

This is the transcript for two oral history interviews with Elizabeth Fessenden, conducted by Laura Ettinger. The first interview, on pp. 1-47, took place on July 21, 2008, and the second interview, on pp. 48-70, took place on October 16, 2008.

**Interview Subject: Elizabeth Fessenden**

**Interviewer: Laura Ettinger**

**Date of interview: July 21, 2008**

**So today is July 21, 2008, and we are here at Liz Fessenden's camp on Lake Titus in Malone, NY. I'm Laura Ettinger, and I'm here with Liz, who is from the class of 1977, [and] who majored in electrical engineering. The place I would like to start is with growing up in King Ferry, NY. As I was just mentioning a moment ago, I've never been to King Ferry, although I've been to the Finger Lakes region. What was growing up in King Ferry like?**

I grew up on a dairy farm, a farm that had been in the family since 1863. The house that we lived in, which my parents moved into when they married in '54, is about a half a mile from the barns proper, so we weren't surrounded by the milking parlor, but my grandmother and grandfather lived in the house that was right by the barns. I was the oldest of seven, and I do recall working at the farm as a—couldn't have been a toddler—but four years old or five or six, feeding calves, kind of a thing that a dad would say, "Well, I need some help here; come do this." But I also have this recollection—and recollections, I know, are shaped by whatever—is that there came a time when my oldest brother, who is two years younger than I am, apparently was now old enough to do this little chore. And I was told that I was not needed to help [in] the barn anymore. (laughter) So I think that sort of shaped my (laughter) sense of "what should a woman do here?" But so this wasn't—and I have a sister between my brother and me because there were seven of us within ten years—so I certainly became you know the oldest sibling with all those things that came along [with that]. Bossy and helping mom and all that kind of stuff.

As far as growing up, it's rural. We played outside all the time, played with neighborhood kids who, for the most part, were welfare kids or hired men's kids.

I went to an elementary school, which I'm sure we don't need to go into a whole lot. I was a good student. I had nice remarks from my elementary school teachers. I liked all subjects. I especially liked math.

**Even in elementary school?**

Even in elementary school. I read a lot, and I was competitive. I liked sports.

**Again, even in elementary school?**

Yes. Yeah, I remember this reading thing—which now I hardly read books at all, I read a lot of magazines—but it was like, well, in fifth grade or fourth grade they had you keep

track of how many books you read. I needed to be the one that had read the most, (laughter) so I had my little file box with all my books.

**And did you succeed?**

I did. I beat Billy Rogers. (laughter) (Inaudible.) So I don't think there was anything, especially unique about childhood other than a big family. My parents are both Catholic, and we went church. We had a lot of extended family on my father's side, very close, because of the farm. So, I had been asked sometimes, "who influenced you?" or "who was your mentor" or "why did you turn out the way you did?" And my conclusion is it really is that whole family unit. It's the influence of all of that, the fact that I had a lot of younger siblings, the fact that I had a grandmother that would occasionally take one or two siblings off alone and pamper each one of us. She was a great PR person, thought we were all the best. (laughter) She had sisters, so I had great-aunts who babysat us. And then my mom's family was about twenty, twenty-five miles away, so we weren't *as* close with them, but my mother was the oldest of seven. So, her youngest sibling was a brother who is only six years older than—or maybe eight years—older than me. So, Uncle David was a teenager when we were really into his love life and who were your girlfriends. (laughter) So, a lot of family. A lot of family, in all directions. What else would be of interest from that era?

**Well, you said on your [pre-interview] questionnaire that both your parents went to college.**

Hmmm.

**Your father went, you said, to Cornell for agriculture and your mother got a B.S. in nursing. And then, I'm presuming that your mother worked as a nurse, based on what you said, until you were born and then had another full-time job. (laughter)**

Yes, yes. And she never worked another full-time [job]. Although my recollection is she did a lot of nursing. (laughter) She'd come into the family room in the evening with a tray of meds and walk around. Everyone had allergies or something. She just asked me to help her clean out some of her—she's a historian of all sorts, she's got papers everywhere—and she finally said, "Just come through and do something with some of this." So, I went through her medical files, and she had a little tin, three by five file box with—she filled out index cards whenever somebody was sick—and usually it wasn't just one that was sick, two or three got something—but [she listed] what the prescriptions were. She had all the emergency room slips in there; we all had to take worm medicine because Mark ate garbage, and—another one—"we're all on penicillin for ten days; I'm so tired of this." (laughter)

**That's organized! (laughter)**

Yeah, I think she did all of her organizing when we were younger (laughter) and now she sort of—

**--said, "Liz, take over." (laughter) Remembering back, what kinds of messages do you think you got from your parents? I mean, however you want to take that.**

I don't recall true life guidance kind of talks. We certainly were all independent. And that was not *discouraged* in any way. My dad was a good teacher, and also loved to play—but I do recall, in fourth grade, I don't know how many evenings this occurred over, or whether it was one or—he decided to teach me algebra. So I learned algebra in fourth grade, and it was like "oh, this is so much fun." (laughter)

**And could you bring that into school? Could your schoolmates know that you had learned algebra?**

I don't remember doing anything about that. But, so solving things in that sort of way, it was always part of what I did. My dad did a lot of home repair and whatever the projects were, turning the nursery into a kitchen and putting an addition on and putting more bedrooms on and all the things that had to happen as the family grew. And I would always watch him, and when I was probably five, he was doing some electrical work somewhere and—in my bedroom I think, he was actually fixing an outlet—and he was saying you need to be cautious because you could get a shock—he hadn't turned the breaker off; he was doing this hot. And I remember going in the adjacent room just thinking, laying there: "Oh, get it over. Get it over with. I don't want him to die." (laughter) But I always followed his projects, and he would call me "the inspector" because I would come: "There is a gap over there" and "those boards didn't come together" and "why didn't you do it this way?" And he would always say, "Oh, here comes the inspector." (laughter)

**Did he like having you do the inspection? I can see that being a double-edged sword. (laughter)**

Yeah, I don't think he necessarily thought I could enforce anything. (laughter) I think he knew he had the upper hand. (laughter)

**And what about from your mom? What kinds of messages?**

She's a really caring person—my grandmother actually said, "Your mother is a saint." It was more of a childcare thing that I observed with her. She really didn't play that much. (laughter) If Dad could get her to go sledding with us, we would be thrilled, "Look at Mom; she's on a sled!" She didn't like to go outside; she was rarely outside. So it was more caring, concern of—she was a very cautious person. I remember one big fight when I was in high school—I was active in a lot of things so I probably was playing some sport and had a lifeguarding job at the school pool and maybe there was a fieldtrip or something else, and a coach or a teacher or somebody walked into the cafeteria at lunch, and my friends were there and they said, "Your mother has called, and you cannot do such and such. She said you have too many things and you're going to be too tired." (laughter) I was like: It was so embarrassing! And I was so furious! Like, what is she

doing? So, the independence things always have their rough spots. (laughter) But I think I tugged at being independent much sooner than she was ready for.

**And as the oldest child, that was probably tough. By the way, you're speaking to a fellow oldest child.**

Oh, okay. (laughter) Yeah, so she was more the caution and—but in terms of guidance around, what you might do or what you might study or are you doing your homework? They weren't involved.

**You did your own thing?**

Uh huh. Yeah.

**And then what about Southern Cayuga High School? Right?**

Southern Cayuga Central.

**Central, like Potsdam Central. What was that like? What was the emphasis there?**

Well, when I was in fourth grade, three school districts combined, so I had been at King Ferry Central School and there was a Genoa Central School and Sherwood Central School, and when I was there, they combined into Southern Cayuga Central School with a plan to have synergies and a new high school was built, a junior-senior high school. And my class moved in there in January of seventh grade. So all of a sudden we had all these new classmates from these other two school districts. So that was an adapting social kind of thing. And then, I do know that I had at least one, if not two, really good math teachers and one high school math teacher got us connected with the BOCES IBM punch card computers that were available. So it must've been a subset of a math class where we did some after school activity and we did some Fortran programming, and we also had a little Olivetti computer there at the high school—and he taught certain concepts. And I remember, one of the tasks was build a do loop—and print the time. So teach this computer to tell time, so all you had to do was make a do loop and just add more counts for it to do whatever you were—you were just telling it to do nothing. But I do remember that, and so I became very interested in computers, as a variation of the math. And I had good science teachers, and I was a good student. But when I was a senior, I was taking the last of the Regents [exams]. I had never gotten a 100 on a Regents and I said, "I have to get a 100 before I get out of here," and so my goal was to get a 100 on physics. And I did. (laughter) All right!

**I did it! (laughter)**

I did it. And really there was not a lot of guidance from the school as to what I was going to do. I ended up getting a National Merit Scholarship. And I was aware of that, I guess. Time schedules on how you get into college are so different now than they were. But I was aware that at some point, I had to actually mark down some things that I would not

have otherwise been thinking about. So I had to say if I get this, what school would I—because some of them were sponsored by schools and some of them weren't. So I ended up, at that point, checking Clarkson, which I barely knew of.

**And would this have been your junior year?**

To me, I'm thinking that it was fall of senior year, but that seems like it was too late in the process. But maybe back then maybe things weren't so strung out. So it either was—certainly the SAT—[I] was a spring junior when I knew that I was a [Merit] finalist and then a semifinalist, but it may have been sometime over the summer or that I had to make some decisions about checking some boxes. And I knew I didn't want to go to Cornell because it was too close to home.

**Do you remember which other schools you checked?**

That's the only other one I remember checking for that, but I did apply to—and did not get accepted—to Dartmouth. And I don't know if I applied anywhere else.

**And do you remember why you checked the Clarkson box?**

Well, because I knew that I was into this computer engineering idea. Well actually, at first I thought I loved programming—once I started programming, I thought, “oh, I just love this,” and then there would be all these ads I would see on television to become a computer programmer in six weeks and I thought, “well, I've got to be something besides a programmer. (laughter) This doesn't sound challenging enough.” (laughter)

**Six weeks, four years, right. (laughter)**

So somehow I got into engineering. I'm hoping that there was somebody in the school system that mentioned it to me, but I really don't recall a lot of guidance or a lot of teacher input into what you might be with these interests that you have. So at some point in that senior year I did a campus visit, by myself, drove—brought a high school friend who was not interested in Clarkson, but I said, “Just pretend you are so that they will put you up.” We didn't know it was probably a lot easier than that, but... (laughter) Because my parents weren't going to drive me. I went and did my own checking out of—and I never went to Dartmouth, just did fill out the application for that and didn't see—it wasn't a big deal to make the decision. And then when I was at Clarkson—I know we may not be ready to move to that yet—but—

**We can go back and forth; it doesn't matter.**

Well, the computer engineering was part of the electrical engineering, ECE [Electrical and Computer Engineering]. I think it's still called the same thing. So that seemed okay to me, and then in the freshman year, whether you're going to be an electrical with controls or an electrical with a computer, everybody's taking the same thing, but you got a sense of who was headed to which more specific area. And I thought, “Ooooh, these

people that are going into computer engineering are really, really different. I'm not sure I fit that." (laughter) So I decided to be more general in electrical engineering and still took a few computer courses, a few power courses, a few control courses, but didn't specialize in the computer engineering. So I made that decision, you know, certainly before my sophomore—

**Early—**

Yeah.

**So, going back for a moment, there were a couple of things that I wanted to know about. One was: do you remember that visit to Clarkson with your friend who pretended—?**

I remember a little bit about it. I remember going to the bars. (laughter) I don't remember anything about the admissions interview or the tour. (laughter) But we stayed on campus and we slept in—well, this is interesting—because I must have slept in Holcroft since that would've been the only place that there were women students at the time. So we must have been on a floor with somebody, so that would've been like the Fall of '76. I have no idea who my hosts were.

**Or Fall of '72 maybe?**

Oh, yes, yes. Sorry, '72, before I graduated. Yeah, because I graduated in '73, so it must've been Fall of '72. So I don't know who those people may have been or whether I connected with this woman that I eventually did ride back and forth with now and then that was three years older than me. Maybe we did. Maybe this Libby [Mary Elizabeth "Libby" Perkins] took us downtown (laughter from Laura) and I think we were in—if I remember this (laughter)—well, what was probably then the Whiskey One, and somebody began hitting on my friend, Joan Grover, and she got very, very, very uncomfortable. And whoever our host was—and it may have been Libby—stepped in and told these guys, "Hands off!"<sup>1</sup> (laughter)

**Where—**

That's really all I remember. I really don't remember how long did we stay.

**But the Whiskey One did it? (laughter) And where is the Whiskey One now? Is it somewhere on Market Street?**

Yes, it would be closer to the corner. God, I don't know if anything is still.... (laughter)

**Right, right.**

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<sup>1</sup> When reviewing this transcript, Fessenden recalled that it was Libby's boyfriend, Jim (later her husband, while they were still students), who stepped in to halt the unwelcome advances.

Well, if you were looking at Weston's bookstore, it would have been to the right of that.

**Okay.**

Closer down toward the corner to what at one time was Morgan's or Dew Drop Up or Dew Drop Down.

**Going back to your high school experiences a little more—you said, much earlier, that you were involved in all sorts of things in high school. Can you say a little more about what those things were?**

Sure, and it was mostly sports. Which then created a different environment when I came to Clarkson, and there were no women's sports. But I played basketball and volleyball and softball and field hockey. I was in, what they called, I don't even know what it really was. It was called the Leadership Club, but it was out of the gym class, and it was the gym teachers selecting—I don't remember what the process was, but there was some selection criteria. And then when you went to gym class, you got to wear this very special little outfit and you got to help lead the classes. And we probably did some other extracurricular, helping younger classes or some such thing. This little blue jumpsuit with The Leaders' Club or Leaders—something like that.

**To make you stand out.**

Yeah, to make us stand out. So most of my activity was sports related. I don't believe I ever got involved in class politics or student council. I do remember in junior year, where the classes typically have junior proms, there was some class discussion. I don't know exactly what the genesis was, but there was a faction that I belonged to that said "what a waste of money." A lot of work for a junior prom—why would we have a junior prom? And so it ended up coming to a class vote and our class never had a junior prom, and there were some girls from that class that were so mad at me (laughter) for being one of the people that...And then to top it all off—most people don't know this—I got invited to another school district junior prom with a guy who turned out to be king. (laughter)

**So you went? (laughter)**

I went! (laughter)

**That's great. But you had to keep that on the sly. (laughter)**

Yeah, mostly sports. And then I always had some kind of part-time job, whether it was babysitting or cleaning houses or lifeguarding or teaching swimming lessons.

**So, constantly busy, it sounds like.**

Uh huh.

**And—just glancing at my sheet here—one other thing that I was curious about with your siblings—we can come back to this too—did any of them pursue engineering or the sciences?**

My brother, Mark, who's five years younger than I am, ended up going to Canton Tech—or ATC it was called then [now called SUNY Canton]. And he got an electrical technician degree. And he can fix anything, but he does do electrical work. He's a maintenance guy for a power generating company now. And that's as close as—to me as any of them.

**And did any of your friends from high school go into engineering?**

I don't think so. There were two guys from my class that went to Clarkson, and one did graduate in accounting with me. And the other guy—who I think was probably in engineering—dropped out after one year.

**Interesting. So you were doing this on your own?**

Uh huh.

**So, turning to Clarkson and your first year there, where you were in Holcroft, right?**

Yes.

**What do you remember about your first impressions once you actually got to Clarkson, if you remember that?**

Well, first impressions...I don't know if I can....

**Well that do you remember about your first year?**

Well, I certainly remember a lot about the dorm, Holcroft, and that it was made clear to us that there were forty women in the class and that half of them had been assigned to Moore House and the other half of us fit into Holcroft with a few of the sophomores or—I think that there may have even been some juniors—that still chose to live in Holcroft. And we had some kind of orientation meeting, and it had to have been very early, maybe the first night, and I think we were probably on the first floor. My room was on the third floor. And—no, it must've been on the second floor because I remember—so we must have all been sitting. It was at a fairly large lobby area on the second floor and then the little stairway that went up to the third floor—so at the top of that big staircase, we must have been meeting in there. There was a—I don't think they called them a house mother—but there was somebody who was in charge of us, and her room was downstairs, right as you came in the front door. Mary something...two-part name. But we were getting oriented, and then there were some of the upperclassman that were there, and of course classes weren't going to start for three or four more days. Val [Barlow] Jerabeck



was one of them, Gayle somebody was another, and they started telling us how much they loved it, and I was like, “Wow! They really must. They came back three days early and classes aren’t even starting.” Now I remember Val coming down being carried on a guy’s shoulders, coming down that little stairway (laughter) meeting us—she’s laughing. I’m like, “Wow, they really have fun here!” So, it was that impression, and then we also—the whole—the specialness of Holcroft was imputed to us, and there always was sort of a rivalry and not a lot of crossing and mixing of the women in our class that were in Moore House and the ones that were in Holcroft. In the phys ed classes, we’d kind of team up against each other, and (laughter)—

**Did you have any choice as to whether you would be in Holcroft or Moore House?**

I don’t remember. I think that was all just random. And I was in a triple up in the—if you look at the front of Holcroft from the gym side—upper right hand room, with Diane DiFrancesco and Melissa (Poulin) Gydesen [who married a classmate, Mark Gydesen] were my two roommates. There was one set of bunks and then one twin bed somewhere else. So it was a fairly large room. Holcroft had its wine and cheese party early on in that freshman year. That was not a good—well that was good in that I realized, “you can drink way too much.” (laughter) And this is when you wake up in the morning with everyone standing around your bed going, “Oh, do you remember what you did last night?” (laughter) And my friend, Kate Thompson, roomed with Carolyn Wolfe, and these are the two women that I still stay in touch with. And they were kitty-corner across the hall, in a very narrow little room. We were able to paint our rooms whatever color we wanted; theirs was painted Beach Boy blue, and they played Beach Boys music, very loudly all the time. We ended up—Holcroft door kind of went out and looked at Ross, and so the guys from Ross—they were the ones that were over in Holcroft the most. So we all had boyfriends in Ross. (laughter) And then, as far as classes go, (laughter) I don’t remember a lot about that.

