

Interviewed by Michaela Bell
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Michaela Bell: This is oral history project 1968, my name is Michaela Bell.

All right, let's start with where and when you were born.

AI: I was born in 1950, in Providence, Rhode Island.

MB: Where did you grow up?

AI: Providence, South Providence, to be exact, actually not too far from this neighborhood. My grandparents lived about two blocks over here.

MB: Briefly describe your family and your neighborhood, ethnicity, religion, and your parents occupations.

AI: Okay, I was born, I'm a nice Irish-Catholic girl, I was born in South Providence, which at that time was a mixed, a neighborhood of primarily working poor people and my father worked in a factory. My mother when I was born was not employed; she was a homemaker; it was the Fifties; that's the way it worked then. She had worked before I was born and she worked again later in life. And we worked, we were what you would describe as working class, or a working poor family. We lived in a series of tenements, eventually we living in a tenement where we lived, I lived on the first floor with my mother, my father, and my two brothers, who were both younger than I was in a little tiny five room apartment. And on the third floor my grandmother lived with my two uncles and in between there was another family who lived on the second floor, so.

MB: So your mother didn't work outside the home, or..?

AI: Not when I was born, she did later. She worked, she worked a number of jobs. She worked at an advertising agency, she was, she was a very capable woman, but in the Fifties that was, when you had little babies you were home.

MB: How were household chores and duties allocated in your family and how did that change over time?

AI: They were broken up exclusively by gender, there were jobs that women did, jobs that men did, I was the only female child so I was responsible, and I shared a bedroom with both with my brothers, it was a very tiny apartment. I was responsible to do housework, my brothers as I recall were never required to do any kind of housework. They occasionally would take out, they did things like take out the trash, and I suppose if we had a garage they would've cleaned the garage. But since we didn't, they seemed to be getting off pretty easy. (laughs) Household jobs broke down exclusively by gender line, like I don't ever remember seeing either of my brothers ever do a dish.

MB: (laughs) What were your parents' political views and affiliations?

AI: Well they're good, they're good Irish-Catholic folks so that they're, in being working people, they were Democrats, that's sort of a tradition. But I would say they were moderate to conservative Democrats. I mean they believed in unions and they believed in, they saw the Republican Party specifically as a party that was out to take care of the rich, and they didn't relate to that because we were Irish-Catholic in the Sixties when Kennedy ran for president, of course, there was a huge ground swell of support for him being the first Catholic president.

And, but in terms of the larger issues that were on the table, civil rights, they were not particularly supportive of civil rights. Black people were just one rung below us on the socio-economic ladder, and so they were in fact, you know, any kind of affirmative action, or what they perceived to be special attention, given to those groups threatened what very tenuous, what very, what very little hold they had on economic security. I mean, my father was a child of the Depression, he was one of fourteen children, he left school in the sixth grade to help support his family, he went to war, he came back, he had his own family. He was a very, very intelligent man and a very ambitious and hard working guy, but he had limited opportunities, and so he was hanging on, you know, by all he could to the American Dream, and the idea that somebody else was gonna sort of get any kind of special attention made him very nervous, so he was not a big believer in civil rights. And, I would probably say, although they would never agree with me, they had, they held certain racist beliefs. Not in their heart, but it was, if the only thing that separated them from the guy below them, one step below them on the ladder, was the color of their skin, they were willing to say, that was okay with them, that was.

Are you following me? Do you have any idea? Its hard to put this Fifties perspective into a Nineties reality. But, if you've got two guys and neither one of them are educated, and neither one of them, and they're both in contention for the same low-paying, low-level job and neither one of them really see a very bright future for themselves, and the only thing that one of them's got going for them is that the guy that owns the company's white, and one of the guys applying for the job is white, well the guy owning the company's going to have a tendency to choose someone to work for him who looks more like him, who he understands better and if that, you know, where I came from, if that's what you were parleying- to get the job over the black guy, that was okay. 'Cause you needed the job. Whether or not if you could ever get my father to say you know, 'black people are inferior' or 'they were lazy' or, you'd never get him to say that he believed in those kinds of stereotypes but at the same time he wasn't willing to give up what little privilege he had, because he had so very little, about the only privilege he had was based on the color of his skin, so. So, he was very, they were, they were threatened. Now, in the Nineties if you asked them this they would tell you that they didn't see it this way, things have changed so radically.

MB: Where did your family get information about politics and other events?

