married; he's also an engineer. He went to University of Buffalo. In civil, but he sort of majored in construction. So, he was doing like,

MS: Subway tunneling.

MA: yeah, they put in a subway system in Buffalo, and he was the construction manager on one station. They had various stations along the line, and one of the stations was his, and he did the whole construction management of that station.

MS: A really big deal.

MA: It was a really cool job, and he loves tunnels and tunneling and subways, which is why we ended up moving to New York [City].

(laughter)

MA: What happened was Buffalo, you know, the recession,

MS: Right.

MA: things dried up.

MS: Yeah.

MA: Construction wasn't there. I still had a great job, but he didn't. He was out of work. And in fact, I had the nice big Volvo. He had the little green Renault.

MS: (laughter)

MA: Yeah, and he was unemployed, collecting an unemployment check. I was pregnant,

MS: I was going to say, you had to start with the girls.

MA: and driving to work every day, and in the winter in Buffalo, in his little....

In the Renault? (laughter)

MA: His car wasn't big enough to put the skis in. He went skiing every day in my big, heavy Volvo. And I'm driving this stupid little green car.

MS: (laughter)

MA: And, actually, he had a choke still, the windshield wipers didn't work, I had to put my hands out the window scraping. (group laughter) I'm pregnant. What's wrong with this picture? Anyway, so, we had Ariana in October of '87.

MS: I remember you bringing her down to Soko's place.

MA: oh, yeah, remember that? The snowstorm? So, that year, my husband's out of work, and she was born in October; he got a job in September in New York City. I'm still up in Buffalo. I'm out to here [very pregnant]. They made me leave like a month before my due date. So I'm just like hanging out at home in Buffalo, and John was working in New York, taking a flight back every weekend, and we eventually knew we were going to end up in that vicinity—in the New York area. So I took him to the airport on a Monday morning, and that afternoon, I started having labor pains.

MS: Were you early with Ariana?

MA: No. Well, two days. Two days early.

MS: Oh.

MA: I mean, I was close, but I was stuck in denial.

MS: Yeah.

MA: I'm thinking, you know, "This couldn't really be happening. I'm going to be late." No. I wasn't.

MS: (laughter)

MA: But he was in New York, I had to call him, he had to get on a plane, and I drove myself to the hospital.

MS: I remember that! I remember that. Yep.

MA: I'm driving myself to the hospital.

MS: I worked; I worked.

MA: Yeah.

MS: I was taking a shower to go get my replacement,

MA: Oh.

MS: and I ended up in the maternity ward.

MA: Yeah. It was,

MS: We....

MA: I mean, we just did what we had to do. I went to the hospital thinking, “Ah, this is nothing.”

MS: You probably didn’t know what to think.

MA: And,

MS: Oh, yeah, because they’d always tell you about those,

MA: yeah.

MS: the little (inaudible).

MA: The Braxton Hicks, whatever.

MS: Braxton, yeah.

MA: So, I’m thinking, “Nah, this is not the real thing.” So I go in the hospital, [and] they said, “You’re in labor.” And I said, “Oh, really?” I said, “But I’ve got to call my husband in.”

MS: Right.

MA: “He’s....” “Well, where’s your husband? We’ll get him.” “He’s in New York City.” They’re like, “What’s he doing in New York?”

MS: (laughter)

MA: “Well, he works there,” but,

MS: “I’m not due.”

MA: So, anyway, (laughter)

I have two days.

MA: yeah.

MS: (laughter)

MA: Right, this is not supposed to happen yet. So, anyway, I said, “I don’t have his phone number with me. I’ve got to drive home and get it.” They [said], “You’re not driving anywhere.” I said, “Yes, I am. I’m driving. I’m leav—,

MS: (laughter)

MA: take the belt off. I’ve got to go.” You know? “But, you’re in labor.” “I don’t care. I got to go.” So I drove home. Got his phone number.

MS: That’s ridiculous.