**Uh huh. (laughter)**

More of the social. I remember playing tag football with people. But somewhere—well, I guess it had to be that fall semester—I guessed I realized I wouldn’t have the sports activity and so I decided to run for class senator. And part of my written platform that was in *The Integrator* [Clarkson’s newspaper] did say, I never did any student government because I did lots of sports; there’s no sports for me to do here so I want to—this is the way I want to get involved.

**I read that. (laughter)**

Oh, did you?

**I read that.**

Oh okay. (laughter)

**And I saw that you were easily elected senator.**

Oh okay, so (inaudible).

**This was your freshman year, right?**

Right.

**And do you remember what you did as a senator?**

Not really, and maybe was that just for freshman year because then I got the sports thing going, so...I sort of could envision the formality of the meetings, but as far as any specific issues that we were dealing with, I have no recollection.

**And so, in your sophomore year, that's when you got involved with sports?**

Well, I remember being at home. My guess would be that when I finished my freshman year, and I did not have a professional job, I ended up being at home and teaching swimming lessons, and I was so over living at home at that point. I was really depressed that summer. Like, "ah, man, get me out of here," and parents, the same old friends and ugh I was—so my guess is—it was during that summer that I wrote a letter to Dean [A. George] Davis citing Title IX (laughter) and said, "I think you need to do something." And I got a phone call from him.

**Wow.**

So I remember the phone call because I remember taking it up in the alcove of our house, and my only recollection is that he said he would do something. (laughter) And so, out of that we had a basketball team and a volleyball team. I think those were the two all-women's sports that were started, probably in my sophomore year.

**And so you played those all three—the sophomore, junior, and senior year? I know you were gone for a semester—**

Right, I was gone for a semester. Well certainly sophomore and that—whatever part junior year I could. I lived off-campus my senior year, so I don't really remember.

**O.K. And tell me something about those two teams. So these were two new teams then—**

Uh huh.

**What kind of support did Clarkson give the teams?**

Uh huh. Well, certainly they started them, so whatever—I mean, a lot of behind the scenes things now that I understand need to take place from the trustees work over the

years, but somehow they got a coach of these teams. And [they] had to get into a schedule. We were playing other colleges. It wasn't just intramurals. I do remember, and I don't know which team it was that this happened to, but the uniforms had been ordered, and instead of saying "CCT" [Clarkson College of Technology], that there had been a mistake and it said "CTC." And the fix, which always bugged me—I was always like, "why didn't they just—why couldn't somebody have just gotten new shirts that were correct?"—was to make the "T" really big, they just put more paint or whatever over it. (laughter) So, I always remember that. Like, that wasn't a lot of support for them not to get us the right name on the shirts (laughter), but they were—I remember having a basketball game against the faculty.

**So it would have been, obviously, mostly male faculty.**

Yes, the male faculty, uh huh. And I'm not very tall, and I wasn't a good basketball player either, but I played basketball, and I remember in that faculty game—it was faculty and staff and the financial aid director is Don Mills—very tall, lanky. And I went to take a shot and, of course, he's going to block you, but it was the first time—this proves I was not a good basketball player—but I actually went to do it. He was there, so I went around and did it another way, and it faked him out! And I was like, "that's what a fake is!" (laughter) And then the next time I came down the court he—I guess he probably ended up blocking—he said, "I'll let you shoot this one. You did so well the last time." (laughter) So he let me get a layup. (laughter) So, I remember playing. I don't really remember who the coaches were. Oh! Norm Smalling was the coach. Norm Smalling was the coach, and he was the Dean of Students. And he was the coach probably of the basketball, and I don't remember who the volleyball coach is. I'm thinking it was a woman, but I don't remember.

**And what do you remember about playing—besides the fact that faculty/staff-student game? I presume you did it because you had been so involved in sports in high school, and clearly you were looking for that in college. But what did playing sports in college give to you?**

I don't think it was probably anything more than some social group and some exercise and something to fill in time on my schedule. I was used to doing one thing after another. Because I recall very little about how demanding was it, how far away did we travel, did I have to miss class. I don't remember any of that.

**Were many of your friends from these teams?**

I think Kate [Thompson] did play. And DD [Diane DiFrancesco] played. Probably if I was looking at a yearbook I would be able to trigger a few more memories about who they were. Because there would have been upperclassmen too that played.

**That's alright. I know you were also involved in a number of other organizations on campus. SWE [Society of Women Engineers] and the engineering honors society and IEEE [Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers]....**

Oh yeah.

**Do remember much of anything about your role in any of those?**

I think in SWE—SWE, I was probably the most active of those three you named. Tau Beta Pi, I think by the time you get in and it's sort of late, and the whole focus is just inducting the next class. There isn't a lot that goes on, and IEEE, I pretty much avoided. Well, in fact, with Eta Kappa Nu—is the honorary, so I know I was inducted into that or whatever that was, but the actual IEEE I don't think I belonged to until later.

**Ah.**

When I still lived in the North Country. Then I began to have some more appreciation of the professionalism that it could bring. And I think that I joined the whatever they call it—the experienced professional—

**The professional, right. And may I ask, why did you avoid it in college?**

I just didn't connect with a lot of the electrical engineers. (laughter) Although I was quite close with some of the professors. You know, it was a good group of professors: [Rangaswamy] Mukundan and [M.S.A.A.] Hammam and [Hank] Domingos. So, I don't know. I just think, from early on, as much as I knew I wanted to do engineering and I liked this math-science base, I knew I was not going to be an engineer for my whole career. So I started taking management courses whenever I had an elective option. I started work on my MBA at night school, senior week. So, I didn't feel compelled to stick with those truly hard engineering organizations. I put together like an electrical engineering purge, and I was never so happy to throw away my Fortran book (laughter) when I graduated. So I think I was involved with SWE, with some of the conventions. I probably get some of this a little muddled, because then when I came back and I did that year and a half as Assistant Dean of Student Life, I was the advisor to that group. And can more easily remember those conferences that I went to as an advisor with the student group, rather than going to any as a student myself.

**Do you remember why you joined SWE?**

I guess you could just say, in general, I'm a joiner. (laughter) But there was probably some campaign where somebody came and made a nice pitch to us, sitting there in Holcroft, and it sounded like the thing to do. They probably told us about the fun events they did and that they had speakers.

**And, just going back for a moment, to the classes—which I understand what you are saying from your freshman year, you don't remember as much, and I fully understand that—but you were just naming a whole bunch of professors. I know from reading one of the Clarkson press releases about you that you graduated with**

**high honors from Clarkson, and you obviously did well there. What do you remember about professors and relationships with professors?**

All my recollections are positive. And anticipating this interview, I was thinking, “well, was there anything particular about being a *woman* in these engineering classes that one way or the other, positive or negative?” I certainly don’t think there was any special treatment. I think you do have the advantage when you are one or one of two women in a class (laughter) of twenty or thirty, that you do get more noticed. I think all I had to do was make an indication that I was about to raise my hand, and I would be called on. But, for me, I don’t remember anything that I took as being, as I say, positive discrimination or negative discrimination. And I get asked this a lot about the whole professional side, and all I can say to people is “I don’t know what it is like to be a man, so (laughter) all I experienced is what it was to be a woman.” And I didn’t see things—I never took things—sometimes in the work world I would interpret things as “well that’s because I’m junior or just out of school or…” but never because I was a woman. But maybe much later in my career I began to notice more of the subtle things, but early on, I didn’t feel any disadvantage to being a woman, in the classroom, at Clarkson, or in the work world.

**And that—sticking just with Clarkson--that was both by peers, your age peers, and the faculty.**

Uh huh.

**And were you typically the only woman in the class? Or one of two?**

I was not the only electrical engineering female student. Sandy Hunsperger was an EE. And I think maybe one other—Carol [Koehler].

And I think that there was some change—people change majors. So maybe there were more to start with or fewer. But definitely Sandy Hunsperger. So then depending on, like when you went into specialty—I think in my power classes, I probably was the only woman.

**Uh huh. I know at Clarkson now there is all this emphasis on teamwork and team projects. What was that like back in the 70s?**

You had a lab partner, and so you worked on that in the lab, as well as the preparation with a team—with one other person or two other people. But otherwise I don’t recall a whole lot of teamwork or even studying together.

**I was just wondering how that worked at that time, and if being a woman in that situation would make any difference.**

Right, right.

**But it sounds like it wasn’t there. It was more do your own thing kind of focus.**

Maybe the guys were off doing their thing. (laughter)

**Right, as you said earlier, your only experience was being a woman there. (laughter) And what about housing? So you were at Wilson, right, in your sophomore and part of your junior year?**

Right, right.

**So was that a single-sex floor?**

No, it was a coed floor.

**Coed floor.**

Uh huh. Coed floor. I think our suite—which in the sophomore year was—DD and I were in one room and Kate and Carolyn were in the other. And then in my first semester junior [year], Carolyn and I were still in Wilson with new people as suitemates—I think probably underclassmen. And I think DD and Kate went to Woodstock. And probably in with two other people. They wanted to do the apartment. But it was a coed floor. I know in the room right beside us was a double E that was a classmate of mine. Yeah, probably of that dorm we were the—well, may not have been the only coed floor. I think they probably had a suite of women on every floor.

**And do you remember what the transition was like from Holcroft, [which was] single-sex, to Wilson?**

Probably liked it better. (laughter) Yeah, I think certainly getting out of a triple and a gang bathroom and there were definitely advantages to moving to Wilson.

**And—[I] just thought of two different directions to go in—I think I will stick with the one we're in right now, which is social life at Clarkson. You were saying that in your first year, your freshman year, that Holcroft women—all had Ross boyfriends, that sort of thing. (laughter) Geographic convenience there. What else would you say about the social life at Clarkson? And I'm talking [about] both friendships and romantic relationships.**

I didn't join a sorority, so that's sort of a whole separate thing. There were women from my class, both the Holcroft freshmen women and women that did get into the whole sorority thing, which I think presented a lot of social opportunity and planned events. On campus, there was a Rathskeller, which I know that I went to on and off. I think there was no lack of dating opportunity. And there was a lot of studying. (laughter) Certainly, I remember in my freshman year, one time—well, my desk must have been situated at some little angle of the room where my back would be to the hallway or part of my back to the hallway. And I studied. I knew how to study, and I liked to be prepared in advance. If I had a test the following week I was starting that week so that if something else came

up, and I remember somebody else saying, “Did you know that when those guys were over visiting Kate and Carolyn that they were making fun of you studying? They were blowing cigar smoke at you.” (laughter) No, I was just doing my thing.

**I was going to say, thinking I probably know the answer, but did you care about perception? So you clearly, as a freshman anyway, had a reputation as a good student who paid a lot of attention to your studies, and— Did that matter to you?**

Well, I certainly would never—I mean, I think I do care what people think of me, but I would not consider thinking me to be a studier to be a negative. (laughter)

**And what about, in terms of female friendships on campus, given that the numbers were so small. I have talked to current students about this, and you probably have too. How did that work out?**

Just thinking back, who you kind of ended up rooming with, those were probably the closest friendships and then lots of—well not lots of—women would fall under the acquaintance role, just as many men would. I don’t have a need to have a lot of close friends. I prefer to be close with a few, and that just acquaintance thing works well for me. (laughter)

**Yup, yup. And were there many platonic—I’m not only talking about you, but—platonic friendships between men and women?**

Yes, yes.

**And would those have been developed in class or—**

In class or in the dorms. Uh huh. I think probably most of those, just in my experience and my roommates’ experiences, most of those that are platonic at one point might have tested the other aspect of it.

**Uh huh. Another thing we were talking about earlier was, in your junior year—I know you spent a semester in Europe—can you say a little bit more about that and how you decided to do that?**

I think I had an interest in travelling. From a long ways, I think even as freshman we joked about “well, where are we going to go on Spring Break? When we’re—let’s go to Jamaica”—I wanted to get out and see other things. But somewhere prior to that semester, I had planned, because I had overloaded so I could take this semester off—

**Right, you didn’t take classes in Europe?**

Right. There were no—yeah, I took a semester away from school. No tuition. No classes. (laughter) And so I must’ve planned that for a while. And I also arranged to have a summer job that started earlier than a typical summer job because I wanted to have work

to come back to. I worked at Corning Glass that summer and I think I started work in April.

**And was Clarkson supportive of letting you do this? I don't know if this was typical of that time.**

Right. It probably wasn't typical. And whether I—as I was deciding what classes to take as overloads each semester, I'm sure I was following some regimen so I knew that I was getting the ones out of the way. I do remember having the discussion with, again, Don Mills, the financial aid director, probably as I was preparing to finish that fall semester and trying to get things lined up for the next fall coming back, how much tuition aid I could have. And I do remember him saying, "Well, you're saving me some because you won't be here next semester, so I'll give you another thousand." (laughter)

**And what do you remember about your time traveling around Europe that semester? Did you do it by yourself?**

No, I travelled with a friend.

**A friend from Clarkson?**

No, not a college friend. Somebody I met in college, but not a college student. It was a good experience. Six weeks in Europe and, let's see, Germany, France, Italy, Austria. Three weeks in Italy. I remember that half of it was in Italy.

**Had you ever been to Europe before?**

No.

**Had you ever been on a plane before?**

Yes, I would've been on a plane. Uh huh.

**So six weeks travelling. And so then you came back and did a summer job and, if I'm remembering correctly, had a professional summer job after your sophomore year?**

Yes.

**Junior year—after your junior year, and then you worked as an engineer also during your senior year. So I'm interested in all of those ambitious (laughter) things that you did, working at all the local places. So the first one was Alcoa, right?**

Yeah, the first one was Alcoa, and that had to have been probably a SWE connection. Ed Misiaszek was the advisor to SWE at the time and he was very well connected to the corporate world, and I recall—I don't know whether this guy came to—probably didn't



come to a SWE meeting, but Misiaszek must have directed certain of us to have an interview with him. There was this group interview, one-on-one, and I think it was Les Drapela who was the Chief Electrical Engineer. At that time, Alcoa was very organized, very functionally [organized]. So, out of Pittsburgh, here's the Chief Electrical Engineer, they must have been on a push—as they still are—(laughter) to get more women into engineering. And probably because Massena Operations had a connection with Clarkson, he came to campus, interviewed people. I don't remember—as I say, there weren't that many electrical engineers, whether he was interviewing other engineers also, whether anyone was hired and went to a different location, but I was hired for a job in Massena, after my sophomore year. So that was summer of '75, and I didn't have a car, so I had to arrange housing in Potsdam and then just somehow figured out how to cover those twenty miles. (laughter) So folks at Alcoa must have told me who other full-time employees were that lived in Potsdam, and I ended up—some of the time—riding with somebody who actually lived right in a house on Elm Street, right beside the place that I was renting. But I started work whatever the designated date was; it was probably in May. I always wanted to start getting the paychecks sooner rather than later, and the place that I had arranged to live for the summer was a June 1 rental, and that was with two Clarkson classmates of mine. That had been Moore House girls. And it was either the place they were going to have into the fall semester or it was a sublet on this third floor in this house on Elm Street. It was so hot. I remember there was no air conditioning. It was a hot summer. I remember getting into the shower, and then we had a little window fan, and—it was practically an attic where we lived, and had the fan blowing in. I'm just standing there naked with the water dripping, like we've got to cool down somehow! (laughter) But somebody that I carpooled with at least some of the time was in the house right beside, and my job was on a construction site for the current West Plant, smelting plant at the time—the pot line. It was a great experience. It opened my eyes to what work would really be like, so different from what the class work was like. I remember being very excited and talking about it probably to potential freshmen at some orientation or some such thing or freshmen at a SWE organization in that fall talking about my job. I really liked it. Certainly got a taste of what it's like to not just be in a classroom with a ratio of one to 25, (laughter) but to be on a construction site with a ratio of maybe one to 500.