AI: Listening to the radio, reading the newspaper, watching TV, and in general politics were very local, especially in immigrant communities. And we weren't that far removed, my father was only, my father was first generation in this country, his father came over from Ireland. So, they got a lot of their information from the people in the neighborhood. And there was, there were local personalities who held a certain amount of power, in terms of they were connected to the city counsel, they were connected to the legislature, they

were connected to the Mayor, or the Police Department, and they had jobs and opportunities and things available to them. So a lot of people, or at least in my neighborhood, a lot of peoples' political views and political loyalties were based on who was gonna get, you know, your uncle a job when he needed one.

MB: What were your experiences with dating or friendship?

AI: (laughs) Yeah, I did both. What exactly, could we be a little more specific here?

MB: I'm not really sure, I guess just like interactions, or.

AI: Well, I came from, I came from a somewhat insular neighborhood. I went to, my, I went to as a grammar school; my school was attached to my church. I went to a nice little Catholic school 'til the ninth grade. I lived in a neighborhood where most of, a lot of the folks didn't own cars. We relied on public transportation. We owned a car, but only one, my dad drove it to work. I don't think my mother even knew how to drive 'til I was about ten or eleven. So if you couldn't get there on a bus you didn't go there. Which means we didn't leave our neighborhood very much. We had business to do we did it downtown, we took the Broad city line, did our business downtown and came back. I didn't get out of my neighborhood much. My life five days a week was centered on my school, and the other, on Sunday it was centered around the church which was next door to the school. All of this was within, you know, a ten block walk. So, early friendships were very much, we were all, and plus I came from this enormous family. There were fourteen kids in my fathers family, most of us lived in the same neighborhood, so I had like fifty-two first cousins, most of them were in walking distance.

So, we all went to the same school, we spent our weekends together, we went to church on Sunday together. I was probably ten or eleven before I was ever really exposed to people who weren't like me. So, my friendships in the early days, depends on what time, you're talking about 1968 now, now we're getting a little later, now we're, I'm through high school and on my way out into the world and things have changed quite a bit. I went to Classical High School. Instead of going to St. Xavier's, which was where my family planned for me to go. But I had reached rebellious puberty before then and decided I had quite enough, thank you very much, of Catholic education and refused. So the only public high school that they would even consider allowing me to go to was Classical. So I went to Classical High School and was very much in a minority. Most of the kids there were from another part of the city, most of them were not Irish-Catholic. So I met a lot of different kids and started to have a number of different experiences.

As for dating, yup, all kinds of people. I do remember however that in 1968 I actually was dating a, there were two black kids at Classical High School. And I actually, and so, and they were both boys, well that's not true, there was also a black girl in my class. But it was a little hard for them to date, I mean they were in school all day with all white girls, so they dated white girls. And I actually was, for a period of time in 1968, was dating one of the black guys. Who I still occasionally see, he's a consultant in Cambridge now. And he was a great guy and we had a good time. And his family actually had a good deal more money than my family, and were much better socially positioned than my family, but I didn't bring him into the house. I didn't bring him home into my house, because my family would have lost their mind. Now they knew I was dating him because people would see us around and they brought it up, but they knew they weren't gonna get anywhere with me, so it just was left unsaid, unspoken.

MB: What did you think you wanted to do when you grew up? And did that change over time?

AI: (laughs) Tell me when we're focusing here. Because 1968, you have to understand, is a very different year than 1958, or 1964. 1964 the Beatles come to America, okay, by 1968 it's like *Sergeant Pepper's* time, we're all, we all have long hair and have altered consciousness'. A lot of things happened between '64 and '68. If you'd asked me in 1958, I would have told you I wanted to be a missionary nun. If you'd asked me in 1964, I may have wanted to have been a scientist or a teacher. If you'd asked me in 1968 (laughs), I didn't have a clue. What did I want to be in 1968? I wanted to be a poet or a photographer in 1968, you know. I was getting out of high school, and I didn't have any plans to go to college, which was very unusual at Classical.

One of the things that Classical does when they, I don't know if you know any kids who go there, they bring you in and they say everybody, you know, they have like 100% college attendance, they have this high percentage of people who get into their first choice of school. I mean they used to, particularly 30 years ago, they used to drive this home, they used to have entrance exams to get in. And they did this ugly little thing that I will never forget and no one who ever went there will ever forget. They stand you up the first day and they say to everybody, look at the person on the right of you, look at the person on the left of you, two of you won't be here when it comes time to graduate. The freshman class starts out with about 500 and they ended up graduating about 125. And they made it very clear that they weed you out, which I found like, elitist and revolting and very hideous. So, but their whole point is they like their statistics, you know, they only want the cream of the crop, they only want the kids who are gonna get into the good colleges.