MA: Called him. He didn’t even have a phone in his apartment. The phone was down the hall with his neighbor, and I got his neighbor on the phone, who happened to be Spanish,

MS: (laughter)

MA: I’m like, “Pedro. Pedro, get John.” And he knew to expect the call. The phone drops and,

MS: (laughter)

MA: “John, John! Your wife is on the phone. She’s in labor!” And, the line went....he’s in Brooklyn, he gets to Queens, you know John,

MS: Yeah.

MA: he’s like Mister Calm, Cool, and Collected. [At] like nine o’clock that night, he comes wandering into the maternity ward

MS: (laughter)

MA: with his submarine sandwich. I’m like in agony at that point. Went through all night of labor without a single drug, but I did it.

MS: Oh, so did I.

MA: Yeah.

MS: Because we were so late. They go, “It’s not going to do you any good.”

MA: Yeah. That’s,

MS: He goes, “You’re already.....”

MA: That’s what they told me with Rebecca, with my second one.

MS: they said, “You’re already dilated.” I go,

MA: Yeah.

MS: “You’ve got to push now.” “What?” (laughter) “Get the warmer!” (laughter)

MA: (laughter)

MS: Boil the water. “I don’t know nothin’ ‘bout birthin’ babies.”

MA: (laughter) But, anyway, we had our child, and then, I was home. And I had saved up all my vacation time, so I could spend a lot of time, but the thing was the whole time I was pregnant, and even up until the minute I had her, I was thinking, “I’ve got to line up a daycare for her. I’ve got to take care of this stuff.”

MS: Right, right, right.

MA: You know, you had the baby, throw them in daycare, go back to work. The instant she was born and I looked at her face, I was like,

MS: Done.

MA: “No one is taking care of this baby but me.”

MS: But me.

MA: I mean, it was that abrupt that that maternal instinct kicked in.

MS: Kicked in.

MA: And I’m like kind of tearing up now, thinking about it, that no one else can take care of this baby as good as me. And that’s what I want to do. And so when John pushed the issue and said, “There’s no work up here for me, and we’ve got to move because I got a job in New York.” And I was like, “Well, okay.” Because then, I could give up my job, and we moved down to New York.

MS: Yeah. And you were off; your mom was a homemaker. My mom was a homemaker.

MA: She was. Well, my mother did go back to work when my youngest sister was in school full-time; I mean, they needed the money.

And remind me where you were in the family?

MA: I was in the middle.

MS: Fourth.

Fourth, okay.

MA: Fourth. I had three older sisters, two younger sisters, two younger brothers.

Yeah.

MA: So, we ended up in New York, and I halfheartedly, I mean, Union Carbide is big, and they had other offices in the area, and I interviewed in Danbury, Connecticut, but they were more mechanical and chemical. They really didn't have civil engineering type work in the New York City area. And I was like, "Yes!"

MS: (laughter)

MA: They don't have a job. I get to stay home!"

MS: Yahoo! Yahoo!

MA: So we moved to Maplewood, New Jersey.

MS: You've been there forever now, right?

MA: I knew that Union Carbide had an office in Springfield, New Jersey. So we're driving through New Jersey, trying to figure out, "Where do we want to live? Where?"

MS: (laughter)

MA: We saw an exit off of the highway we were on, and it said Springfield Avenue. And I'm like, "It's got to be close to Springfield, New Jersey,"

MS: (laughter)

MA: and we took the exit for Springfield. We're driving down Springfield Avenue, and we saw a sign that said, "Maplewood Commuter Parking," and all you saw was a park and it was beautiful, and [had] great big oak trees, and I was like, "John, turn right. Let's go check this little town, Maplewood." You've never been to Maplewood. It is like the most adorable, cutest town you've ever seen. It's beautiful. And it's just like old time USA.

MS: Right, right.