**And what was the difference there, if there was any difference?**

Well, it was a little rougher at the construction site. I mean, there were more—there was the whistling and the—and I guess some of that happened around the Clarkson campus as you walked from Holcroft to go over into the cafeteria. Some of that whistling would occur. That doesn't happen anymore at all, does it? Totally gone.

**I don't know.**

Totally gone. (laughter)

**You'd have to ask the students. (laughter) My perspective and their perspective would be different.**

Yeah, all of that stuff is gone. I remember saying to somebody, “Nobody ever tells you you look good anymore.” The only people that ever say anything and make any passes at me are the homeless people in Richmond that don’t know any better. (laughter)

**Right, it’s been written off as “can’t do that.” (laughter)**

Can’t do that. Yeah, so there definitely was a lot of—kind of that whatever, tension in the air. But I worked with people then that are still my friends from Alcoa. And it was just really fun. We were doing a check out of equipment, so getting the systems to run and learning all about—back then, there weren’t programmable controllers even. There were electro-mechanical programmers and relays, and I got my hands into wiring and understanding blueprints. And it was just a lot of fun.

**That’s great. And we’re already talking about the summer after your junior year—**

Right, so the summer of ’76. Whether companies were on—must’ve been on campus interviewing for summer jobs during my fall semester. And I lined up a job in Corning, NY, which is the one that started when I got back from Europe, so some time in April. It was not as rewarding. I did some engineering or electrical something or other, but I did a lot of be the fill-in person in the test lab where you put the Corelle bowl on the test and you push the button and it goes up twenty feet, and you drop it and you count how many pieces it broke into. (laughter) That was at the Corelleware plant, and again, I learned a lot about the workplace and I guess I would call it—you would call it now—sexual harassment. But I probably didn’t at the time. (laughter)

**I see from what you’re saying you evaluate it differently now than you did then.**

Yes.

**To what extent did it bug you then? Clearly it bugs you now thinking about it, but to what extent did it bug you then?**

Well, I guess probably that particular summer—because I was—I mean, I had a boyfriend, so I was not interested in anything romantic, particularly with some men who clearly should not have been approaching me. (laughter) It was a little creepy. I had to figure out “whew, how do I steer clear of these guys?” after I realized what their intentions were.

**And do you remember how you did that? How you steered clear?**

Yeah, well (laughter)—after whatever the circumstances were, oh, when he says, “Do you want to go to lunch?” I now say “no.” When he says, “Well, why don’t you ride with me when we go to this other plant that’s thirty miles away?” “No!” (laughter)

**So you learned the rules, I guess, about how to operate in that. So that sounds like it was a lot worse than your experience the summer before at Alcoa. Or am I incorrect in that?**

No, you're correct. You're correct.

**And then your senior year, you were at GM during the year?**

Yes.

**While you were also doing classes full-time?**

Yes.

**How'd you do that?**

I worked in the evenings, late afternoon and into the evening. Probably two days a week, maybe four hours from four to eight or something like that. So I would drive to GM, and I was doing engineering work. Primarily, reprogramming programmable controllers at the time for whatever their presses were. But some of what I was assigned—and of course, the guy who was assigning the work then left at five o'clock.

**And you were there by yourself.**

I was there by myself, and I like to be busy. And I remember going—well, not going to—but his boss, [who] was sort of the engineering manager, would check in with me every now and then, “How are things going?” And I said, “I need more work, and whatever you assigned to me is not challenging enough.” And so Dave Fayette was the guy I was working directly for, and everyone called him “Pops,” and boy, Pops once—oh I get these names mixed up. Dave Fayette might have been the other boss and then Pops was the guy I worked for. But somehow, when the word got back, you need to give her more to do, he was just (laughter)—I think he was angry, and boy, he loaded me up then. But that was good. I did some in-office work, and I got to go out on the floor and do some things with the presses. So, actually by the time I was ready to take on a full-time job, I had experience with three big companies.

**Was that typical during your era at Clarkson, do you know?**

(laughter) I don't know. I really don't know.

**I know that [with Clarkson] students today, there's so much emphasis on the co-op and everything, but I wasn't sure if—**

Well, certainly a job after your sophomore year in your profession was unusual. That was unusual.

**I know you were mentioning the SWE connection there. Do you think that was because you had a high GPA? I mean—and the SWE connection?**

I think it might have been an interest on the part of many companies, which I know was for sure true with Alcoa, that they needed to bring women into the workforce.

**Interesting. Going back to other kinds of jobs, you answered on your pre-interview questionnaire [that] you worked a number of jobs during college too. You said, food service, and admissions, and lifeguarding, SUNY pool for Clarkson students. And were you doing all three of those jobs throughout your time there? (laughter)**

I don't know. I know I worked from the beginning. That was part of my way—I had to earn money to be there. So, not having a job was not an option, really. So food service, I'm pretty sure I didn't—I may have, at one time done, or started doing, generic food service with the regular masses and the dishes, and I remember all that. And then maybe got more selective and maybe did just special events. I remember doing work at the President's house and got to know Bob Plane through that. In fact, I was over there at the President's house on Pierrepont [Avenue] when Plane was inaugurated, which was the inauguration where one or two people dropped dead.

**Oh, yes, I've read about that.**

So the word comes back to all of us, scurrying around to get the food set up for this celebration, that there is going to be a little damper on this.

**I've read about that in *A Clarkson Mosaic*. And admissions, how did you get involved in that?**

Tour guide. I can think of two things associated with admissions. The admissions office used students in recruiting efforts, like to go to career nights at schools. And maybe they came and used SWE people. But I do remember being downstate somewhere, in Albany, [and] the part I remember, getting a speeding ticket on the way home. (laughter) That's the part I remember. I was 20. That year I got two speeding tickets. And the next time I got two speeding tickets was when I was 50. (laughter)

**That's a pretty good record! That's a very good record. (laughter) Wow.**

So there would have been some of that. At least that one event off at some high school event, talking about Clarkson at some kind of career fair. And then the tour guide. So I think probably if you were a work-study student, they probably told you, "Here are the jobs."

**Right. "Here are the options."**

Yeah, so that was admissions. The same with lifeguarding because I was a certified lifeguard. And food service, didn't take much skill there. (laughter)

**You sound like you were just incredibly busy. (laughter) I'm sure as I find out more about you more recently, I'm going to hear the same thing based on everything you said. (laughter) But I know you've been incredibly involved at Clarkson, obviously, since you graduated. To what extent do you evaluate your time at Clarkson differently now than you think you did then?**

I don't know that I actually evaluate it any differently. And I am not a person to have regrets or say "I should have" or "I wish I had," so I often—I look at the past as, "Well that's what it was and it's only from this second on that I can do anything about it." It was a positive experience for me. I really don't remember anything negative out of it. I got these wonderful job opportunities as an undergrad, and for me, [it] was a good foundation for what I did later. Would someplace else have been different? Probably. Would it have been better? I don't know. Would it have been worse? I don't know.

**Like being a woman, right? You had one college experience and it was at Clarkson, right? (laughter) So, you'd had these three different professional experiences by the time you graduated. How did you choose Alcoa, or how did Alcoa choose you? Or how did that happen?**

When I graduated—well actually, I was involved with somebody in the North Country, so I knew I was going to stay in the North Country. And so my options really were—I talked to GM, Reynolds, Alcoa, and Corning about their Corning plant. Corning didn't have any—I mean, it's a really small plant in Canton, so there wasn't really a job opportunity there. I think I was offered a job at least one other of the Massena plants, either Reynolds or GM. And I remember distinctly saying to whoever interviewed me at Reynolds that I wasn't really that crazy about going to work at a place that had that much stuff coming out of their stacks. They had a different treatment system than Alcoa did. And also in that interview, at the plant site, whoever interviewed me asked me about—he asked me something he shouldn't have asked me—about my intentions about having children and about how long was I going to work and actually kind of twisted around in his chair and pointed at a photograph of his family on the credenza, and "Well, aren't you going to do this?" I was just like, "Man, I'm not coming to"—I mean, Alcoa has its problems, but—which after being there for thirty years I know a lot about (laughter) —they at least didn't do anything like that. (laughter)

**Right, right. (laughter) I can see why that might get checked off your list. Actually going—I forgot to ask this when we were talking about GM because you were mentioning, when talking about Alcoa and then Corning, your experience as a woman in those places. When you were at GM, did you experience similar things?**

Hmm.

**I mean, it would have been over a longer period of time you were there.**

Right.

**But for shorter segments of time, right?**

Yes, yes. No, I don't remember anything there that—I think I spent a lot of the time in this office area by myself, programming. And I certainly remember some of the guys that I worked with that I liked a lot—John Evans and Doug Premo. I don't remember anything that was untoward.

**I thought about that because I was thinking about the decision that you had to make around graduation about where you were going to go, and obviously Reynolds was eliminated for several reasons.**

Right. And as I said, I'm not totally clear as to whether GM had openings. I'm thinking that that wasn't a possibility for some reason, but I'm not quite sure.

**So, when did you start at the job at Alcoa, the full-time job?**

The full-time job. May 27<sup>th</sup>. (laughter)

**Okay, that's a good memory!**

There was something about—it was a strike year, and I had to be there X days before the possible strike. So I started work the day after graduation or very soon. And then within two days went to work with my sleeping bag and I think the strike was averted, but we were there like maybe one full day around the clock or something. So it was something like that. May 20<sup>th</sup>. May 27<sup>th</sup>. One of those days.

**Welcome to the world of full-time work. (laughter)**

Yes. Exactly and then I was taking night classes for my MBA also.

**When did—too many questions just came into my head at once. When did you know you were going to do that, the MBA? I mean, you said from the beginning or from early on, you weren't going to spend your life doing pure engineering.**

Right, so all of that—I knew what the core courses were. I was taking those as my electives, but yeah, that makes it seem like I knew I was going to be in the North Country, which I didn't.

**Right. Although, presumably those would have been core courses for an MBA elsewhere?**

Anywhere, yes, yes. So somewhere along the line, I just decided that that would be the way to do it.

**So you were working full-time at Alcoa and then taking the night classes?**

Uh huh. For four years, two classes every semester. Uh huh. And studying at lunchtime.

**That sounds exhausting! (laughter)**

Yea, thank goodness you just start doing that because you don't know anything different.

**Right, and you're in your twenties, early twenties. (laughter) Yeah, right. And so, what were you actually doing in that first full-time job at Alcoa?**

I was a plant engineer, which you could be a mechanical or electrical engineer, and be a plant engineer. The construction site that I had worked on two years before had been commissioned shortly after that summer job I had. So, it was up and running, and I was assigned accountability to be the electrical engineer for the same area that I had worked on during checkout. And it was—well, it made me realize they needed help. When I walked into some of these control rooms, with the blueprints plastered on the wall because if you go in to try to figure out where a problem is, that's all up there, and they were the same ones with my handwriting on them from two years ago! (laughter)

**That's a problem. (laughter)**

And these were markups of things that had been changed and hadn't been put back on the original. Oh, things were done so differently then. (laughter) You had to mark it up, put it in the mail, it went to the drafting room, they got out the—I guess it would be called sepia—Mylar, whatever. You know, they erased with a pencil and drew the new lines and then you got back the new set of prints and you plastered the new ones up. So, I was the electrical engineer in support of the maintenance and operations and any small capital project that would be done as an improvement if you were decided to make some change. And “we're not going to install blowers here” or this, that, or the other thing. So, I was there in that job; really, I mean, my accountability has changed some, for five years in the smelter with different areas of the plant. There was the new pot line and the old pot lines, and there was the power system and the carbon plant and—so I had different accountabilities as an electrical engineer over the course of those five years. And I was doing night school. I remember two things I think that prompted me to leave Alcoa. One was just some boredom. I remember taking a job and having people talk about “I've been here twenty years,” and I was like, “Man, I can't see myself anywhere for three years, five years!” When you're twenty, things seem *so* much different than they do now. But I do remember opening up a file drawer for an annual preventative maintenance that was done with—contracted with GE to come in and take these regulating transformers down and drain the oil and check the contacts, and it was like a week-long process. And at that point, then you didn't have a backup for the pot lines, and so there was a lot of tension there and you were always out. You had to be watching even though these guys knew what they were doing. So there was somebody who said, “Why is she sitting in here? She should be out there.” I'm like, “Man, these guys know what they're doing. I don't need to be out there,” but it was opening up that file drawer and saying, “Oh, this is the fifth time I've done this!” (laughter) And then there was some change in reporting

relationships that didn't suit me, and so I thought, "Okay, I need to do something different. I'm really tired of doing the same old engineering stuff. I need something that's a little softer, and I'm not developing my soft skills as much as I would like to be." And I'm still committed to staying in the North Country. So, where might I go? (laughter)

**Dun da da dah! (laughter) Clarkson!**

I wrote a letter to Bob Plane [Clarkson president from 1974-1985], and said, "Always thought I'd like to be part of your team. What have you got?" (laughter)

**Wow.**

Bill Dempsey was Vice President, and so I got a call to come and interview with him. I remember what I wore because I wore jeans to work every day, and I didn't have to have an interview suit and I didn't have to get dressed up. So here I was—I'm just thinking of how awful it was! (laughter) It was—I think I wore a skirt, and it was probably grey. Grey skirt, grey blazer, but the blouse was what I remember. It was black and magenta stripes with big collar, big turn back cuffs, three or four buttons up the—oof. (laughter)

**This was the early '80s though. (laughter)**

Exactly, exactly! (laughter)

**That seems totally appropriate for the early '80s.**

Probably was. So, I talked with Dempsey, and they either had had some thoughts that they needed to have some focus on women's programs or they totally dreamed it up after I came and talked with them. (laughter) I really don't know, but all of a sudden there was a job that I could take like in the middle of February as Assistant Dean of Student Life slash women's programs. And I left Alcoa, and they gave me a going away party. At the going away party they all kept doing the spoof on the slash. (laughter) So, that was a long title. So I took that job and worked for Norm Smalling, and Steve Newkofsky was in the department, and Mark DeRitis was in the department, and Randy Lamson was activities director. And well, it was very different from what I had been doing. (laughter)

**I can only begin to imagine. It must have seemed like a different world.**

It was. It seemed like a different world. Talk about the pendulum swinging from hard sciences to soft (laughter), not even science. Although I think there is some science, I have since learned, to managing people and students, but back then I didn't think so. There was no calculator on my desk. I remember one time the phone service went out or the lights flickered and I was like, "Oh! It's not me that's supposed to go take care of that." (laughter) And, really, it was not long into that job that I knew it was not for me. But I also knew, "Hmm. Two months after being in this job is not a good time to put another gap on your resume," so I stuck it out. And, I don't say that—it wasn't that—I



mean, I think I learned things. I think I added something in some way, but I wasn't that comfortable being a counselor or advising. Oh I don't know if I want to have all this in the history about the... Bill Dempsey, the Vice President, wanted something—maybe, this might be interesting for Clarkson because there's actually something going on now that's somewhat like it—wanted something to round out the students and wanted it to come from the extracurricular side and not just from the academic side. And so I think Norm got his staff together, and we were supposed to brainstorm to deliver something to the Vice President because he's asked for something. So, whatever the conversation was, I made it into a little flow chart. (laughter) Well, so the flow chart got presented to Dempsey and he was like, "Oh this is wonderful!" (laughter) And, so then I became in charge of this program, which is called STRETCH.

**I don't know anything about STRETCH.**

STRETCH<sup>2</sup>—Steve [Newkofsky] will know some of it. It was an acronym.

**Is this a living/learning thing?**

Yes, kind of. Skills to—the 'E' was erudition, I know that. (laughter)

**Did you come up with that?**

Yes.

**I love it! (laughter)**

It was a whole thing where it was supposed to be encouragement for students to develop other aspects of their whole being, and to have a counselor to do that. A PDA, even; a Personal Development Advisor.

**Was that you?**

Well, we recruited from faculty; we recruited from staff. So it was a voluntary—so it was like a mentor, and I think we said you wouldn't have to mentor more than five. But it was different than mentoring them academically.

**Right, right.**

And there was this vision that they would log the events that they went to, concerts or speeches, and what their thoughts were about them, and what they did for physical exercise, and that they would keep all of these in binders. (laughter)

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<sup>2</sup> According to Bradford B. Broughton's *A Clarkson Mosaic* (1995), STRETCH stood for Skills That Reap Enrichment Through Challenging Horizons, and it was designed to develop students' skills in five areas: human relations skills, communications skills, erudition, physical fitness, and professionalism.

So, we got binders for the freshmen that were like three inch binders. (laughter) Yeah, for all the stuff that was going to be put in there, and it had STRETCH across the back. And I remember one of the professors at one point saying he saw a student carrying this binder, and he was so shocked, and said, “What is in there?” because it was full! Well, he had put all his ES111 pages into this binder. (laughter)

**Free binder! (laughter)**

Yes, free binder! Exactly. But I had three or four advisees myself, and I don’t think it lasted more than one year.