Well, by 1968 I thought "College! Who wants to go to college? There's too much fun to be had out there". So, I did not have plans to go to college immediately after high school, which upset my college advisors to no end. So, I didn't know what I wanted to do, I wanted to go away and lead an exciting life somewhere, and make a new world, (laughs), I wanted to make the revolution. I mean, if you, if you, I can answer more specific questions, I don't mean to be vague, but these are pretty large questions, so.

MB: These questions are about your high school and college years. Where did you attend primary school again?

AI: I went to Saint Michael's the Archangel School, then I went to Classical.

MB: And how did your education shape you as a person?

AI: I was a, I was a very good student through the elementary and junior high school years. Not because I particularly applied myself, I was just lucky, I was just academically, academics were not hard for me. I got to high school, and I became a lot more interested in things that were not academic, strictly academic. I became more interested in things that were social, things that were artistic, things that were political. In Classical, as you can imagine by it's name, implies studying Latin, and Greek, and mathematics, and ancient history; all of these things which although now hold a certain appeal to me, at those, in those days seemed just completely irrelevant to a world that was in major revolution.

I mean, my birthday happens to be on November 22. I don't know if you know what November 22 is, it's the day, JFK [John F. Kennedy] was shot on my thirteenth birthday. So, I came into puberty with a bang, so to speak. I was going into high school, and the President gets killed. By the time I graduated from high school Bobby Kennedy had been killed. Martin Luther King had been killed. Watts had gone up in flames, the war was happening. I mean, I graduated from high school wearing a black arm band in protest of the Vietnam War with the number of my class, right. The world was in major, from my point of view, major upheaval. So my high school years were very different from the rest of my earlier years.

My earlier years you know, I, I liked school, I read what I was supposed to read, I did what I was supposed to do, I participated in the science fair and went and got awards and all that kind of stuff, and that was okay. And I liked Latin, I mean, I remember in the ninth grade I won this big Latin award, by the tenth grade I was failing Latin. Now you gotta go some to win an award in the ninth grade to be flunking it in the tenth grade, you know. And it was just 'cause all of a sudden, Latin had no meaning to me, anymore. Although now, you know, I wish I had paid closer attention. But, I didn't want to read *Caesar's Gallic Wars*, I didn't want to read Cicero's, or, you know, I wanted to be talking about what was going on in the world right now. So, in high school I became a very bad student. No, I don't think I became a bad student, I became a bad student of the subjects that they were teaching in my particular high school. I read constantly. I was interested. I was very intellectually curious and interested about a lot of things; unfortunately, they weren't teaching them at Classical.

So, I was reading a lot of, doing, reading a lot of theater, reading a lot of poetry- which I think happens to all adolescents; interested in art, very interested in what was going on in the world politically, and very, very interested in what was going on in the world socially, and in music, and that sort of thing. So I was not a good student, as a matter of fact, I went into Classical at the top of my class and left Classical at the bottom of my class. I barely, I mean I really, barely got out. And, because they just, they just, they didn't harness my, well, I can't completely put it on them, I was being a real brat, but it didn't, what was going on in my high school did not harness my intellectual curiosity.

Now the difference, the one thing is, that really did change my life, really did totally form my life, was something that happened to me, actually I think the first week I was at Classical. Coming from the neighborhood I told you about, we didn't go to a lot of theater, we didn't, I didn't have a family that took you to a lot of museums or took you to the theater, I didn't even have a family that really read very much other than the newspaper; and I went to Classical the first week, they put us on a bus, and they took us down to the RISD [Rhode Island School of Design] auditorium to a program called Project Discovery, which I assume they're still doing, did you, have you ever gone to Project Discovery? Well, it was the first time in my life I had ever been in a live theater performance, and I was absolute...it really truly, there's a quote from Graham Greene, who's one of my favorite authors, who says, you know, "There's a moment in childhood when the door opens to the future" that was, in fact, my moment. That was the day the door opened to my future.