MA: I mean, they even have a circus with elephants on the Fourth of July. I mean, circus tents and it's so old-fashioned and cute, and it's all these little Tudor buildings, and we loved the houses, and we loved the trees, and we're like, "We like this town. Okay. Let's just look here." And we did. First we bought a condo there, and then after five years and two more babies,

(laughter)

MA: we ended up saying, “We need a bigger place.” And we searched and we found a house in Maplewood, and we’ve been there ever since. We moved there in 1988, and we’ve been in Maplewood ever since. But then, along the way, I had my third child, Sam. So it’s two girls,

So, your first one, Ariana, was born in ’87?

MA: ’87. Rebecca was born in 1990. Sam was born in 1992. He was the unplanned one.

MS: They’re only days apart. Yeah, [a] couple months apart from Desi.

MA: Yeah. Exactly. Sam is July ’92, and Desi is March ’92.

MS: March. Yeah.

MA: So, at one point, I think my husband was sort of feeling the pressure. He had gotten the job that he has right now, with the company’s he’s working for right now. He got that the year Sam was born. We almost moved back to Buffalo at that point before, because he had gotten laid off, but then got this job with URS Corporation. He’s been there ever since. But [at] some point along the line, I think he was sort of feeling the pressure of, “Hey, I’m the only breadwinner around here, and what is she doing home with these three kids?”

MS: (laughter)

MA: And I will never forget this as long as I live, in our dining room, my husband’s standing there with his finger shaking in my face saying, “Are you ever going back to work?”

MS: “No!” (laughter)

MA: And I said, “Well, I’ll show him.” And that Sunday, I pulled out the Sunday paper. I found one little tiny two-line ad. They were looking for an assistant township engineer in Millburn; it’s the next town. How far could this be, you know? I answered the ad, and I get a phone call right away. [I] came in for an interview. I’m like, “Yes!” And so I go in for the interview and the interview went really well, and I thought it was great, and then I didn’t hear from them.

MS: Uh huh.

MA: And this was in September of 1999. And, meanwhile, the whole time I was,

MS: So, Sam was seven-ish?

MA: He was in second grade, I think.

MS: Hmm, okay.

MA: I worked; I was on the PTO,

MS: Right, right. Same, yeah.

MA: PTA, this board, that board, you know,

MS: Room mother, Girl Scout leader.

It sounds like all three....

MA: yeah, I never just stayed home.

Yeah.

MS: Right.

MA: I was always at the school doing something.

MS: They had me in a tent for Girl Scouts.

MA: Oh.

MS: Overnight.

MA: I know. I did that too.

MS: Grilling.

MA: Yeah. Nik grilling. Do you see the size of the rock on her?

MS: (laughter)

MA: So, anyway, I don't know if you ever heard of Hurricane Floyd, but it hit

MS: Yeah.

MA: the east coast really hard; the town that I interviewed with, Millburn, totally flooded out, and that was the week after my interview. And they totally flooded, and so the township engineer was busy; everybody was busy. So, I didn't—it wasn't even on my radar screen. But that's why they didn't call me back; they were too busy taking care of all these projects that cropped up as a result of the flooding. So they called back in November, and they said, "Can you come back in for a second interview?" It's like, "Sure." So I went back in, and two other people, the township business administrator interviewed me as well as again, the town engineer. And they said, "Okay. We want to give you the job." I was like, "Okay. Great. When do I start?"

MS: (laughter)

MA: And you know me, I hadn't worked for 11 years, but, you know, they wanted me, and I thought, "This really,

MS: That's okay.

MA: this really isn't going to be hard." The thing that was great was it's two minutes away from where I live because all the towns there are right next to each other. I mean, really, they're all on the same train line into New York. So it was close.

MS: Oh, you take the train there?

MA: No, I drive, or I walk.

MS: Yeah. Wow.

MA: And the hours were great. Seven hours a day instead of eight. The benefits were great. I mean, free healthcare.

MS: Wow.

MA: I mean, I didn't pay a dime for healthcare, to cover my entire family. So the salary wasn't great at the start, but the benefits were there, and so I took the job, and have been there since

MS: Yeah, how many years now?

MA: the year 2000, is when I started.

Wow.

MA: And so I'm extremely happy,

MS: Well, good.