**And were your advisees in electrical engineering?**

No, no, no. I’m not sure how we did the assignment process. I do remember one of them was a diabetic, and so there was a lot of dealing with him to manage his social activities so he wasn’t in a coma.

**Right.**

And that’s the one that had the biggest impression on me.

**STRETCH. I’m going to ask others about STRETCH too; (laughter) Steve [Newkofsky], Randy Lamson.**

Oh yeah, oh yeah. (laughter)

**Now what exactly was your job supposed to be? I mean, because you said there was this counselor role.**

Well, right. The easy parts were you were going to advise SWE and also SWM, which is the Society of Women Managers.

**Yes, yes.**

And, I mean, certainly there was the development office, the true counseling office, but I guess when RAs would have people: “They were sending you to Student Life to talk to somebody because you’ve had too many violations of X, Y, and Z.” Whether they sent more women to me?

**Right.**

Because I can think of a few cases that I was involved in and maybe they just—and then I became like this champion of this STRETCH. And (sigh) I remember talking to the Board of Trustees about it and having to recruit the faculty. Oh man. (laughter) But I’ve heard something now about this thing called Transitions? Is that a new program on campus?

**If it is, I'm embarrassed to say I'm not familiar with it.**

It sounds to me like it's something coming around with more focus again on developing all aspects of the student.

**I mean, I think you're familiar with the First Year Seminar, which is for first year students to get them adjusted to being in college. I wonder if it's something about that or—**

Well this other thing is definitely a program by the name Transitions.

**Okay.**

It was mentioned at this marketing meeting I was at last week. I think STRETCH probably now has other things that are filling some of those identified needs of getting yourself oriented to being on campus and not getting caught up in all of the partying.

**The pitfalls. (laughter) And what about the whole women's aspect of this? I mean, given that you said that while you were at Clarkson, you weren't paying attention to—**

Right, right.

**Being a woman there. So how did you feel about that aspect of this—**

Oh, right, right. At that point, I was like, "Man, I just wish you'd left that slash women's program coordinator off." (laughter) Because I'm not a feminist, and I haven't studied this stuff, but I guess in that role, whatever—because I certainly didn't—I don't remember influencing things. I ended up—I was there fifteen months. Sixteen months. But I did do a lot of reading about the issues of women in the workplace and I think I mentioned that to you briefly during our—

**I remember—**

When we met.

**I remember that.**

That some of Rosabeth Moss Kanter's work, and oh, it was chilling! Like, "Oh my God! Some of this stuff that happened to me was because I was a woman?!" (laughter) So, it really, it put me off a bit in terms of my confidence that I had had and never really (laughter) had any issue with. I was now second guessing myself about mannerisms or how I said things or how I approached things or, "Oh, maybe I was nervous when I didn't raise my hand in class," and (laughter)—

**You were rethinking this, using this new information that you—**

Yes! So I certainly read quite a bit. I don't remember how educated I got in any other way. Did I go to any seminars? And what did I do with what I read? (laughter) But if I was implementing STRETCH in that short period of time, I should be forgiven for not doing something on women's programs! (laughter)

**It sounds like, as usual, you were quite busy here! (laughter) So, now wait, timing wise—and I know I've got your resume in front of me—**

That was then—

**So '82, '83? That was when you were there?**

Yes. February of '82, and then I put in my resignation to finish up at the end of June of '83.

**And then you went back to school?**

I did. Unplanned. I left Clarkson without really knowing what I was going to do. But I just thought, "This is their normal cycle; I need to give them notice." So for that month of July and August, I just felt like I was a worthless person. And at home, I was doing everything. I was like, "Man, I'm not bringing in any money anymore. I've got to rake the lawn, mow, I've got to have food ready, and there's no excuse for not having the house in order! There's really not!" (laughter) And I didn't want to go to the grocery store. I didn't want to run into anybody that was going to say, "What are you doing?" and I was going to have to say, "Nothing." Oh, it was terribly—awful, awful. At that point I felt like I was still connected to the North Country. I was married; I lived in Norwood; I owned a house. Really didn't have a plan. I guess I had the luxury of not having to exactly make money every day, but...I got a call—it was after Labor Day, or may have been Labor Day weekend, from Hank Domingos, who was, I think, probably chair of the electrical engineering department. I was on my way out the door to a wedding, and he said, "What are you doing?" and I'm like, "Oh that question I don't want to hear. 'What are you doing?' I don't want to say 'nothing.'" (laughter) "I'm on my way to a wedding!" (laughter)

**I have something to say, for this moment anyway. (laughter)**

Yes. Exactly. He said, "Well, what would you think about being a teaching assistant?" I said, "Oh, well that sounds alright." He said, "We really need English-speaking teaching assistants." And I said, "Oh," and of course it was at least a week, if not ten days, into the school at the time—into the semester. And he said, "Oh, by the way, to be a teaching assistant you would have to be enrolled as a master's degree student." (laughter) And "Ooh! Ooh! Well let me think about it. I've got to go to this wedding." (laughter) So that was a Saturday. On Monday, I was in Clarkson Hall, enrolling.

**For a master's in electrical engineering.**

Uh huh, and then going—and then starting to go to class! And it was systems engineering. I don't remember if there were really choices, and oh, that first week of—I had tears in my eyes in some of the classes, like “I haven't done this stuff in eight years!” and this—what did I? But—so I was a teaching assistant. Ill equipped. (laughter) I could speak English! (laughter)

**You were qualified in that way, yes. (laughter)**

And so that was September '83, and I took [some time] to finish my thesis and maybe some course work. I'm not sure how I—but I know I didn't finish until December '84. I did a thesis with Bob Schilling on some robotics stuff.

**Did you have to do a thesis to get a master's?**

Uh huh. I took courses and had colleagues that were master's students with me. One who eventually came back and taught or headed up a program at Clarkson. Doug McIntosh. He and I had shared an office area together.

**Okay. I can tell this wasn't part of the grand plan, to get a master's degree?**

(laughter) Right.

**(laughter) In systems engineering. Did it serve you in any way later?**

I think it—probably not on a really specific level, but to say that I was—had a learning orientation or proved that I had a learning orientation and also to get a little updated because electrical stuff was changing pretty rapidly. Not that I was going to be an engineer (laughter) for my whole career, so I think probably just the experience, the teaching was good. Yeah because, actually, then when I finished that in December, and perhaps even when I was finishing up the thesis, let's say if I didn't have class work, I was a substitute teacher in the Norwood-Norfolk school district. And I also was part-time code enforcement officer for the Town of Potsdam. (laughter)

**I read that with interest, as someone who lives in the village of Potsdam and deals occasionally with code enforcement. Yes. (laughter)**

Yes. So, I think the classroom experience can always benefit you in some way. But specifically, did I ever call on the coursework I took to get my master's? No.

**And so, after then, '83, '84—no, '84-'85, right? Which would've been the year that you were finishing your master's, being the code enforcement person, and substitute teaching. After that, you went back to Alcoa—**

I did.

**After having left—**

Uh huh—

**Saying I'm bored and I've got to be done with this. How did that happen?**

I know I was still in contact with friends from there. And somewhere along the line, someone must have said to me, “We are recruiting electrical engineers, and would you have any interest?” At some point it was clear to me it would not be the exact same area that I had been, and that there would be some advancement opportunities. I went and interviewed with sort of the guy who was my peer, that had been my conduit and then someone who had, at one time, been my boss, and he, I think, now had a slightly bigger job over perhaps the whole operations, not just the smelter, as the chief electrical engineer. And I met them for lunch in Cornwall [in Ontario], and they said something about, “Well, we just didn't want anybody to see us because we didn't want to get rumors flying” (laughter) “that you were coming back.” I can't quite remember if I understood why it was so covert, but... (laughter) So, they made me an offer and I went back to work in probably late September of '85, in a different part of the plant. And I think I went as an individual contributor. I don't think I was a supervisory engineer at that time, but within six months I was promoted and had a whole staff of engineers working for me. But [I] had made it clear that there were other things I wanted to do, and one of the other reasons that I had left Alcoa—I was interested in getting into line management, and most of the line managers came out of the group known as process engineers, which primarily were chemical engineers or, in the area that I had worked in, had been recruited in chemical engineering and did the process engineering, and then became area coordinators and then superintendents, and....So I had said I wanted to be considered for some of those area coordinator jobs, and I was told that I would have to be a process engineer first. I could not go to area coordinator from electrical engineering.

**Why in the culture was that there?**

Well, because [as a] process engineer, you were closer to dealing with the supervisors and the hourly folks and actually working the process, versus the electrical engineer who was out in the courtyards, in the control rooms—

**Right, so—**

Fixing things—

**Away from the line.**

Yes. So I had viewed that somewhat as a brick wall, which is another reason that I left to begin with. So when I came back, I said this is still my interest, to be in line management, and my career has to be managed in a way that is different than it looked like it was going to be, “Oh yes, we've changed, and you'll be in a different area.” So, I became

Supervisor Electrical Engineer, and then it was less than two years of being back—yeah, that’s probably right, about two years, I was offered an opportunity to move into the marketing department, as an application engineer. So not really building ads, although that’s all we had in the marketing department were application engineers, so anything that got called marketing we sort of got involved in. So, I did get familiarity with ad agencies and how they put together their campaigns. And this was in Alcoa’s wire rod and bar business unit, which are ten foot lengths of wire, rod, bar which are square. (laughter)

**And in your MBA had you had exposure to marketing or did you have any—**

Yes. I had exposure to all those things, but as I say, the primary role was application engineering, interfacing with customers; what are your needs? Okay, what product do we have? What product do we develop? So I got to travel with sales folks; I did a lot of travelling, went to distributors, and had a little canned presentation that we put together about products. Did a lot of that road warrior stuff.

**So very different than—**

Yes!—

**Your previous jobs had been.**

Yes, and had to learn some metallurgy in the course of this. So, it was good. Change was good. Because those eighteen months or two years that I had been back there, whenever I would sit down with my boss, he would say, “Well, you’re doing this and you’re involved with this project,” and I would say, “And it can be passed on to someone else!” (laughter) I would always tell him, “Whatever is here, somebody else I can teach to do because I don’t want to be doing this all the time.” So, they heard me. So I got this opportunity to do the application engineering, and that was a good experience, learned more about that product line. And then, in the fall of ’89, having not been in the smelter since ’82—man, well, yeah I guess so because when I left to go to Clarkson, they said, “how about coming and being superintendent of the department down here of 200 people?” And I said, “Ooh! And I’ve never been a process engineer, and I’ve never been an area coordinator even! Hmm, I guess you guys did change!” (laughter) But that was probably the most development necessary on my part in terms of stepping into a job and having to just learn so many things in terms of managing people, to go from having managed four people to 200.

**Wow.**

At the most four, and then having two years managing nobody, right. (laughter) So that was really the most stress in a good way of the first day I show up and come into this new job, don’t know these people, I’ve got supervisors that have been supervisors for twenty, thirty years, and area coordinators who wanted the job—

**Right, right—**

All sitting around the table, and I'm like they're looking at me. They're looking at me; they're listening to what I am saying. (laughter)

**I'm in charge now.**

I'm in charge! (laughter)

**And so 200 people in all different positions, it sounds like—**

Yes that would be down to—I mean most of them hourly in there. I would not have had—of course, I can't remember the structure exactly—but it would have been all a strict line organization. If there was an electrical engineer that supported that department, they still reported to the engineering department. These were the people that did the work, the manual work that was done 24/7. And the supervisors that supervised them and how they were then into departments. There were like three departments that reported to me. So that job—ah what time is it? That clock—

**3:15.**

Alright, so we've just been going two hours.

**No, not even. One hour and forty-five minutes.**

Oh right. (laughter)

**I'm keeping track. (laughter)**

I'm thinking, "Okay, we still have got quite a few years to go here!" (laughter)

**I know, I know. (laughter) We're going to go over two hours if that's okay with you?**

Yes, we can go over two. I just think if we—and probably should try to be headed out of here, starting to pack up about four—

**That's perfectly fine. I know, [you need to get to the] post office. (laughter)**

Yes, post office. So, that job I was in six years. Now, it got little things tacked onto it, and I think I took over the maintenance department, plus this electrode department, for the last eighteen months or two years that I was in that. But I had my most development, really career development, in that position. Dealing with the union, implementing new safety rules, putting processes in control and capable, and going from, at that time, Alcoa had six smelters in the U.S. The electrode department in Massena was the worst performing of all six. We went from worst to best. So, it was really a good time, but as I do look back on my career, I was in that job too long.



**Hmm.**

You know, I probably could've advanced further if I had been popped out of that sooner.

**And why do you think you were there too long? Was that others?**

No it was, I think, just a lack of focus on developing high potential people and getting them exposure and no system that kind of checked what's down in here—who's down in here because—well then I went the six jobs—the six years in that job, and that expanding to have 400 people and all the maintenance for the smelter. With really good people working for me, and I always had good teams. I enjoyed all of that, and then I became smelting plant manager. And, again, really good experience. From my early days in the smelter, there was one superintendent—who just passed away this past year actually, from Massena—well, it's Mike Carroll's Dad [Jack Carroll].

**Oh, yes.**

Jack was a superintendent of the pot lining department and, for some reason, he just had this uncanny ability to mentor and [was] able to do it with women. There were like three women that either were in his department, one's still a good friend of mine, that had two-year degrees, that did some technician work, but I was an engineer supporting his department. And he was just so helpful in terms of advice on all sorts of things, and a real supporter. He eventually worked for me. And I remember he and I were riding together to Montreal to look at—oh, we were trying to figure out how to get our alumina offloaded to Montreal so it didn't have to come by rail because the St. Lawrence was frozen and can't come all the way to Massena. So we were up there looking at some old cement tanks, so we had a chance, with me in this position, and he said, "You were cut out for this job." (laughter)

**That's really nice.**

Yeah, he really was just a great supporter from way back. But I had always—really had always had good support from people and ability to work with a lot of people, and yeah, I could think about little anecdotes and things but, in general, I had really good experiences.

**And were these teams, like the 200 people you managed for that six year period—**

Uh huh—

**Were those all men or almost—**

Yeah, almost all men. Yeah, (laughter) maybe two or three women.

**Okay, and similar when it went to 400 people as the smelting plant manager?**

Yes, yes. That era that I was there, even from starting when I graduated—[the plant was] able to recruit some women. Just about the same—maybe even a year after I joined, and for some reason there was the ability to get some women into the Massena plant into management positions that really hasn't been duplicated (laughter) since. And some of them are still there. In fact, a name—she's not an engineer and she's not the right era, but—Sue LaClair. Tomkinson was her maiden name. She must have graduated in early '80s from the I.D. [Industrial Distribution] program [at Clarkson], and she ended up in the line positions, and now she's the HR manager. So I had [a] good experience, and yes, if some other time, we can go into all those anecdotes; things you were called and things people did to you they shouldn't have done to you, but I let a lot of things just roll off my back. But it was then, if we kind of get more onto the women aspect of it—in that job then, when I began to have more accountability for people and realizing I have a greater role to play in Alcoa than just being an employee; I now have some accountability for making sure the right thing's done, on many fronts. And I began more to have more understanding of there is a role that I play in helping women do better. Whereas, at one time, Sue LaClair, more enlightened than I, had decided there needed to be something done, and she had sent something around to all the women in these nontraditional positions, asking, "Would you be part of a group?"—an informal group. And I said, "No!" (laughter)

**No, because it wasn't necessary?**

Because why do we want to single ourselves out?

**Yes.**

But then I took more of [an] interest in it when I realized that that's the only way things are going to change.

**And this was—you're saying this change occurred around '89 when you started—**

There and then much more so when I was the plant manager. But in there, throughout the course of some of those years, Alcoa did have a corporate task force. I was on some task force for figuring out how to get more diversity into the workplace. So, I became more enlightened. (laughter)

**And then, after that, you went to Tennessee, right?**

**Yes.**

**To be a smelting plant manager—**

Right, it was a lateral move from Massena to Alcoa, Tennessee. The town was called Alcoa, so it's very confusing. That's why we just call it Tennessee. That finally dawned on me; all of our other plants called by the town, like Massena operations, but this one

they call Tennessee. (laughter) I get there, there's Alcoa police, Al—I thought, “Man, this is a bad situation!” (laughter) But so, the Tennessee plant.