They took us to see one of the worst Eugene O'Neal plays, oh the, not one of, the worst Eugene O'Neal play ever written, and/or produced, called *Ah, Wilderness*. Which, interestingly enough, is about, the main character, and I've only seen it once, mind you, and I haven't read it, but I could still tell you, I could describe the set for you. Peter Gerety, who's still, who's no longer, I think, in the Trinity [Repertory Theater], he's no longer there, but he was for years in the Trinity company, played Richard Miller, who was the main character, believe that was his name, Richard Miller, who's this rebellious adolescent. And he's reading Strindberg, and he's reading George Bernard Shaw, and he's reading Oscar Wilde, and he just like totally locked horns with his family and all their traditional values and he's in love with this girl and he's just sort of running wild in his mind and what it really is, is it's Eugene O'Neal's optimistic, glorified view of the life he wishes he had, which was not the life he had. But it sucked me right in.

And I left there, and I went out and I found Strindberg, and I found Oscar Wilde, and I found all these people this guy was reading, because as a character, he just spoke to me. And it also developed my interest in theater, in the arts, and politics; I mean all very much together. So as I went through high school I wasn't doing my Latin homework, I was reading O'Neal, and Strindberg, and Ionesco, and any other weird thing I could get my hands on (laughs). So, I mean, so ultimately Classical had an enormous impact on my, on my education but really more to send me down a, unknowingly send me down a completely different road. Additionally, I have to say, what I did learn at Classical was maybe not the content of the material they were teaching, but I did learn how to study. So that when I got to college, college was a breeze compared to Classical, I gotta say.

So my early education shaped me because it was a Catholic education, shaped me in a sort of, giving me a moral context, because everything in a Catholic education is sort of based on the Catholic way of seeing the world, which is a very interesting perspective. But it really addresses issues of morals and ethics, and I internalized that. And then when I got to high school my interests turned more to art and politics, but with it always fitting into some kind of a moral context. There always had to be a discussion for me somewhere in whatever I was doing that had to do with morality and justice, and whether it was social justice or you know, economic justice, which are often one and the same; so there you have it.

I mean, we're all a product of our education, I think we just don't necessarily leave educational institutions with what they thought we were gonna leave with. No, I, I don't think Classical; Classical was happy to see me go. And probably did not think I was ever gonna make much of myself, and I honestly don't know today whether they would think I did or not (laughing), but they did have a pretty profound effect on my development. And a lot of it, again, was me pushing against them, they were this repressive force that I was fighting against constantly. I mean the world was blowing up and they wanted me to learn Latin! You know, people were getting assassinated every time you turned around and they wanted me to, you know, decline things, I didn't see the point of it.

MB: Could you describe dating and sexual activity among your group of friends, and was there any difference in your, was there any difference in that when you went to college, or?

AI: Well, it depends on, I was of the post-birth control, pre-AIDS generation. You probably won't find a more sexually adventurous group of humans. The generation right before me were terrified of sex, for fear of unwanted pregnancies. And that was my mother, and that was the fear my mother tried to install in us. When I came along, I was, we all knew where to find birth control pills, by the time we were in our teens. In poorer neighborhoods, to be perfectly honest, sexual activity begins earlier. Because we don't take ballet lessons or tennis lessons or learn to ski or have swimming pools to go to. It becomes recreation, if you want to know the truth, when you got nothing to do but hang on the street corner, you get sexually active, pretty young. The neighborhood I came from was very

sexually active, very young. I went to Classical, those kids who had many more options in life, you know, they went to summer camp and ski trips, they tended, truthfully, not to be as active as early as the kids I came from.

But, by the, by 1968, pretty much every body was active. We did not fear unwanted pregnancy because we had this sense of, not always well-founded, sense of security in birth control. We did not have, in those days, much you couldn't cure with a couple shots of penicillin, so the biggest fear really was gonorrhea and syphilis, and syphilis wasn't, was not something we really, really truly internalized as a threat to us, although gonorrhea got passed around pretty regularly. But that was the kind of thing, three shots of penicillin and it was over. So we were very sexually active. I was, we were sexually active in high school, and then when you got to college of course there was just more kids who were out from under the watchful eye of their parents, so they were more sexually involved.

The difference in the late Sixties that I found from the Fifties and from the generation that followed, and this had something to do with the drug culture, and I suppose it depends on what social group you were running around in, if you were in a sorority you probably had a different point of view than I had, but I was running around with a bunch of, you know, quote "artists", quote "revolutionaries", quote "long hairs, drug taking freaks", okay? (laughing). Our view of sex was a very healthy, all-inclusive kind of thing. It was sort of like, oh, we really saw it as a natural outgrowth of your affection for somebody. It wasn't tied to life long commitment, it wasn't a tool you used to get attention or give attention or maintain control. The sexually, quote "sexually liberated" women or girls that I ran around with, felt for the first time in generations that they had control of their own body and they were gonna use it any damn way they pleased and they didn't use sex as a way to manipulate men, you know.