MA: I love the town, I love the people, I love the people I work with, I love what I do because every single day is different. And they're also like a family there. So, anytime my kids had a concert, or,

MS: Right, right.

MA: "Oh, yeah. Go. Go ahead. Go ahead. You know, come back whenever it's done."

MS: Well, that's really nice.

MA: The thing I kind of miss—I mean, I don't travel a lot; my big trip every year is going to Atlantic City where we have a League of Municipalities conference every year in November.

MS: (laughter)

MA: Get to stay overnight at the Borgata, you know; that's my big trip. And I do miss the traveling. And I traveled a lot, an awful lot with Union Carbide,

MS: Yeah.

MA: because we built air separation plants all over the country. And I did (inaudible).

MS: And see, I don't miss it at all. I don't miss it at all.

MA: Well, you traveled a lot more than I did.

MS: Well, the last time, that one Honduras trip where they all of a sudden came and got me and pushed me out because when you go into an embassy, you surrender your passport. All of a sudden my passport showed up and I was at the airport. And there had been a bomb scare.

Oooh.

MA: Wow.

MS: You travel enough, you get to the point where you start taking risks, so....

MA: Yeah, because it's very second nature, and you sort of let your guard down.

MS: so, yeah. But I couldn't care less if I ever travel again.

MA: Yeah. Yeah.

MS: I'm done.

[After a break in the interview:]

MS: It's so funny to hear about our kids because in some aspects, they're so much the same and so different. She'll hurt herself if she's late.

(laughter)

MA: Well, why isn't it more important for her [Nikki's daughter, Desi] to get her ass out of bed? Why do you have to call her [to wake her up]?

MS: Because she's

MA: Nik?

MS: in a show.

MA: Yeah, well.

MS: She's got to get her shit. Oh! she's up!

MA: Oh, okay.

MS: She's up. She's been up.

MA: Okay.

MS: This is just her excuse to hear mom, and

MA: Okay.

MS: Yeah, that's what it is.

MA: Okay.

MS: That's what it is.

MA: Okay. Alright.

MA: See, my kids could care less if I call them.

MS: oh, no.

MA: See, usually, if my oldest calls me, it's because she needs something. "Can you watch the baby?"

MS: (laughter) No, it's like, "Oh, I miss you, mommy." And "Mommy bear

MA: Oh.

MS: and baby bear."

MA: My son is much more lovey with me than my daughters. Every time he ends a phone conversation with me, he says, "Love you, mom."

MS: Same thing. Same thing. Well, but the other thing is it could be that difference between one, two, or three. It could be, I had her so late in life, it was the very first time,

MA: Uh huh.

MS: and that's when my maternal instincts kicked in.

MA: Yeah.

MS: But my mom was a homemaker, yours was a homemaker, Val's was a homemaker,

MA: Uh huh.

MS: I think we did pretty good.

MA: Yeah.

MS: For getting as much else accomplished as we did, along the way.

MA: I'm placing all my bets on Sam; he's going to take care of me.

MS: (laughter)

(laughter)

MS: Desi [had] better, too. I've only got one. (laughter)

MA: (laughter)

MS: I only got one bet, and that's....

MA: Yeah. So Sam's at George Mason University.

Okay.

MA: He applied here [to Clarkson],

Uh huh.

MA: he came up here, looked at the school, was like the third or fourth school he looked at, and he said, "Okay. Clarkson's the one. I really want to go here." And, then my husband - I could kill him - said, "Why don't we go look at George Mason?" And when he [her son, Sam] went to George Mason, he really liked that, and then he started thinking, "Geez, George Mason is seven miles from Washington." He grew up next to New York City.

MS: Oh, yeah.

MA: And he's very comfortable with public transportation.

MS: Yeah, yeah.

MA: And it's way too cold up here.

MS: Yeah.

MA: And it's so far away. And how many girls go to school at Clarkson? And he was like,

MS: That'll do it.

MA: you know, there are more females than men at George Mason. They have a decent engineering school; as soon as he went there, he was like, "Yeah, I think I want to go there." And my heart sort of broke.