**And why did you choose to make that move?**

Well, at that point, now I was a little bit more on the radar screen, and the business unit president from primary metals was—they were trying to figure out what to do with me and what sort of development I needed. And as they put it, maybe not as bluntly as I eventually do and recall it as, “Well, you've done a great job at Massena, but it was too easy. You knew all these people. You've been here *so* long that it was so easy for you to manage them, and that's why the plant's running so well and everything's going so great. So let's put you in a tougher environment, where the union still remembers when they killed people in the '30s and they're really tough” and so on and so forth. So I said, “Okay.” And it was the first lateral I accepted and I never advise people to (laughter) accept laterals, but I was only in that job six or seven months and they asked me to then move. And it took like three or four months to actually get it to happen, but at that point they realized, “Okay. It wasn't a fluke. She was running this plant. She does have this capability. We need to even accelerate her career further.” But there when I went down and met that team, some of them I had known because some people had transferred and just in those years in the smelter, you had known some, but I really didn't know that many of them. And one of the women who worked for me, she said, “Why did they keep you in Massena long?! Where have you been?! You're great!” (laughter) So, as I say, I have support wherever I went, which is—

**That's great—**

Nice. So that woman had the job that I had had in Massena for six years, electrode superintendent. And being in the South, there actually was a guy in her department that would walk up and down the baking furnace, reading from the Bible the passages about why women should not be in the workplace. So, it was a little tougher environment. The union was not as open to working with management. And then some of them were not as open to working with women in management, and—but, I did encounter all sorts of different things. That's just part of it.

**And your plan was for that to be a short time gig?**

I didn't know that. I mean, you normally don't have your own plan. (laughter)

**Okay.**

I didn't—no, I certainly didn't look at the things—that was my first transfer and, having at that point—I think I had lived in two houses in the North Country, one for fifteen years and one for maybe five years, never thinking I was never going to be transferred out of Massena. (laughter) So, when I think about the changes I made at this house that we bought, to have been there less than eighteen months (laughter) was like, what a waste of investment! So I certainly thought I was going to be there awhile.

**You mean the house that you bought in Tennessee?**

In Tennessee, I went into the house in Tennessee thinking, “I’m going to be here for awhile. I need to make it the way I want it.” And I wasn’t there for very long, but that was a—I had a great boss there, very easy to talk to and he called me one day and said, “Well, I’ve just come from one of these” whatever, succession planning meetings that he was off to somewhere, “I need to explore with you three possible opportunities. This is nothing that’s happening right away, just need to know what you think about these type of jobs.” So he listed three jobs, and one was business president of a small business, and he actually named out a specific business. One was a position in human resources in corporate, and then there was another one, which I can’t recall at the time. And I ranked them. I know the business president one was first, whatever the other one was second, and then the human resources job was last. Just a general conversation and I went about my business. About a week later—it’s the third one. (laughter)

**Now why was it the third one that you got?**

I mean, either that was the only one that was open at the time, whether this was strictly a very exploratory conversation and the other two weren’t even open. I mean, I know the business unit president one wasn’t; that guy was in it long after I passed through the HR track. So, but whether they were going to offer me that third one that apparently was open and probably had been open when it had been asked—when he was asked to run it by me in a very noncommittal way. I thought, “Oh, I don’t know...HR. It’s not for me.” And here we go again with what I did at Clarkson!

**I was going to say the soft stuff.**

The soft stuff. This is not really me; why would I do this again?! But I took the trip to Pittsburgh the time we were building the new office building, and the executive VP seemed like a great guy to work for and seemed like a great salesman. And I took the job. (laughter)

**And I know on your resume, you refer to it as a pass-through career development opportunity. Was that the way it was—**

Presented to me—

**Presented to you? Okay.**

Yes. That one, I knew, wouldn’t—should not have been more than two years. They said, “We know this isn’t your area of expertise, that you want to be in line management. We want you to be in line management.” But this does one of those things that very few jobs do, which is—gives you some corporate exposure. It’s fairly low risk. And you get to know a lot more about the company.

**Right, right. And—**

And it won't be more than two years. (laughter)

**So, Pittsburgh for two years, and what did you see yourself as learning during those two years?**

Well, I did learn a lot about the corporation. I got to interface at the highest levels. It was during a CEO change from Paul O'Neill to Alain Belda. So, and my boss was—very much let me have some interface roles with those guys as—particularly the new CEO. “Okay now that you are in this position, what kind of messages do you want to convey? How do you want to set up your interface with a broader organization?” [I] came up with the idea to do a leadership conference, like the top 200 hundred of the company. We did that for two or three years, helped them put together the agenda, decided which outside speakers we would bring in. That sort of thing. Because I was in charge of the succession planning process, the one that had brought me to that job—and it was my job to become acquainted with the top two or three-hundred people in the company. So I travelled to all the business units around the world. I interviewed and talked with and got to know people, so that when someone said we had an opening, the system was, I mean, it always is going to have a human aspect to it. There are the shadow systems, and then there's the real system, and there were a lot of things we tried to computerize, but you still have to have somebody who knows people to put their names forward. And I certainly made an effort to know who the women were that were in this pipeline, and I was the—I mean, I can name at least two, and I can think specifically of the instances where I pushed for them, “This is the right person for the job. You would be very happy if you put so and so into this job.” So I did some of that, better for the organization kind of thing that I'm an enlightened (laughter) person. So, and I came to learn that HR is a science. And that companies, Alcoa being one of them, that often didn't recruit professional HR managers, but just said, “Well that person's always good with people and maybe they're a little weak on this, that, or the other things, so they're not really succeeding as this manager, but I they could be a great HR manager.” Man, we got stuck doing that. There is a science to this. So, I developed an appreciation for that, learned about executive coaching, which was a term I never even knew. But the influence aspect of that job versus the action part of my other jobs was very, very frustrating. (laughter) And I just couldn't wait 'til somebody came up with something at the end of those two years (laughter) for me to do different.

**And it was at the end of those two years, right, that you went to New York? Am I remembering—**

Well, it did turn out that the job I was in could be anywhere. So when I took that job, I was in Pittsburgh.

**Okay.**

But in that same time period, the New York City office was being opened. This was one of the things the new CEO wanted to do, to have a global headquarters there. Corporate headquarters remains in Pittsburgh, but he wanted to move a team to New York. And there wasn't really always a good rhyme or reason as to whose job got positioned in New York City. He liked me. He knew I was getting divorced. He said, "New York will be good for you. Why don't you come to New York with us?" (laughter) So I did, whenever it was that I started that job, probably in the Fall of 2000, and I didn't move to New York until maybe '99—no, 2000. It must've been fall 2000, and I didn't move to New York until May of '01.

**And that was the job, right, where you were in charge of four very different companies—**

Yes, yes.

**So, how did that happen and why were you in charge of four very different companies?**

Alcoa made the Reynolds acquisition, Reynolds Metals acquisition, in 2000. And many of those businesses had sister businesses already in Alcoa, and they were integrated in. But there were few lines of business that Alcoa had not participated in, and within Primary Metals, which we will talk about first—that job I took in 2000—Reynolds had spent pot lining treatment facility with other aluminum producers as customers. Alcoa had been a customer and partial investor. They calcined their own coke. Alcoa always bought calcined coke and made it into anodes. And so those businesses, those parts of Primary Metals, came into Primary Metals with no real home, and there were a couple other things floating around the Alcoa system that were somewhat unique: the powdered metal, which is called Specialty Metals, and the magnesium smelting. So, whereas in the past they've sort of managed those two, specialty metals and magnesium, in some way reporting into the structure, now there were two other orphans, and they just had to put all these orphans together. Some with a question mark, "Should we stay in them? Should we sell them?" and just gave them to me. (laughter)

**And so you were president, right?**

I was president—

**For all four of these companies?**

Actually, some of those companies had presidents. (laughter)

**Okay.**

By title. Titles get very confusing, and so some of those were separate legal entities that had presidents. Northwest Alloys always had a president, Specialty Metals has a president, and then the pieces from Reynolds had general managers. So everybody else

just kept whatever title they had, and I was made president of Primary Metals Allied Businesses, “Allied” meaning (laughter) no connection to each other. (laughter)

**Okay.**

And, in addition to those four businesses, I was also asked to develop an aluminum fluoride strategy, which is a consumable within the smelting process, and we had some fluoride plants that belonged to another division, but there was a strategy of make versus buy. And so they needed what they called an “impartial party” that could broker things between the consuming smelting plants and the producing fluoride plants as to what are we going to do and whose—so, they saw me as somebody able to broker that, so I was put in charge of fluoride strategy also.

**So how many people total were you in charge of?**

Oh! I don’t know. These were small businesses, so if I just—probably a thousand. Which was—yeah, okay, that’s a good number. (laughter)

**And how was it to deal with four businesses that were (laughter) totally unrelated to one another?**

It certainly prepared me for later jobs, and I really can look back on it. There were some aspects—I like to get the team together every now and then. Our financials were enrolled together to report from my business to another, so I had a controller. And there were some common things that you could talk to all of them about: the safety programs, the environmental programs, whatever the issue may have been around diversity or hiring or human resource management. But in terms of specific strategy, is it growth, is it shutdown, is it sell? I just worked with each one independently. And so, the outcome of that was sell the calcined coke business, decide then that the anode plant that was in Lake Charles, Louisiana, which made anodes from calcined coke that was primarily shipped from Baton Rouge to Lake Charles. They made anodes and then they put them on a boat and sent them up to Baie-Comeau, in northern Quebec. I decided the ad anode connect should report to the Baie-Comeau smelter, even though there was a couple thousand miles difference. But that’s where it fit into the organization. Sold the calcined coke business, shut down the magnesium smelter, started buying magnesium offshore, and that was a—certainly it’s never fun to put 200 people out of work, but that was a good learning experience too. It was right during the Northwest power crunch, and we only had so much power. Were we going to make magnesium? Were we going to make aluminum? The cost of power was going up. It was somewhat fortuitous that the plant had been operating 25 years, and so most employees had 25 years, and they ended up being fairly comfortable moving on doing something else. But to deal with the press and the legislators and everybody around shutting down this facility was a good experience. And to deal with the employees because even though the president was there on site, he was essentially a plant manager that also handled a little bit of the sales. Most of the sales were internal, but he was called president. But, for me to come in representing the

corporation and have them ask questions and—so that was a good experience to learn to deal with that. So at that point, I had pretty much decimated my group. (laughter)

**(laughter) You got rid of your job.**

So, and I think I was—I mean it was pretty clear that I was not as busy as I should be. I said, “What are you going to do with me?” and he said, “Well, we don’t know and....” The opportunity in Richmond came out, and so that was the next one.

**And I have to admit, I don’t really understand what flexible packaging is. Because that is where you went to next—**

Yes.

**Alcoa Flexible Packaging. I think I have in my head probably something that is not correct. What does that mean?**

It means something to you, as a consumer, that is much broader than what it meant within Alcoa. All the little pouches that you buy craisins in—all [of] that [is] flexible packaging.

**Okay.**

So anything that’s not rigid, like a can. It’s not a can. If it’s in a pouch. The tuna that you now get in the little foil pouches. That’s flexible packaging. But the Alcoa title “flexible packaging” was much narrower than that and, in fact, we weren’t in some of these booming— (laughter) flexible packages were all over the grocery store. Most of it was from the Reynolds acquisition that did not have sister business units. And the history within Reynolds, it began with things that had aluminum foil as part of the packaging. And, of course, foil is flexible. So, Hershey’s Kiss wrap. They, at one time, did the Klondike bar, so foil that would be laminated with a waxed paper. Flexible packaging. The Burger King things that are wrapped in—so that kind of paper foil poly-laminates. They also made shrink wrap. One of the large customers was Nestle, so all the Nesquik chocolate milk that’s in that shrink wrap bottle, all that shrink wrap was printed and made at a plant in Pennsylvania. And then actually the largest customer segment, then and now, is a paper foil laminate that you and I don’t see very often, but lots of people do, that lines cigarette cartons.

**Ahh.**

That’s their largest—

**Wow—**

Sale. And when Alcoa acquired Reynolds, I was in that HR job, interfacing with the executive office, and it was the new CEO who really did that deal. And I was aware—I don’t exactly know why—but I was aware that that was a big segment of the Reynolds



business and I was like, “Ooh. I need to tell them to go get rid of that. We don’t have anything to do with the tobacco industry.” Two years later, here I am at home, like “My God.” So I had to really go through a spin in my own head that this is not the product—that it was not this packaging that’s actually killing people. But to deal with that customer in a way that was not negative toward them in terms of my attitude showing. I really had to work on my understanding of the product that we made and how different it was from the product they made.

**I can understand that, why that would have been challenging. So—backing up for a moment—you went from being in New York to Richmond.**

Yes.

**I know you live in Richmond now. Was Richmond particularly attractive to you? How did you end up at the flexible packaging—**

The business unit was headquartered there. Reynolds Metals was headquartered in Richmond. For all of the business units that could not be absorbed into sister business units within Alcoa, they remained where they were.

**Okay.**

Which was Richmond. So all the packaging. Alcoa made the Reynolds acquisition—one of the reasons was for packaging. You might know now that they have now divested everything they acquired. So, that’s where the business unit headquarters was. So it was: the job’s in Richmond. Having worked in the South, in Tennessee, before and having been very dissatisfied with my food choices—

**Uh huh.**

I thought, “Oh no. Back to the South.” So the first thing I did before I answered any questions about taking the job was I went online and looked at menus from restaurants in Richmond. That’s how sophisticated my decision making is. And I thought, “Oh! This is much better than Tennessee. This is actually a little more cosmopolitan. I can deal with the food.” So I took the job without even going down—

**You didn’t go down to Richmond. I love it. (laughter)**

I did check the menus. (laughter)

**Uh huh. You made choices based on what’s important to you—**

Yeah, and then I had only been in New York City for a short while. I had only been in my apartment, which had been a six-month renovation—so the apartment I had owned I had only been in six months, so I thought, “Oh I really don’t want to leave just yet.” So I delayed my move by about five months, four months. I guess I took the job in May and

didn't move until the middle of September. So I commuted back and forth and went back to pretending I was a tourist in New York. I had fun. (laughter)

**And with the flexible packaging job—what were the upsides and downsides of that job? I know you mentioned one potential downside.**

Yeah. Well certainly it was more—it was a larger business unit, so more P and L [profit and loss] responsibility than what the Allied Businesses job had been, and more external customers. So, I had a lot of sales force, whereas even in those four other businesses, there were probably three salesmen total for all of that, because most of it went internally to other business units. So, big sales force. Some challenges—it was good for me because these were not people I knew, so it was good for me to realize, yes I can establish myself even when some of the other jobs had not been as comfortable as being 17 years in Massena.

**Right.**

But still, there were people there that knew your name, and so this was all Reynolds people. So that was a very rewarding confirmation for me that I could walk into some place that I really didn't know people and they didn't know me, and do okay. My predecessor had been a Reynolds family member.

**Wow.**

So people were ready for a change and they were also ready for somebody who didn't have any—I think if you're in a family, even if it's third generation, you still have certain ways you treat people and think of yourself that are not appropriate in today's corporate world. So, there was a lot of openness to something different, so that was helpful. I ended up with, very early on, a woman who was very happy to have me there. Somebody said, like my first day walking through this hallway, "Oh now we need to introduce you to Laura Clark. She's the one who did cartwheels when she heard you—when she heard she was getting a woman to run the business unit!" (laughter) So, Laura was in marketing and probably ten years younger than me, if not more, and she bonded with me very quickly. And I swear I had probably been there two weeks, and she came in and said, "I think there's something you need to look into." She was aware that this had occurred with several of the key customers in the segment that we were talking about, and then further exploration determined that it had occurred with several other key customers in other segments, market segments. So probably five of the largest customers—when Alcoa had put a push across the whole corporation, but these Reynolds businesses were trying their darndest to do what the new corporate parent wanted them to do, had—really were working on bringing down raw materials cost. And big focus on all that and synergistic buys and...Now unfortunately several of the contracts with these key customers required that raw materials costs, whether they went up or down, got passed through. But the former leader, working with procurement departments, had figured out they had said, "Hmmm, maybe we don't need to pass this on to them. Maybe we just don't kind of tell them about the savings." So, in the end, there were several million dollars that we had to

give back to these customers in the business unit that was already just breaking even. So, the business situations were tough. The equipment was old. (laughter) There were these give backs to start with, and I was trying to think of—Oh! And one other thing that was interesting to walk into these businesses, two years after the acquisition, everyone there referred to “they,” Alcoa. When they wrote their weekly reports, they said “we” or “they,” or they talked about Alcoa as if it’s a different company, and never said “we.” And so, I got to do that whole thing of really integrating them into the Alcoa culture. So, that was a good experience. So, tough job, high-risk job. At this point, having watched (laughter) especially all the discussions about all the people who had the business unit president job, they make it clear, you pick one of these jobs, and you’re probably going to leave it before you want to. (laughter) But, yeah, the situation, how I ended up taking early retirement—the whole packaging group was doing horribly, so my boss, who had been this former CFO, was let go, and—actually, it was interesting—I think there were four packaging business units; three of them had women presidents.

**Wow.**

And all reporting to this one guy. And so he leaves and they know that it would be really bad to pass over one—these people that are in these other jobs. I had the smallest business unit of the four, and I would never have expected that I would get that job, but I was very disappointed when the president of the largest business unit got the job. It was somebody who had been in the former Reynolds business, somebody that was there in Richmond that I had to do a lot of cross BU [business-unit] stuff with.<sup>3</sup> It was a woman of low integrity, and so she’s put into the position. And it was just interesting to watch her—anyhow, my business unit wasn’t doing well. [Alcoa CEO Alain] Belda wants changes everywhere. Told her to change me out, she told me that they were making a change and said, “You can work another job in Alcoa, or you can take retirement.” I said, “I’ll take retirement.”