We weren't looking, in 1968 the last thing on my mind was 'find a husband and raise a family'. Oh my word, that would have just given me hives, the thought of that! So we were a pretty wild and loose bunch, but it was always in the context, again of mutual love and respect. We saw the flip side of what we did was the kind of closeted, repressed, unhealthy sexuality where people slept with each other but pretended they didn't and guys bragged about it in locker rooms and girls denied it. That kind of stuff where the guys were out making conquests and the girls were pretending to play hard to get. In 1968, I have to tell you, that my particular circle of female friends, we weren't playing hard to get, we were making the decisions, if we slept with someone it was 'cause we wanted to not because they wanted us to and therefore that we were going to work our way up some social ladder by attaching ourselves to the right men kind of thing. It was a very proactive, almost aggressive sexuality, but we were comfortable, I mean we were just busting out of a closet, you know, we were.

It's, I think any movement has that, when you've, when a group has been, felt like they've been repressed or suppressed in any way and then you lift whatever that, that pressure is on them, it's like blowing out of a pressure cooker. So, the fear of unwanted pregnancy, the fear of a bad reputation, in 1968, that was like laughable to us, 'a bad reputation'. 'Cause that put all the power in the boys' hands, they could determine whether you were a good girl or a bad girl. We said "Oh yeah, watch this, we're calling our own shots here". It was a very, very different attitude, and unfortunately not an attitude that I could pass on to my children because by the time my children were old enough to be sexually active there were issues like AIDS in the world.

And sex is a funny piece of business, you know, you put it into a relationship and everything shifts, everything changes. But we were, yes, sexually active, yes, big yes under that category. Whether that was a good thing or not, you know some people came out of it with a real healthy, good attitude about sex, other people came out of it hurt. You know, I think it was just all, it's hard to know. Many of the people who, many of my friends from that group, I guess people were fearful that if you acted out like that and you looked like that you'd be unable to enter into any kind of a 'serious monogamous committed relationship' but we didn't, my friends, my group, we didn't seem to have that problem, we were able to identify serious love, committed relationships, and confine sex to that if that was the agreement. But we just didn't buy into what the prescribed sexual roles and mores were, you know. If I was gonna learn to fix my own car I was gonna decide who I would sleep with, you know, it was that sort of thing. If the jobs weren't gonna be broken down by gender line anymore, none of the jobs were gonna be broken down by gender line.

MB: Were students treated differently if they were male or female when you were in college?

AI: Oh yeah, when I was in school? Sure, in '68 it was still early but it was, things were really bubbling up. I, when I went to college they had just eliminated, just eliminated dress codes, (laughs) you used to have to wear ties to the dining hall. And girls had to wear skirts to the dining hall, that had just gone by the Boards. When you were in college, in the middle to, right before '68, I'm trying to think was it '67 or '66 or '67 they got rid of it, boys could come and go in the dorms as they pleased, girls had to sign in and out, and they had curfews. And if they wanted to go home for the weekend they had to get written permission from their parents. So boys had the freedom to come and go, but girls were like in this, you know, protected mode.

And the only inter-visitation like if you were in a girls'- they only had boys' dorms and girls' dorms, there was no; if you were in a girls' dorm and you wanted to have boys in your dorm, you had, there was a three hour period on Sunday and you had to sign them in and the door had to be open. I got in more trouble, I got kicked out of boys' dorms, and got boys kicked out of, you know, oh man, I was, we were constantly in trouble for like getting nabbed in the wrong place. And nothing, not that we were in that dorm doing anything wrong, that we may have just been like hanging out with a male friend listening to music and we were just weren't paying attention to the rule that, you know, it was immoral for us to be in a room listening to music with men. 'Cause, you know, you come from a family, don't you, you know, you all use the same bathroom at home, we couldn't figure out why all of a sudden this was like so inappropriate, that you couldn't, you know, use a bathroom on a hall where men lived.

So, yeah, there were lots and lots of rules, that didn't really change, it was the beginning of the Seventies before males and females were socially treated the same by colleges. Colleges in those days really took their responsibility of 'in loco parentis' very seriously. They thought they were your parents, and that their job was to watch out for you as parents, and in those days parents treated males and females very differently.

MB : Do you feel there was a generation gap?

AI: Between whom and whom? Between..