MS: Oh.

MA: You know? And they [Clarkson] gave him a lot of money.

Uh huh.

MA: It would have actually been cheaper to go to school here [at Clarkson] than to go to George Mason, which is a public university, but we were out of state and we get no money.

MS: Oh!

MA: It's in Virginia.

MS: Dang.

MA: So, it's costing us 32 grand a year

MS: Yeah.

MA: at George Mason. And here would have been like 20.

Even though it's a private school?

MA: Even though it's a private school.

Oh!

MA: He just finished his freshman year.

Okay.

MA: And he did fail calculus, and he's taking it over the summer.

Uh huh.

MA: And that's been really difficult trying to get through that whole hurdle. Trying to get his school to accept credits from a university up in our area. They're like, "Don't let this happen again because the next time you're going to have to take the course at George Mason."

MS: Right.

MA: They wanted him to come back in the summer and take it there; it was going to cost another 4,000 dollars. And we would have had to pay for an apartment for the summer for him.

MS: Sure.

MA: And he said, no. He got a job up here. He's going to school up here. They said they would accept the credit as like a pass/ fail kind of a thing, but it won't erase his F that he got.

MS: No way!

MA: So, if he'd taken it at George Mason, it would have erased the F.

Right.

MA: But we can't do it.

Yeah.

MA: You know, we just can't afford that. So he's taking it at Montclair State. He's busy this summer. He's taking calculus again, and he's working, and he's hanging out with his friends. And he thinks that he doesn't have to come home, and he thinks he can take my credit card.

MS: (laughter)

MS: Mine [her daughter, Desi] won't be late, she won't spend any money,

(laughter)

MS: she begged me to go to school during the summer so she can get extra credit.

MA: She's really smart.

MS: And flexibility with her

MA: Oh, man. Man.

MS: directors and producers. Oh, I thought, when I hit the jackpot, I said,

MA: I know.

MS: right now, she's a year and a half ahead of herself, she just graduated her sophomore year, added her minor, and is doing three shows, back to back rehearsals.

MA: She's a super high achiever.

MS: Yeah.

MA: None of my kids were like that. I mean, they are smart.

MS: But Moose [Nikki's father] could memorize anything, and she can memorize anything. And she's a mezzo-soprano.

MA: Mmm.

MS: So, they want her in a lot of capacities.

MA: Mmm.

MS: And she's very tall so she plays the mother in most of her stuff.

MA: Wow. See, I don't know what that experience is like.

MS: Actually, there's an equal balance because I'm sitting there going, "Slow down. Knock it off. You're going to drive yourself crazy." But, I don't know, on the other hand, what I'd have to do if I had to....

MA: Where do these kids get motivation? And the one thing that I'm puzzled about is I always told my kids, "You're going to college. You've got to do this. You....," and my parents never did that with me.

MS: Correct. Correct.

MA: But it was just sort of understood, "You're on the college track in high school,

MS: Yeah.

MA: you're smart, you get really good grades, you're going to college." And when we graduated, we were expected to go to college, finish in four years,

Right.

MS: Right.

MA: Get a job and be on our own. I mean, these kids are finishing up, they're moving back home. My oldest daughter just moved

MS: Well,

MA: back in with me, back out, back in, but she's got a ton of stuff at my house.

MS: I have to believe our society is some of it.

MA: But like these kids don't want to grow up and leave? I don't know.

MS: Well, there are not a whole lot of jobs out there, number one. You can't afford it, number two.

MA: Yeah. It's really expensive where we live.

MS: Yeah.

MA: I mean, she would have to not only pay her utility bills, but we pay 600 dollars a month for car insurance. 600 dollars a month.

Wow.

MA: For car insurance. We pay -

MS: Just for her? Oh.

MA: For three cars.

MS: Oh, okay.

MA: Well, we pay 18,000 dollars a year in property taxes.

MS: Yeah.

MA: I mean, it's not a cheap place to live. So it's tough to be on your own.