**Wow. Was that a hard decision, to take retirement at that point?**

Well it certainly wasn’t, I mean, I knew something was going to happen. I didn’t really—No, I mean, it was much easier than saying fine because they probably weren’t going to give me another line job, and I didn’t want to go do any staff thing. So, I just said, “I’ll go.” So, that was fine. It worked out great. But she was later let go and walked out of her office for them discovering things that were kept wrong in the books to make her and the business look good. And when that happened, it was probably within eight months after I left, and I had never actually had a conversation with the CEO when I was leaving. But I knew that she was doing what he wanted and he needed to change—he wasn’t happy with the performance and can never—it takes awhile sometimes to figure out whether it was the horse or the jockey, as they say. So I understood his thinking, and it was okay with me, but when I found out the news about her, I wrote him a little e-mail and said—my subject line said “personnel change” and I just put her name and said, “She never had

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<sup>3</sup> In response to a query about the transcript, Fessenden explained that, for example, her BU made a semi-finished product that was sold to the other BU to be converted to the consumer product—and vice versa. In addition, several physical locations were shared by the two BUs.

the Alcoa values. Good move.” (laughter) He thanked me for it. Yeah, what I was really saying was: “It was a crappy move to have put her in that job to begin with!” (laughter) So, I still have a good relationship with him. He says, “Come have lunch with me” and so.... So, that was in '05; I was just turning fifty. So I was like, “Oh! This works, can do something different,” and—but I knew I wasn't ready to—as my sister says, “Do you remember that summer you said you weren't ready to start painting yet?” (laughter) And this summer I am! I don't ever remember saying that. She said, “That's what you said.” (laughter) So I just immediately started a job search or did whatever happens. I mean, sometimes you don't do much, they just start calling, and so I got this job at a private equity company, American Capital. That just opened my eyes to so many different things, and what I could do and how I could live my life. Not that it wasn't pretty much 24/7, tied to the BlackBerry and the computer and lots of travel, so I was never home. When I took the job I knew it was an 80 percent travel job is what they said. “We don't care where you live.” Hmm, could live in the Adirondacks in the summertime.

**Uh huh. So that's when you started coming up here during the summers?**

Yes. So that summer of '05, I was not employed. I was still in the job search, but I hadn't landed this job yet. So I came here in the summer of '05, and then when this opportunity developed in the fall, I realized, “Yeah, of all these others that people are talking to me about full-time line jobs just like I used to have, in some city, somewhere.” I thought, “Ooh! I like this.” Plus I liked variety. I really do—did always like juggling four different businesses and within flexible packaging I had four different general managers and it went down to three. And sort of different market segments and different products. And so I liked that. So the private equity job was essentially the same thing; you're accountable for five or six portfolio companies, working with the management teams and helping them figure out what they need to do different. And so, I was really good. I loved working with portfolio companies. It was very time consuming, however. And then I got a little frustrated with the bureaucracy that the private equity was growing a lot, and they started putting in layers and a lot more procedures for what you had to do if the company you were working with needed money. And a lot of second guessing of what you did, and I was not used to that. Throughout Alcoa I had had good bosses who let me be very independent. So I could hang myself (laughter), whatever. But, I'd prefer that. So the bureaucracy and the politics—the politics got—I do not do politics well, at all. In fact, one of the times I took—I'm trying to remember which job it was I took with Alcoa. It was sometime within the last five or six years I was with them, and an old HR manager that I had worked with a lot. He said, “I worry about you.” He said, “You're so apolitical.”

**Meaning that I don't stay out of it—**

Right, and I sometimes—I not only not stay out of it, but I'm blunt, and I say what I think instead of saying what somebody might want to hear. Yeah, so, but I think it worked fine. I was perfectly happy with how my career went. So, it was last summer—sometimes I tell these stories—you always get the same question—and I can't remember when I last

spoke to a group of younger people somewhere. Kind of—“It doesn’t sound like you planned anything!” (laughter) No kidding! Nobody does! (laughter)

**That’s the way life works. (laughter)**

But it is sort of serendipitous. You make the best of the choices that you have at the time, and then you have to go from where that branch took you because you can’t go back and redo it. So, I was sitting with some of my friends in Richmond, one of the weeknights that I was home, and we went to dinner. And the two of them are a few years older than me, one almost completely retired and the other with sort of the home business, and they were laughing and I was looking at them and I’m going, “Man, I’m so stressed with this job, and I’ve got all these people I don’t really like working with back at the office. I love the work I do with the portfolio companies,” and I said, “I think I’ll quit. I need to be happy like you two!” And I went home and wrote my resignation letter. (laughter) And then—so after that, when I realized that I really needed to understand what works for me at this stage of my life. What do I really want to do? I got off the Alcoa train. Because I hadn’t prepared for that, I was just into another full-time job because this is what you need to do. So then last summer I’m not going to think about it really until January. I’m going to take six months and figure out what I want to do. And during that period, I mean, I knew I really liked the portfolio company work. One of the guys at the private equity company at which I worked had left and taken another job. He left for some of the same reasons I did. He worked for another firm, called me in September, “I really could use somebody like you to go do this.” So I went to New York City and interviewed with their company, knew that if I took it further and sold myself I would be working immediately and that it would be exactly the same kind of time commitments that I had before. And getting on a plane say that Monday or next Monday or—and I actually got nauseous and said, “Oh, can’t do that!” Definitely a signal that you were not ready to do this again. So I called before I found out clearly whether they were going to offer me anything, but I called and said, “I’m not interested.” So, continuing to take the rest of the fall to think. At that time I was in the pipeline because of the interaction with Terry Brown [CEO of O’Brien & Gere], who is on Clarkson’s board, to go on his board. So, I thought, “A little board work.” And I had done board work with the private equity company on private companies, and said that sounded good. So I finally said, “You know what? I need to pick what I like. I like board work. I like working with mid-cap company sizes or like the groups of guys I worked with for these four little businesses, and helping people put together strategies and doing some general management consulting. So I need to figure out how to do that, and develop a network where, if something comes up, can fill up some of my time, then that’s what I’ll do. But I’m not going to go back into a seven day a week kind of thing.” So I got on Terry’s board, I did a little networking in Richmond and somebody connected me with somebody who hired me on the spot to go on their board. I’m in the pipeline for three others, and one of the companies—well, both of the companies where I’m on the board—because they are private and don’t have to worry too much about the conflicts of interest, are interested in having me to do some consulting above and beyond the board work.

**So, why do you like board work so much? I mean, I know you've been on Clarkson's board now for 18 years—**

Yeah, right. That's a long time. I mean, that kind of board work—when I think of non-profit boards, oh, they can really fill up— I am president now of the other two that I'm on, both effective as of this July, this month.

**So which are the two others?**

The Lake Titus Protective Association and Child Savers, which is a child guidance clinic in Richmond. And [I am] not going into any more non-profits. (laughter) And it's unfortunate, I think—it could be unfortunate for the non-profit organizations because right now I'm not working, so I give them a lot of time. One of the EDs [Executive Directors]<sup>4</sup>—I said, “You'll be happy when I get a job,” because I won't be bugging him so much. My commitment level could fluctuate significantly, which I think is not all that good for them. But be that as it may. But as far as the independent director on a corporate board, I like strategy. And you're dealing with strategic issues. Carrying on with my thought about I need to do something, sort of give back to—from the aspect of being a woman, there are so many public boards that don't have women on them. And you hear about the work Catalyst [a nonprofit organization focused on expanding opportunities for women in business] does and they count them every year, and then if you look at heavy industry and say, “How many have women that have come out of line management in heavy industry that could serve on a heavy manufacturing board and actually know what they're talking about”—so because of the size of the business that I ran was about half a billion, I'm not ever going to run in the stratosphere of the Fortune even maybe 500, but I'll make some in-roads into some public company boards. So there was one—I'll tell you the story real quick. It's just interesting and sometimes you have to just kind of put yourself out there. There was a company that I thought, “Hmm. With my background, I should really be a good fit for them.” And I heard a piece of news where a director had retired. So instead of working my network and trying to figure out who do I know, who knows somebody who is on the board, I just sent a letter to the CEO and to the chair of the nominating committee. It probably took me six hours of internet research to find that guy's name and his e-mail address! (laughter) And where he lived. And after I sent it—it was a very compelling letter, I have to say—but after I sent it—I thought, “This is the company you really want to go serve on their board, and you've just blown it! Who sends a cold letter like that?” Ugh. A week later, I get a call from the guy, “Very interesting! (laughter) But we don't have any openings right now”—apparently they actually needed somebody that could fulfill the audit chair background, which would be somebody with a CPA, which wasn't me, but he said, “I think we'll have an opening in 18 months”—I mean, there was never a promise, so anyhow, I felt vindicated that I didn't blow it. So at this point, I'm just kind of taking things as they come along and probably am not going to take another small company board slot. They do take a lot of time and don't pay very well.

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<sup>4</sup> In response to a query about the transcript, Fessenden explained that Executive Director (ED) was the term typically used for the top person in a not-for-profit organization. She said that the terminology was transitioning in the mid-2000s from the title Executive Director to the title Chief Executive Officer.

**Makes sense. I was just going to tell you that I think we should be done because I know that it's four, and I know you want to—I have so many more things I could ask you (Liz laughs), but I respect that we've gone over two hours, we should be done. So, I'll say thank you and turn this off.**

**Interview subject: Elizabeth Fessenden**  
**Interviewer: Laura Ettinger**  
**Date of interview: October 16, 2008**

**Today is Thursday, October 16, 2008. I'm Laura Ettinger and I'm here with Liz Fessenden. We are at my office this time at Clarkson University in Bernard H. Snell Hall. Liz, as I was telling you earlier, I listened to your interview that we did in July, and wanted to ask you a bunch of follow up questions. And, I think I'm going to do it sort of in chronological order which was how we did the previous interview. One of the things you said pretty early in the interview was that you knew very early on that you would not just want to be an engineer for your whole career. And, I wanted to follow up more about how you knew that and what deterred you from being only an engineer from a pretty young age it sounds like, or pretty early point.**

Uh huh. That is a good question. Did I know that before I came to Clarkson, or was it something that happened within the first year where I got more exposure to things, and just decided what, and I don't think I can answer it. I don't really know.

**Uh huh.**

I'm just trying to think. I could come up with some theories. (laughter)

**(laughter) I remember you telling me in the previous interview that you started taking management classes when you had opportunities to do electives.**

Yes.

**So I mean, by the time you were here—**

It was definitely, yeah, for sure, by the time I was a sophomore I knew that. So, whether it was something coming in to begin with, I don't really remember anybody giving me guidance that said, "Be well-rounded." (laughter) Or whether it was just the nature of the course work with the non-engineering courses that I took, perhaps I liked. It's not that I had management courses to start with because you really had to make an effort to take a management course if you were in [the] engineering school. So, I really don't know what.

**What are your theories?**

Theories. Well, one would be that I looked at the engineering curriculum and the people who are engineers and thought that they're really very focused, and I am not that focused. And really throughout my career it's played out, I like to be playing in a lot of different ponds, and have a lot of balls to juggle. So it had to be something that was innate in me. I don't think it was somebody recommending, "Oh, you look like a person who should take management classes." (laughter) It could also have been that I didn't even— selecting what I was going to major in, although I knew I liked math and science, I may have had a broad enough interest that I thought, "Well, this would be a way to explore those



interests.” I didn’t double major. Lots of people double majored to balance their interests. I didn’t do that. But, it probably was an attempt at doing that sort of thing – just getting a broader education, anticipating that would better suit what I like to do, and that I wasn’t, I could not ever see myself doing the same thing for a long period of time.

**And that’s kind of what doing just engineering represented to you?**

Yes.

**Doing the same thing over and over?**

Uh huh. Which, of course, isn’t true. There’s a lot of variety in engineering. And probably some of it being a woman, that there was a sense of wanting to develop soft skills. Or, be interested in soft skills.

**And I know that you said in senior week you started doing your MBA, and do you remember when you figured out that you were going to do the MBA?**

Probably sophomore, junior – somewhere in there. I think Clarkson may have, no – they had the program for longer than that, but obviously, I got some exposure to the fact that I did that. The other thing was in my personal life, I was pretty much being tied to the north country at that point. So, I was thinking, “Well, how can I get all this done here.”

**Right.**

And, so that did narrow my choices where somebody might say, “Well, how did you know you were going to get your MBA at Clarkson when you were a sophomore?”  
(laughter)

**Right.**

And I didn’t really know all of that. But, by the time I was interviewing for jobs I was limiting myself to a job that was here. So, somewhere along that same thing it was, “Oh! Well, I can just go to night school.” And I knew that there was tuition assistance from companies, and it just made sense, “This is how I’ll do it.”

**And either you didn’t tell me that last time or I may not have remembered – so, did Alcoa pay for your MBA?**

Yes. They did it course by course. Yes. And he [a colleague] and lots of people from Massena Operations took what prior to being the MBA was called an MS in management. And I think while I was an undergrad, they actually got accredited in an MBA program. So that’s what the program was. And, I bet when I was in that summer job at Alcoa after my sophomore year, I worked with people who were in that night school program.

**Uh huh. So, you would have been familiar with it by that point?**

Yes.

**That makes sense. Another thing that you talked about—I guess actually this is not going in chronological order completely—you talked a little bit about interactions between men and women on campus, but not a lot. And, it may be that you don't remember a lot from that. I don't necessarily remember a lot**

(laughter)

**from my undergraduate experience in that way. But you mentioned for instance that all the Holcroft women, your freshman year, had Ross boyfriends.**

Uh huh.

**Can you say more about what you remember about the interactions between men and women on campus? Again, to the extent that you remember them; either in the classroom or downtown at the bars, or in activities –whatever you remember about male/female relations here on campus then.**

Uh huh. Right. Well, I guess part of that word relations makes me think that I have to have sort of a holistic view of what was happening between men and women which I have no holistic view.

(laughter)

I have just my personal (laughter) view. But, certainly, the walking from Holcroft down between Ross and, I guess, that's Cubley, where you walk, because we were going to the cafeteria. So, back then cat calls and whistling and all of that was what went on. So, the guys in those two dorms were always sort of ogling the girls walking from Holcroft over to the cafeteria, and the same thing even, it was a little intimidating. You go up the steps and you'd walk in the door of the cafeteria (laughter) and, at the beginning, it's like this. I think the whole novelty (laughter) wears off for everybody at some point. I don't think it went on all year round. But, boy, those first few weeks are what made the most impression. But then there was interaction; I remember playing football with some group, maybe from The Pit. I mean, it wasn't like—, I'm not sure everybody in Holcroft had a Ross boyfriend (laughter). But, a number of us did. (laughter)

(laughter)

So it was very easy to get involved in doing activities— social activities. And I do think that Ross dorm, because they come up that end door, they just wander up the stairs and walk around the hallways, see what was going on. And in the classroom –I really don't remember anything that stood out in the classroom as far as – people were pretty much

focused in the classroom to listen, and then there was studying together, labs together. It was rare if you had a female lab partner.

**Again, I realize you're remembering back, but was that an issue? I don't know if in high school classes you were used to being the only girl?**

No. No. Because high school would have been roughly 50/50, I guess. So, that was a difference. Recognizing the ratio which, I think, was almost like double digits to one, maybe 12:1. I think dealing with that, even though I can't remember a lot about it (laughter), but getting accustomed to being that minority then made it much easier to transition into an industrial setting where the ratios were even worse.

**I remember you talked about on the construction site, or whatever, it being 300:1.**

Yes. Yes.

**So, 12:1 – I see how that would be a good ratio by comparison.**

Yes. Yes. So, just, it provided the comfort level, I think, of just learning how you handle yourself and what you might expect.

**Did you realize coming to Clarkson that you would be in such a minority? Did you know?**

I knew, yes, I think so. I had come to visit the campus. Yes.

**And, I remember you talking about that.**

So, I think I was aware of that. Certainly that not a lot of women chose engineering. But I didn't see it as a negative or a positive. It just was.

**That makes sense. Okay. Another thing that you mentioned was your job in the summer of '76 at the Corelleware plant, and then you said you learned a lot about the workplace in that job, some which maybe wasn't so positive. (laughter)**

(laughter)

**And you mentioned that you learned a lot about what we might now call sexual harassment. Although you said that you probably wouldn't have seen it as sexual harassment at that time.**

Uh huh.

**I'm wondering if you could say more about that, or if you could say how what we now call sexual harassment was dealt with at that time?**

Uh huh.

**Or, did people just not deal with it? That was too many questions at once.**

Well, right. So, I'll try to focus. Even certainly that experience but other really—, your experiences of working were things that today nobody would even think of doing. For one, in most workplaces now, people don't whistle at women. (laughter) That very simple thing.

**Uh huh.**

And don't have pin-up calendars up.