MB: Between, I guess the Fifties and Sixties.

AI: Oh, well, sure, I mean, well, there is a gener..., I mean, okay, between, give me twenty years, you've got a generation gap. I'm not specifically sure what you mean. There was a huge shift in everything from acceptable norms of social behavior to sexual activity and a lot of those things were based on communication and health care and, you know. The availability of birth control, of safe, effective birth control; changed the way women dealt with their bodies and their sexuality forever.

The fact that, by the Sixties, everybody, I didn't have a TV in my house in the Fifties, poor people didn't, we didn't, my grandmother didn't have a phone until the Sixties. I mean, you know, but by the late Sixties, by 1968 every body had a television, oh well, not everybody, but probably more people had televisions than cars. People had televisions, almost everybody had telephones. Even in rural areas, communications, information moved so much faster, look at what it, the difference now. In the Sixties, Vietnam was the first war that was televised, my father fought in World War II and my uncles fought in Korea and when you would ask them about it, it was a story from far, far away, long, long ago and there were some still photos. But my friends fought in Vietnam, and I sat at night and watched them die on television. It was the, now, I mean this probably doesn't mean anything to you guys, because we watched the war begin and end on TV in the Gulf, you know, it was so weird, it was like watching a Nintendo game. But in Vietnam, it was the first time that TV and the electronic media was on the front lines, and it brought it home. So, every thing changed so rapidly.

I watched on Sunday morning, sitting in front of my television I watched Lee Harvey Oswald shoot, I mean, I watched Jack Ruby shoot Lee Harvey Oswald, on TV in real time! I'm sitting, Sunday morning, I'm watching TV, here comes Lee Harvey Oswald, here comes that film you've seen a million times. But I, I was 13 years old and I watched it happen in front of my eyes in real time. I mean that's bizarre! And that's not an experience our parents had ever, ever, ever, ever had. So, everything was changing so rapidly, it felt like the world was upside down. You know, can you imagine having, you know, three major national figures shot in a period of four years and if you stretch it out, five years, or six years. Watts, you know, was these huge racial riots, Watts was on fire and people going into the South to register black people to vote and disappearing off the face of the earth and turning up in ditches, I mean. And all of a sudden, this stuff was coming across the TV screen.

I had this sweet little grandmother, who lived her whole life in probably a three square mile area, never learned to drive a car, had never been on an airplane, in her life had never been on an airplane. She went from riding down Elmwood Avenue in a horse and buggy, her father was a harness maker, to watching people land on the moon on television. Her understanding, I mean, try, I used to try and figure out how she would fit, how she fit this information into her head. But that's how fast, I mean, I remember the night, was it '68 or '69 they landed on the moon? I remember that was in July, 'cause I can remember exactly where I was, watching it happen. This is weird stuff! I mean, you, it may not seem weird to you, but it's, it'll be sorta like the first time someone lives on Mars, and they call you on the telephone, you know?

It was, things were happening very, very fast, and my poor parents were having an awful hard time keeping up. They were used to a much slower pace of life, they were used to living the same life their parents led, they were used to getting most of their information from their elders. We were getting most of our information from the media. And we were just, so, yeah, it was a, it was, I can't imagine, I imagine it was, how. I can't imagine how hard it must have been to be very conservative parents and have kids in the Sixties. Because it makes me laugh now when I look back, you know, and I remember, I hear, and I don't- look at me, I mean I'm no, you know, straight-laced corporate type, but I used to hear things coming out of my mouth to my kids that I would laugh in the middle of the sentence, 'cause I would hear my mother's voice coming out of my mouth. I would say things like, "You're not going out wearing that, are you?" You know? But to me, it didn't; I laughed, you know. My kids dyed their hair green and I thought it was funny, it was green hair, it's only hair, hair will grow back. But when my boyfriends came home and had hair down their back and had pony tails this was like such a statement to my parents it made them crazy! And I kept saying "it's only hair!". But it wasn't only hair, it was really insulting to them.