Yeah.

MA: In our area anyway.

MS: Well, see, things were so much simpler then. I think we don't,

MA: We don't remember.

MS: yeah, it was Beaver Cleaver. There weren't vibrators and (laughter) cell phones, and videos.

MS: I know! (laughter)

MA: Vibrating cell phones.

I knew what you meant.

(group laughter)

MS: You know, everything is different. It's not Beaver Cleaver land. You pay extra to get Beaver Cleaver land,

MA: Yeah.

MS: and that was the industry back then.

MA: I know.

MS: I love where she [Desi] goes to school because there are sidewalks, and there are the parks and the trees. Southern California is a freeway,

MA: Yeah.

MS: if you want to take them to Chuck E. Cheese, it was a three week event. Planning,

MA: Yeah.

MS: making sure what time you were going.

MA: Yeah.

I heard this weekend is insane there because [Interstate] 405 [a major freeway in Southern California] is shut down.

MS: You couldn't (inaudible).

Thank goodness you're not there.

(group laughter)

MS: I couldn't have picked it any better.

MA: Yeah.

I've got one more question for you; you have all been so generous with your time.

MS: We just love talking about ourselves.

MA: (laughter)

Well, I love hearing about it. This has been very interesting. What advice you might give to young women with either an interest in engineering or technical fields? All three of you have had such interesting paths.

MA: Yeah. Very convoluted in some cases. I would just say, "If you're interested in this field, go for it. Don't let anything hold you back. Just pursue it. Don't think about it," and I never thought about it as being a gender kind of a thing.

Uh huh.

MA: Never. It was always like, "This is what I want to do," so you don't think about it

MS: Let me do what I want.

MA: as being, "Well, I'm a female in a man's...." I mean, you will encounter, and and it still happens to me. I'm 57, [and] it still happens to me now; I get an odd look. But it's usually from somebody that's the next generation up from me because,

MS: Certainly not the ones coming up.

MA: no.

MS: Yeah.

MA: Not the ones coming up. I don't think that the stigma for our kids' generation or even the one after that, I don't think the stigma is there anymore. So,

MS: Because, you have to remember when you were growing up,

MA: they go for anything they want.

MS: there was not a black anchorperson, there wasn't a woman,

MA: Right. Right.

MS: It was all white,

MA: Right.

MS: white Anglo-Saxon, and I don't think we put it in perspective, or until later. But I tell my daughter that, there wasn't a cell phone, the computers were as big as this building.

Uh huh.

MA: Yeah.

MS: With the

MA: The punch cards.

MS: punch cards.

MA: Yeah.

MS: And that is as far away from their universe as it could possibly be.

MA: They have so much more available to them now that makes it so much easier to do their job. I mean, just think when we started, we had slide rules.

MS: Uh huh.

MA: That's how different it is.

MS: Literally. Literally.

MA: And now, all of that stuff is so easy for them with computers, that now they can concentrate more on doing more research type [of stuff]. I mean, half of our time here was spent learning the tools. You know, we had a slide rule class.

MS: If you had a syntax error, that botched your whole job from,

MA: I know.

MS: from the day it happened.

MA: And, now, the programs are preloaded

MS: Yeah.

MA: and you just put them on, you put the numbers in, and

MS: Go!

MA: and yeah. Exactly.

MS: Well, I sometimes wonder if we didn't lose something in the,

MA: (Inaudible).

MS: (inaudible) Beaver Cleaver land.

MA: You've got to understand the theory. Don't be afraid to speak up for yourself, and don't be intimidated by the guys. I mean, if you have the least thought that you should be intimidated by—, they don't know—; you probably

MS: (laughter)

MA: know more than them.

MS: More than they do. (laughter)

MA: And they're in the same boat as you. I mean, it's still kind of is a man's field, but there are more and more women in the industry, and I think just go for it, baby.

MS: Yeah.

Well, I'm going to turn this off now, and say, thank you

MS: Turn the vibrator off. (laughter)

very much. Thank you very, very much.