**Right.**

I remember talking with guys; this is at Alcoa where I had developed good friendships, but there was one tool manufacturer and their annual calendar was not a true pin-up calendar but whatever the things they were advertising, they were just well-endowed women in fairly skimpy clothing. And I remember giving this one guy a really hard time. And he said, "There's nothing wrong with this calendar," (laughter) and I said, "Well, I just don't like the idea that I think of you as looking at women and thinking of women like that because it makes me uncomfortable." And those sort of things eventually, they're not even made anymore. (laughter) So those tool manufacturers don't make calendars like that. But that summer of '76 at Corning, it was, I think, a little more shocking to actually be approached by men older than me, who were married, who essentially were hitting on me during the work setting. And that was uncomfortable. And, nobody had given any training. Today, you go places – everybody gets at least annual training. So, maybe summer students still don't quite get the full breadth of, "Here's what you should do when this sort of thing happens." But I'm sure some of it happens less. The inadvertent stuff probably happens a lot less because people now know you don't have calendars, you don't tell off color jokes, you can't compliment women on what they wear. So a lot of that went on. And you had to decide, "Where's my boundary?"

**And, how did you decide? In that setting, when you would have been given, it sounds like, zero guidance.**

Zero guidance. You had to pretty much go with your gut reaction. I can't remember if I told you this one because I could go on with a lot of (laughter) sexual harassment examples.

**I mean, you didn't really talk about that stuff much.**

Oh.

**I mean, you talked about that it was happening. I think you implied it when you were talking about Alcoa. I don't know if I'm taking this too far field, and if I am,**

**tell me. You were talking about how supportive Jack Carroll was to you, and you said you always had good support from people, and that you had a good experience. But, you said some time we can go into all those anecdotes.**

Oh! (laughter)

**You said the things you recalled that people did to you that they shouldn't have done. But you said, "But I let a lot of those things just roll off my back." And if you feel comfortable sharing any of that, I'd be interested to know more about what you mean, so it sounds like we're talking—, I realize the Corning thing is late '70s and Alcoa would have been**

Well, the same.

**the late '70s/early '80s probably.**

Well, yeah. There are lots of anecdotes if I sat down to write them down. One I actually think I will use tomorrow [in a talk to WiSE (Women in Science and Engineering) students who live together in a dorm] on this thing about setting boundaries. This is probably late '70s, maybe '80. I might have been working at Alcoa three years or so at that point. And I was dealing with a vendor, and he had said this to me, and I just happened in conversation to pass this along to my boss. He said, "How are things going with this scrap dealer?" And, I said, "Oh, he said, 'does that dumb broad really want that box set there?'" And that, I had let roll off my back. I thought, "This guy is a French-Canadian from Montreal. He has no clue, and I didn't find it all that offensive." But my boss realized this cannot go on. We don't want vendors on site that are acting like this so they talked to him, or went back to procurement, [and] told him, "This is not acceptable. You need to apologize." So, my phone rang sometime in the next few weeks. I was actually embarrassed that my boss had stepped in to this. So my phone rang in the next few weeks, this guy, Jeff, apologizes, said he didn't mean it in any derogatory way. And, we probably talked a little bit more about whatever our actual need for interaction was and that was the end of it. So, I thought, "Okay. Good." But, apparently when he made that phone call, he was in an office of a colleague of mine who spoke to me very shortly after and said that after he had hung the phone up, he said, "I charmed the pants off her." (laughter) So, when I heard this, I'm like, "Okay. I'm taking care of this now." Didn't tell my boss. Just waited 'til I saw him again. And, I chased him down in the shop and said, "You didn't," I rang him out. "You did not charm the pants off me. That is not an appropriate thing to say." I mean, that's where—, that I will not stand for. (laughter)

**(laughter) Now wait, tell me though—I have my own feelings about this—but tell me, what's the difference between being called a dumb broad and that you let roll off your back,**

(laughter)

**but then he said to his colleague that he charmed the pants off of you.**

Yeah. I guess it just has more of a sexual connotation to me. I'm a very literal person.  
(laughter)

**Uh huh. (laughter) Fair enough. That's fair enough.**

Yeah.

**And, did you have to deal with him after that?**

I think so. And a vendor [is] somebody you're working with all the time. Let's see. What other—, and then there was actually one, there was some that were actually scary.

**Uh huh.**

Well, do we want to take up the whole hour with these things? (laughter) Really – because there are a lot. There are a lot. But, one

**Say some more.**

okay,

**If you're comfortable with that.**

when I was in the marketing job where I was going around with the sales reps, and going to distributors for wire, rod and bar, so these are metal center distributors, and giving talks on the various alloys and what they might recommend to their customers and so on and so forth. [I] did those frequently for a year, and after having done one of those in Rhode Island, I think, I got a phone call from somebody at this company, who I thought, customer, okay a customer, answer the customer's questions – whatever they have. But, in the course of the conversation he described what I was wearing that night. What the jewelry was. That he'd like to date me. Said he'd like to come see me. It was really creepy. And, I just didn't know how far he was going to take [this] in terms of tracking me down. It made me extremely uncomfortable. I can't remember if there was more than one phone call. There may have been. Or maybe a phone call to the home. But I got really, really nervous. So, I did, but then I was in the situation that this is a customer. And, so that one I did talk to my boss about. And,

**Was your boss at this time Jack Carroll?**

No. He was never my boss.

**Okay.**

He was never my boss. Yeah. So, this is a different boss than the one that had intervened on the dumb broad thing. And, this is probably five years later. I think he did call, they

somehow got a hold of the distributor/owner, and I believe they fired him. And, they said there had been other things, which usually there are. (laughter) And then, the other scary one that I remember, and then I'll go to some that are just sort of comical. I think we had hired somebody new into the department. This was within that first five years that I worked at Alcoa. So, late '70s, early '80s. Maybe as a temporary draftsman, or something like that. So, his first or second day we finish, we walk out to the parking lot, it was summer so it was daylight. And, I'd been friendly, just said goodbye or whatever, talked to him during the day. I drive out and I live in Norwood at that point, so I go the back way out of Massena, and his car is following me. And, I get on Route 56 and I start going south, and the car's still following me. And then, he either tried to pass me or put his lights on or somehow, and I pulled over as he said, "I want to know if you want to go somewhere for a drink?" (laughter) And I was like, "Nuh uh." (laughter) "No." "Why are you following me?" (laughter) So he did get turned around that night. But then, I was very uncomfortable. I spoke with a colleague who had hired him, who actually had accountability for him, and he [the guy who had followed me] was married also, but wife not living in town. And so they let him go. (laughter)

**Wow.**

Yeah.

**And go ahead.**

Well, yeah. I was just going to say that those two—; I do have a very high tolerance level. So, these somehow in that intuition about—there's something here that is creepy is why I felt the way I did and why I took some action rather than chasing a guy down and yelling at him for what he said because that was not a creepy one.

**Right.**

And then, another one that when I've told some guys this they just can't believe I had to deal with it. This was when I had the carbon plant superintendent job, so 200 people working for me, and probably six or eight supervisors who handled crews of 10 or 20 people. And, there had been a grievance hearing, and I did not go to the hearing but the guy who reported directly to me had been there. And he came back, and I said, "Well, how did that go?" Because it was about a supervisor sort of losing his temper, and he slid a chair in the lunch room, or had done something so there was a grievance against him. Can I use bad language here? (laughter)

**You can use whatever language you want. (laughter)**

We'll have to figure out how to deal with it. So, Joe said to me, "The thing went alright, but you didn't make out so well." I said, "Well, why?" He said that the hourly guy, who had the grievance against the supervisor, quoted the supervisor as having been upset –

why he pushed the chair was something that I had asked him to do and he called me a fucking cunt. So, I thought, (sigh) “Wayne<sup>5</sup>, that’s not good.” (laughter)

**(laughter)**

So, I called him [Wayne] in and said, “I understood you called me a fucking cunt, and I don’t think that shows respect for a supervisor of this department.” Well, as you can imagine, he got a little (laughter) uneasy, but I thought, “I’m the boss, and I’m just dealing with this.” And I bet he never used that language again.

**Yeah. Wow. And, you knew immediately that you were just going to deal with it**

Uh huh. Uh huh. I didn’t know. There was no way I felt threatened. That creepy kind of, somebody that might molest me.

**Okay.**

It was just, “Boy, these guys have got to learn.” (laughter)

**Yeah. And, this would have been early,**

That would have been early ’90s.

**early ’90s. And you said you had other comical anecdotes. I don’t know if any of those count as comical or not. (laughter)**

Well, (laughter) well, yeah, sort of because it’s just sort of catching somebody in what—they were in their comfort zone.

**Right.**

He never would have said it in front of me.

**Right. He didn’t intend for it to get back to you.**

Yes.

**So that was the early ’90s. How long did that continue?**

Well, right. What’s the latest one I can think of? I think as I went up in the organization you have less interface with people who don’t understand what’s right and wrong. There’s been more training. But then it almost goes the other way where people are so careful; in fact one guy who worked for me, it was very bad, I’d say, “Well, you have a nice tie.” He’d say, “Well, you look nice today.” But, they’re really not even supposed to

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<sup>5</sup> This is a pseudonym.



say that. So, he now works at another company; we talk every now and then. He said, “Ugh. I always loved your red shoes. I couldn’t say it then, but—” (laughter)

**(laughter) Yeah.**

Yeah. I mean, really, you walk a fine line. And most of them know there are women who can be extremely sensitive. It’s very hard for men to judge because it’s not—, I mean, some things are not clearly: you don’t do this. But there’s a big gray area, where I would let it roll off my back – someone else, it may make them feel uncomfortable.

**Right.**

The definition just being whatever work environment that’s not conducive to you getting your work done. And that depends on your own personal level of comfort with these sorts of things. So, it’s very hard. Primarily for men, but it can go the other way as well.

**Uh huh. Have you been in a situation where you had to advise women about how to deal with sexual harassment? That was another thing that I know that you got into further in your career at Alcoa, it sounds like being in more of a mentorship role with women. And so, how have you advised women about these issues? Especially given that you’re saying that you have a high tolerance,**

Right. I think that it’s always recognizing that people have their own tolerance levels.

**Yeah.**

So, that you have to do what’s comfortable for you. Even the official information is you try to resolve it first yourself.

**Right.**

Which is probably also why I dealt with Wayne. I know I can make this stop.

**Yeah.**

(laughter)

**You’re the boss.**

But that can sometimes be very uncomfortable for people to deal with. But that’s what you recommend first; then I’m drawing a blank to come up with an actual anecdote to tell you something. But once it’s been brought to your attention, I know there were times where things get brought to my attention and you have to say to that person, “Now that you brought it to my attention, I’m going to have to deal with this. This is no longer just friends talking.” So then you start an investigation using the HR Department. But it’s not a lot of things in the last ten years.

**Because you think the climate's—**

I think the climate has changed.

**Yeah.**

And, whether it would have changed in a factory floor with high school educated folks, still in factories where there aren't that many women, because I think the more women you get, the more they learn they have to adjust what they're saying.

**Right.**

Oh! I remember another one. This is where I did some advising because this was a woman who worked for me. She ran a department; this was when I was at Massena, and she had to deal with male to male sexual harassment that was brought to her attention. Of somebody grabbing somebody by the balls and in the locker room, and then she had to deal with that. So, I remember us talking about who's going to talk to—was she going to talk to the perpetrator about their behavior?

**With probably little in the way of laws that would help you or--?**

Right. Although there it's the same thing. It's creating a hostile work environment.

**Interesting. Another thing that you talked about in the last interview was when you got involved in recruiting women, and I was guessing that was the late '80s? I wasn't sure time wise.**

Like, recruiting to Alcoa?

**Yeah.**

Yes.

**Okay. And you?**

Well, no. I guess it could be two different things.

**Okay.**

One was possibly when I was just a new engineer, and we were just hiring entry level, and they would always have you talk with other near entry level, and we did bring a number of women in. And the other would have been when I was in the Executive Leadership Development Program; I did some work at trying to recruit women into higher level positions from the outside.

**Okay. I'm not sure which you were talking about there—I'm thinking maybe the latter.**

Okay.

**You said at that point, "I began to have more of an understanding that there's a role that I play in helping women do better."**

Oh, okay. That was not necessarily around recruiting but just around sharing the experiences, doing the mentoring,

**Okay. Good. I'm glad I'm asking you [about] that.**

okay.

**I want to know more about what you meant by that, and what you did.**

Okay. Yes. I think probably my first supervising was in '85, roughly. I had three or four direct reports; there's always some indirect supervision. But, so prior to that if I was asked to participate in any structured women's support group, I declined. I thought, "They don't need to single us out. We don't need any special support. I don't need any special support." (laughter) So I declined. But then, when I began to supervise others, and probably even just that small group of engineers, three or four, of which one was a woman, I don't think it sunk in right then that I had some different role. It was more when I got into line management and even though there weren't necessarily women working for me, then I realized I have some greater purpose as a manager. I have to do what all managers have to do. Which is sort of tout the company line on everything. Which is we have to follow the laws, we have to do this, we have to do that, which would be making sure there was no sexual harassment; being alert for that occurring in whatever organization was my accountability. But then on top of that came the piece of the mentoring, which probably came more naturally by people just talking to me, and getting a sense that there's some value here to them. Then when I would be asked to participate in a structured women's support network, I said, "yes" despite my initial hesitation (laughter) way back. I did that because I could see that getting that critical mass together can make a difference. Of discussing what needs to be done. You could have influence. It was the Alcoa's Women Network that was formed the last few years that I was at Alcoa, with high level women, and it still exists today. But that was really to try to make an effort at making it an environment where women more easily succeeded.

**Uh huh. And did the support group systems offer anything to you?**

Oh, I think so. Yes. Yes.

**Like what?**

Just hearing other people's either issues or solutions. Just good information.

**And, the issues and solutions – what were those about, what kinds of things?**

One part that I could tell you didn't ever really resonate with me was around children and childcare, and balancing all of that. Because I didn't have to deal with that. And I remember one woman who worked for me that had four kids, all quite close together. And she said, "You would be such a good role model for me. Except you don't have kids." (laughter)

**(laughter)**

So, it was clear to me that there's a difference. And I can't really relate to it. So, I think I probably tried harder, especially after her comments, to have a little more sensitivity to that. And help people balance their life. And, not just women, men need to do it too. So what I would get out of those things would be an understanding of an experience I was not having.

**Uh huh. That makes sense. You also mentioned—I think this is a different thing—a corporate task force on diversity at Alcoa.**

Uh huh.

**But I didn't really know what your involvement was in that or exactly what that task force did.**

Yeah. It was probably one of several efforts, but I'm trying to think when this was, probably early '90s. A recognition not just around gender diversity but also ethnic and racial, that it wasn't necessarily the perfect environment and what are we going to do about it. So, this group of say ten people was pulled together. There was probably a facilitator; we probably had outside training. And, I think there were different elements of what kind of training do we want to have done corporately? Are there metrics and goals we should be setting? What are things that could be done to ensure that there's more of a level playing field? And out of that came a document that then was distributed and reviewed with all the business units around the things they should do. I'm going to have trouble calling up anything specific. But it was that kind of thing.

**Okay.**

And then sort of building on that, when I got into that HR job in Pittsburgh in the late '90s, there was still, and probably to this day, still is a struggle with how do we move forward, is it possible to move forward? What can we do to improve the mix in the company? Why are we unable to retain women? Or recruit them, so on and so forth. But [with] many things that were new, whenever there's a change, there are motivational techniques to get the business leaders to do these things. Punishment or reward. Having a metric, yes. So, I looked at women in certain job grades over 10 or 20 year periods. And, how many were there and what was the rate of change? [I] actually ended up talking with

somebody at Catalyst to try to figure out what is the right metric, or a metric that makes sense. Because if you just said, well you had 10 and in three years we'd like you to have 20, or how do you determine what these goals are? As an example, another metric would be safety and the injury rate. And, it was very typical of an injury rate to say over five years, you're going to cut it in half. So, I was in that mode: well, what are we saying about measuring the number of women in certain jobs? So, I spoke with Catalyst and they actually said the rate of change, so we went with every business unit, calculated what the rate of change had been over the past 10 years, and said then over the next 10 we wanted double that, or then had in between goals around rate of change. So for awhile those things were tracked; I don't know if they still are today. It's a really tough situation I think. If you don't have them at the bottom, it's hard to get them at the top. To just go out and have them move around from company to company, but some women really play that very well. They're also talented, know what they're doing, but that's a way to seed your organization is to bring in women at the top from the outside. And job movement is so common now that it's not that unusual. But, I think to have a really healthy, strong, changed culture with a higher percentage of women, or African-Americans, or whatever it may be, it has to be throughout your organization. And it's tough when you're starting with engineers who are, if there's only 25% to have to even start with, and then if you parse that down to how many are biomedical that aren't ever going to really work in a factory, it's hard for some heavy industry to have a pool.

**Knowing about the School of Engineering here, let's say with faculty, it's a similar kind of issue.**

Oh, right. Right.