And the fact that we chose to wear clothes that were, was the uniform of poverty- denim was not anything people wore in public. Denim was a, was, you know, blue jeans was working clothes, they were working clothes. They were the uniform that poor people wore, it, it, you know. And all of a sudden, you had these rich kids running around in rags wearing working work boots and blue jeans and having long straggly hair, it must have made their parents crazy. Because their parents had worked so hard to bring them someplace else. It looked like regression to them. So yeah, I would say there was a pretty huge generation gap probably larger than there was in the generations following. The things that probably drive the big wedge between the generation of parents and kids now is technology. You know? Kids on the Internet and parents not knowing what the hell they're doing. You know, that kind of stuff. That's, that's where, well, we were living a whole life, my parents didn't understand drugs, they didn't understand psychedelics, they didn't, you know, they didn't understand the conditions we were coming home in, you know, they didn't understand the clothes we were wearing, they certainly didn't understand the music we were listening to, which is probably, you could say is true now but I can see a whole lot more of the connection between the music you listen to and the music I listened to, than I can find between the music I listened to and Guy Lombardo, you know? So.

MB : What did the clothing styles reveal about people who wore them?

AI: Who made up these questions, can I ask you this? (laughs) Did you make them up, or was this, is this the package that was given to you?

MB: My teacher.

AI: Sharon! Well, there were different, there were different groups of people, clearly there were different groups. There were the kids, and if you, again I'm going to confine myself to 1968. There were the kids who were in frats, fraternities and sororities who dressed in more conventional clothing, and you know, who were stylish, you know, to the day, following sort of you know, the Carnaby Street kind of thing. And then there were the quote "Freaks", who were the kids who were a little more far out, who I guess you could probably most closely associate to the grunge look. You could tell, in some of those clothes, particularly in '68, which was a little, 'cause the Sixties, when they say the Sixties, the Sixties went right into the Seventies, went to about '73.

The kids who wore the bell bottoms and the moccasins and the long hair and the goofy clothes were more likely to be taking drugs, the other kids were more likely to be going to beer parties and tailgate parties and football games. Clothing in general, when skirts got shorter and shorter, I mean I have, I used to go to high school to visit kids when they would do Sixties things, and I would bring this thing and I'd hold it up and I'd say "What is this?", and they'd say, oh- it's this fabulous green thing with bell bottom sleeves and beadwork all over the front, and they'd say "It's a shirt", and I'd say "No, it's not. It's a dress". You know, I think the fact that skirts got as short as they got, spoke to our sexuality and our sense of sexual liberation.

And, I think we were just, you know, there were people who were trying to be really far out. I mean the quote "Hippie" style- and I gotta tell you in 1968, if you were a hippie, you know, and anybody called you a hippie, you'd laugh at them, it was a stupid term and we didn't buy it- were sort of, followed the sort of beatnik, they were going sorta down the beatnik path, you know, and then the other kids, the Carnaby Street kids, maybe the more "fashion" quote, conventional fashion-conscious kids were going down this more fashion, commercially sanctioned fashion road.

And, they were very distinct groups, I can tell you, and on college campuses in 1968 you would find, find your grouping. There wasn't, there was cross-over, but it was always funny, funny cross-over. The kids who were involved politically, the kids involved in anti-war activities were pretty much the grungier looking guys. The other folks were, you know, doing more the conventional, taking more the conventional route through their education. So I was clearly, as you can well imagine, in the grungier camp. Be interesting to hear what the people in the other camp, they probably just thought we were very weird, and I'm sure they did, because weird was something we were working on. We liked being weird, weird was good, weird was, we liked being creative, we liked being 'out there', we liked being adventurous and trying stuff nobody had ever tried before. We really thought life was this huge adventure and you should like push everything to the limit, and I'm sure it was very trying on most people who had to deal with us. I mean I lived in a commune for while in 1968, you know?

MB: Was there a counter culture, was it a positive or negative thing?

AI: I think when you say 'counter culture', that's what we're talking about. I think the people I'm talking about are what people saw as the counter culture, we saw it, we didn't see ourselves so much as a counter culture, I think, as a sub culture. But we were trying to create a different reality, we were re-examining everything from foreign policy to inter-personal relationships, and we were trying to create new rules of the game. We didn't like what we saw, we didn't like the traditional boy, girl, mom, dad, everybody's role strictly defined, we wanted people to define their roles according to their own interests, their own skills, their own strengths, their you know.

So we were messing with everything, we were messing with all the rules. It was like, throw them all out and let's see if we can re-create them, which is part of why I lived, when I said, I did, I, I've lived in both a commune and a collective, and they're different. A collective is a commune with a political mindset. So we, you know, we were trying to just change the rules about how people live together, interact, we were very interested in power relationships, you know. We saw the United States as a superpower and how it was imposing its will, as we saw it, on people in small countries, like Vietnam. We kept saying get the hell out and let these people determine for themselves what they want to do now. Some would say that was very naive, because there's, America has an interest in what goes on all over the world, mostly because we suck up most of the resources from all over the world, and we can't, you know, (laughing) let those things get too far out of our control.