**Going on to something different, you mentioned that when you went to Tennessee, you said something like it was a tougher environment, and it sounds like it was a tougher environment on several levels if I understood you correctly. You said that the union wasn't as open toward women management there, and compared to your experience in Massena, and then I remember it was Alcoa, Tennessee, right?**

Yes.

**You told me it was just called Tennessee.**

(laughter) Yeah.

**Okay. And you also said some of them, I'm not sure who "them" was, but some of them were not as open to working with women in management, and you did encounter all sorts of different things. Could speak a little bit more about that?**

Oh, okay.

**What you meant by people. I didn't know if you meant, just generally, people working at Alcoa, Tennessee not being as open to women in management.**

Uh huh. Well, being in a more conservative, sort of Bible belt, it played out, and then I have a very recent story that ties into this. There was a woman on my staff; she ran the department there and there was at least one person in her department, an hourly worker, who whenever he would see her, he always had his Bible with him, and then when he would see her, he would read aloud the passages about women that should be home and raising children.

**You did mention that.**

So, more conservative. But I just had a lunch meeting with a woman that worked in my organization in Richmond, last week, and she's changing jobs, and she had been to an interview in Missouri. She's a sales rep, and her first interviewer that day was the HR person who said, "I want you to know that people here don't really accept women in the workplace, and you might get a little sense of that resistance today, because of their religious beliefs, and so on and so forth." And, she really got upset, she said it just set her on edge and very defensive for the remainder of the day. That even though the other professionals that she talked to didn't really give her any indication of that, she was anticipating, "I'm just going to have trouble doing my job." So, I was counseling her; she said she left there crying. And, I said, "Okay." And but since then, before we got together for lunch, they called her back for a second interview. So she's going to have to make a decision. She said, "I just don't think I can work in a company like that." And, I said, "Well, you have to decide if it is going to impact your ability to do your job. You're going to be out with customers most of the time. They're not going to be different than the customers you have today. But, if you have to get work done, a special product made and through the plant in order to satisfy a customer's needs, and if you have people who are going to be resistant to working with you," and she would have only sideline influences, would not be line. So, she was going to probably explore that a little more. And, there were other female sales reps and she was going to talk with them to see what kind of issues they encountered. So, it's not gone away. (laughter)

**Right.**

And then this one other thing about that Tennessee group – because the union leaders [were] pretty antagonistic with management. I think I made some special efforts to try to be friendly with them which included, I can't remember why we were all off site, we probably went off to something, to try to make us work together better. (laughter)

**Right. (laughter)**

But, we had the opportunity to go country dancing. (laughter)

**Let me guess that you're not normally a country dancer. (laughter)**

So, I just went out there and said this is how you get to know people. And, the same thing occurs, men bonding with other men. I have found that as long as I have made a

conscious effort to be a flirt, and I know that it's for a purpose that it can work to my advantage. (laughter) And, as long—, you still have to be aware and have your intuition up to know whether someone is going to take it wrong. But so, when you have one of those non-work environment situations where you can get to know people a little better, it does help the working relations later. So, the fact that I danced with Blue. (laughter)

**I'd be in trouble if I had to go country (laughter) line dancing. So aside from the country line dancing thing, how did you deal with this environment in Tennessee which was, it sounds like, pretty antagonistic to you, not you personally, but you as a woman, and you as a woman in management?**

Uh huh. I found that communication, and the one-on-one. Because when people are in a group, they pretty much have to stick with the party line. But, if you can spend time with somebody one-on-one, and say, "Let's talk to the issues," and I did have, in my part of the plant, probably somebody who was a little more reasonable than the rest of them. So, I used him as an entrée, spent time talking with him, invited him to my staff meetings in the morning, so that we established a relationship.

**So I'm moving in a totally different direction.**

Okay.

**You said that the year you retired from Alcoa was the year you turned 50, and that you weren't sure what was next. And I know you explained last time that you kind of jumped into American Capital, but can you say more about that transition when you retired from Alcoa and trying to figure out what's next in all this?**

Yeah. The opportunity to retire came up and so it's not like I had been thinking about it and working toward, "Okay. I've almost done my 30 years." This was whatever, 28 years, had the opportunity to. So, I hadn't thought about it. And, so I was still in the mode of, "Okay. I am going to work a full-time job. I want to run some part of some business. I like what I'm doing. I want to do a similar thing." And, really just waited for the recruiters to call which is not really what they recommend. (laughter) It's the easiest. And, the calls were coming enough that I hadn't gotten in the mode of really thinking about what kind of company do I want to work for? How do I do the informational networking, and get my foot in the door? So for me it wasn't the transition; it wasn't time to say, "I'm going to go to something less than a full-time, kind of a high pressure job."

**It sounds like that came later.**

That came later.

**Yeah.**

Not too much later, but it came, and I think, also, I wasn't sure of, well, I had done no financial planning either. So, I didn't even know whether I could cut back.

**How would this work?**

Yeah. (laughter)

**(laughter) Would this even be an option?**

Yes. Yes. And prior to the next transition, because I did have my retirement to deal with and 401K's to roll over and all that, I did get a financial planner. And they plug things into a formula and say, "Well, how much do you spend?" And then, "Maybe you don't have to work at all." (laughter)

**So, before you left American Capital?**

I already, yes, had much more information. (laughter)

**Okay. I remember you telling me it was with that job, right? You had been talking with your two friends in Richmond who were very happy, and you realized, "Hey! I could be happy like them." (laughter)**

Yeah. Yeah. So, yes. So, at that point I knew that I could manage without having a big salary. And,

**Could you say more about why you decided to get out of American Capital?**

Yes. So, now I had a conversation in the last two weeks with the recruiter who placed me at American Capital. So, we talked a little bit about this too. I did not have as much autonomy as I had at Alcoa. And, whether you can have autonomy in a bureaucratic organization or not, I'm not sure if those are mutually exclusive, but I didn't have autonomy and it was very bureaucratic. (laughter) Both of those things. So, working with the portfolio companies, I could pretty much have the autonomy that I did as if they were my staff. And just, "What are your problems? Let's decide what we're going to do." And, an interaction of what they were going to do. But, if there was ever anything that had to go back through the American Capital structure about getting more money, making a decision to sell, then it was very bureaucratic. Lots of paper work to fill out, people to convince. I'd go talk to somebody, and the boss's boss would say, "Well, but you didn't talk to that person first. And, we can't have that coming up in that meeting. He doesn't know that it came from me that I approved it and that he approved it." I'm like, "Holy smokes. It's going to take a long time to get things done here." So, to me it seemed like there was a lot of second guessing. There was a lot of politics. I remember a number of long conference calls where a bunch of us that worked closely together were making the recommendation, "It's time to put this company on the market. We've had a good run. We've got pretty good revenue stream over the next few months. We look out and we think it's going to drop off. And, even though you're not getting back all your money, this is in such better shape than it was three years ago. It's time to sell." And, there were people that had emotional connections to the company and they had made the decision,



and there was just all this angst, and politics, and trying to play to people's egos. And, I'm just not good at that. So that was some of the politics and the bureaucracy. But, when I talked to Nicky, the recruiter, she said, "I told them that if I was going to find them people like you, that they had to let you be autonomous." (laughter) And then, it was really nice. She followed up with an e-mail a week or so after that. And, she had interfaced with one of the guys that I had worked with, that was not, actually, in my hierarchical structure but more a peer here, and she said, "I had lunch with Jon the other day. He's a big fan of yours just as I am. And he said to stay in touch."

**So, this was a recent conversation?**

Yes, just like a week ago. So, there I was in a group where I didn't have a lot of respect for the people I was reporting to. And then, they got so big and they created another layer. So then, I got kind of bumped down and was reporting to somebody else who did brown nose, I was reporting to this guy, and it was just, I thought, "I don't—"

**I don't need this.**

"I don't need this."

**Yeah.**

And, one of the fellows that I worked with at one of the portfolio companies, when he heard I was leaving, and he knew the turmoil with these guys, and all the politics, and he said, "I told them you just had FU money." (laughter)

**(laughter)**

And, I said, "Well, Wally, I'm not sure I really do, but." (laughter) So, that's sort of what it was. I'm glad they took it that way. (laughter)

**(laughter) Right. Now, going again in a totally different direction, as I said to you before we turned on the recorder, we were talking on the boat ride from your camp about your involvement on the board, and you've been on the Board of Trustees here at Clarkson for a long time. How did you get involved in that, and why do you stay? (laughter)**

(laughter) Yeah. The first question – there always has been an alumni network that had a hierarchy and a governance board and that sort of thing. I can't even think of what it's called now. But, back then it was called Alumni National Executive Committee. So, the chapter presidents were part of that. And then, they had members at large. And, so Don Dangremond [who was Clarkson's Vice President of University Relations in the early 1990s] nominated me or somehow brought my name, I think now I know how they recruit, and first they look at somebody who is actually sending us some money.

**Right.**

Even if it's \$25.00. And, I think they're probably looking for some diversity. I was local at the time. So, I was asked to be on ANEC as a member at large. So,

**What's ANEC?**

meaning the Alumni National Executive Committee.

**Okay. Thank you.**

Which today is called something else.

**Okay.**

Alumni Leadership Council, I think. So I did that which meant I came to a few meetings. And then, that is sort of a feeder, and today even still serves as a feeder for the Alumni Association because it lets you identify people who have green and gold blood.

**Right.**

(laughter) So I went from that to just being nominated or asked, so I'm sure it was the system. And I was not the youngest woman on the board at the time. Sara [Goble] Salloum [class of 1980] was on.

**And it was 1990 when you started?**

Yes. I think 1990. And the board terms are five years. You can have two consecutive terms. And, after ten you have to take a one year hiatus. So, it was fairly easy for me to participate because I was here [living in the north country] until '95 or '96. So, coming to the meetings, other than the February meeting which is usually off, always off site, frequently in New York City.

**Right.**

That was easy to do. And then, during that first five years, I think I probably was on the Student Affairs Committee, and chaired the Student Affairs Committee, so I could interface with whoever the dean was. It was easy; it went along. Then, when I was away, it was a little more difficult. And, at the end of the ten years I said, and I had also been on the Trusteeship Committee, and I felt that too many people just stayed and stayed and stayed. And, they would do their one year hiatus, but then they would come back after their ten years, and then they'd be into their next ten years. So, I said, "I've done my ten years and I'm off." And so, they checked after the one year and I said, "No." And, every now and then somebody would call and now I'm even more tuned in to it because I'm on the Trusteeship Committee now,

**Which means what – the Trusteeship Committee?**

the ones that you decide, the Trusteeship Committee is in charge of nominating future trustees. Yes. As well as a few other governance things.

**Okay.**

But, primarily who's in the pipeline. A lot of the work is done by the administration. But, some names are put forward by Trusteeship Committee. But then, we do evaluations of what skill set are they bringing. There are, I think at this meeting [the Trustees meeting at Clarkson], two potential trustees. We meet with them individually, one-on-one meetings to gauge are they the right fit, do they understand the requirements. Then they have to come and attend two meetings before they're elected. And everybody has to feel warm and fuzzy about them. They have to nod their head; they have to understand what the financial commitment is. (laughter) So the list of who may be nominated always includes past trustees. So, I'm sure I was always on that past trustee list of well, "Is Liz going to come back?" Because I wasn't all that old. So they would keep calling. And I remember once I said, "Well, alright." And I may have told you this, the reason that I said "alright," and I tell people this openly. Because I do like Clarkson, but it's not like I have a passion as some of my trustee colleagues have said, "I came there intentionally to revamp the investment committee and to get a better handle on the endowment, and to get a better return." I'm not that visionary, or I came back because my social life sucked. (laughter) And I said, "Well, this will fill up three weekends every year." (laughter) But in fact, I will be re-elected at this meeting

**You will?**

to my fourth/fifth year, or maybe even, I think I had a couple, when I came back on, I filled out somebody else's term with two or three years, then I did five more years and now it's up for five more. So, someone from the Trusteeship Committee called to say, "We asked you on the phone call the other day, but this is the official call – are you willing to do this?" And I said, "Yes. But I'm not really sure what I bring." They said, "Well, you bring a lot of continuity. You have a different point of view. We'd like you to stay on as a trustee." So, I don't really know how it will come to an end. (laughter)

**(laughter) You're going to keep getting recruited to stay. Do you think you bring a different point of view?**

Well, I certainly—, I can think of some examples. Yes. But I think also the longer you're on, the more you sort of just get molded. The very first meeting I was at, they must have had some discussion about—this is way back when I first came on, or within the first year. Discussion about tuition. And, of course, I didn't really quite understand the discount, and the tuition, and I thought, "Well, you'll get more people if you just have a big splash in the newspaper that says, 'Clarkson did not raise their tuition.'" So, I voted against the tuition increase. It's the only time I voted against a tuition increase. The rest of the 20 years, I voted for the tuition.

**(laughter)**

(laughter) But then, you, you sort of realize how this goes.

**Yeah.**

And that there haven't ever really been that many contentious issues. I would say one of the more contentious activities I took place in was the presidential search. I was on the last presidential search committee. And there was not easy consensus on that. So if there's something that I am passionate about, I will raise my voice even if it doesn't go with everybody else. But there aren't—, and I think also my style probably is a little more one-on-one. I always will send Tony [Collins, Clarkson's president] a note after the meeting with feedback. They had a proposal; of course, everybody loves to get into the physical plant things. They say, "I don't like the shape of that new building," or, "This building's—," and it's unfortunate for the administration; there's a lot of micromanagement sort of that comes out of the board that shouldn't be there. But there was a proposal for the renovation of Holcroft that was shown, Tony had shown slides or something, and I just thought this is disgusting how it looks. And I really got on his case about it. So, now he sort of [says], "Liz, come look at this new one. We need you to see this new one." (laughter) "It was you that made us decide this wasn't right." I said, "If you're working with an architect that claims to be in historic preservation, you should fire them because this is not historic preservation." (laughter)

**(laughter) And you remember Holcroft.**

Yes.

**Right.**

Yes. Yes. And he said, "That was a real insult to that architect." (laughter)

**And, going forward do you have particular issues in the next five years or particular committees, because I understand that—,**

Yeah. People are on committees. I don't chair any committee which is lovely. In general it's a lot of the work over the last several years has been around the marketing, which relates to bringing in the students, and the fund raising. And, all the work that really needs to be done to the physical campus. And that has been ongoing, forever. I think it's in much better shape than it was, but some of those things that were done 15 years ago, that seem like, "Oh, whew! We got that done." Now, those things are, (laughter)

**Resurface.**

yes.

**Yes.**

But no, I don't have a particular passion.

**I see actually we're over an hour. I have more questions, but I'll ask one more.**

Okay.

**Related to this actually. You were an undergraduate student here and then you were a graduate student here, and then you came back for the assistant dean position, and then as a trustee, basically, on and off for the past 20 years. And I'm curious as to what you see as the biggest changes from when you were an undergraduate student here, and now. And, I'm thinking [about] that broadly, and in terms of women – both.**

Uh huh. Broadly in terms of the education, I think there is a more consistent focus on the team work, and the well-roundedness, the leadership aspects of developing the students here. Rather than take this major, follow these courses, yes, we throw in whatever Great Ideas [in Western Culture], but I think, at least I get the sense that there's more cohesive work on the part of faculty and administration to have a program that creates well-rounded students who can lead, communicate, if they wanted to; they've done some research to really give people a broader education than just being in the classroom.

**Uh huh. As compared to when you were—**

As compared to when I was here. Yes.

**Now, what about in terms of women here?**

In terms of women. I'm not sure I actually have a perspective that's—, it would be a guess to say that just because the population and the understanding in the broader world is that women don't get harassed, women should be wherever they want to be in terms of—, that has got to be a less tense environment. But, I don't know that that's true because I really don't have that student perspective any longer.

**Yeah.**

Yeah. Certainly there's more women on the faculty.

**Right.**

That I can see.

**Yeah. And, I even have seen that in the past ten years myself. (laughter)**

(laughter)

**Yeah.**

Yeah. Which is great because the pioneers have to get a wedge and then you just make the wedge wider and wider. And when the critical mass is there, then there's a wider acceptance of different degrees of behavior.

**Okay. So, I do have one more question. I'm sorry.**

(laughter)

**When you use the word pioneer, and I promise I'll make this the last, did you see yourself as a pioneer when you were here?**

Yes. I think we knew, we being any one of the women engineers, that there had only been women here for a few years. That there were very few, and that could have come some from SWE, which, I think, focused some on their uniqueness. We are unique. And whoever the speakers were that we brought in.

**Did you like being a pioneer? Do you remember?**

I think so. Yes. Yeah.

**What did you like about it?**

I think the implicit, well there was explicit, but the implicit challenge.

**Uh huh. I remember from what you said during that last interview, that you clearly like challenge. (laughter)**

(laughter) Oh! Yes. Yeah, and probably being a little different was a positive.

**Let's end it.**

Okay.

**Thank you very much.**

Thank you, Laura.