And in those days there was this, you know, the vision of the superpower, there was communist Russia which was trying to take over the world, and then there was, you know, America for freedom and democracy, and somehow, how, we couldn't understand how this was all supposed to be clashing in this little tiny country in Southeast Asia. The domino theory which was the prevalent theory at the time about how if South East Asia falls, everything would fall. I used to have a T-shirt that had all the dominoes with the maps on it, showing how absurd it was, you know, going from Southeast Asia through to Europe and the United States.

We didn't believe it, we didn't believe in it, we didn't like the way America was imposing its will. We didn't like the male-female models of relationships we had where guys get all the say and all the power and all the control and women are supposed to do their bidding. We didn't like the way power was being used in race relationships, we were, you know. Racism- the women's movement came directly out of the Civil Rights Movement, which was addressing racism, and the anti-war movement, all of those things, and they were all mixed up together. And so we were, that's what the counter culture, quote "counter culture", I never use those terms, was about- chucking all those rules and trying to recreate, in these days we would say, a new paradigm. But trying to, trying to find new ways of solving problems and addressing things. Any of this making any sense to you? Are you sure?

MB: Yeah.

AI: Okay, Stop me and ask me to clarify, because I mean, I could be talking, like, a language that is meaningless to you.

MB: I understand, we've done a lot of research and stuff, so

AI: Okay.

MB: Drug use, how did you feel about that?

AI: Well, this is a dangerous question, to send someone in high school out to ask somebody like me; I felt fine about it. There was a lot of drug use. I, not everybody, but among the people, again, when you start talking about counter culture, I'm sure there were, there were a lot of people who didn't use drugs, but there were a lot of people who drank too much beer. As far as we're concerned that was as bad as anything. I never was a beer drinker, although I do come from a long line of serious drinkers. I was never a drinker, I actually, interestingly enough, saw the ravages of alcoholism all around me everyday and said "who wants that?".

But I was a great believer in drugs. I really believed the whole, this whole idea that we thought it was expanding our consciousness and it made us more creative, and it made us, which is all horse hockey, 'cause I look at the stuff I painted, or wrote, or pictures I took when I was high, and they're dreadful. But, at the time it was this heightened sense of reality. It was just, well, when they, you know, when you talk about psychedelics, and you talk about 'taking a trip', that's really what it is, you just, you're just gone somewhere else. And

that was all about the experimentation.

So, among my peer group or the people I spent most of my time with, there was an, there was a lot of drug behavior, starting with, I took drugs through high school well into college. And found that we didn't take drugs when we had something serious to focus on. Now I say 'we', I'm talking about the people who survived it, I'm not talking about the people who had addictive personalities and ultimately went down. To be perfectly honest, I think most of those people would have gone down to alcoholism or mental illness anyway, I don't think the drug itself took them down; I think they were people who were susceptible to that kind of damage, and if they hadn't found it in drugs, many of them would have found it somewhere else. But drugs can take you pretty fast. [I have seen] the damage that alcohol and drugs do to people, so I'm not naive to say that there's not such a thing as gateway drugs and they're not dangerous, and the younger you start, the more likely you are to develop a serious problem, all of those things are true. But, they're not true, in my personal experience, they were not true for everybody.

I mean, we took a lot of drugs, until we started to have college protests and have things that required a lot of serious attention and suddenly everybody got along just fine without the drugs, did what they had to do. It was more recreational, I did not see a lot of addictive drug behavior, again, around 1968, it was much later when the people who had been taking them for a long time did not make that next step in maturation, did not take that next step into "okay, now I'm moving on to the next thing in life, I'm moving on to a job, I'm moving on to being grown up, I'm moving on to being married, I'm moving on to having children," they got stuck and drugs took them down. But, I smoked...Do they want to know what kind of drugs people were taking?

MB: *Umm...sure.*

Unknown: *I, I don't know, I'm not even supposed to butt in...*

AI: Go ahead, go ahead.

Unknown: *...but it might be more helpful. 'Cause I know, the angle you're going at, as far as totally, a little more specific, about the LSD, 'cause we know that, that was, I think, the big drug of choice for that culture, right?*

AI: Pot and LSD, and speed, a lot of speed. Not cocaine, cocaine was much later, and you had to be richer to have. "Cocaine is God's way of telling you, you make too much money." I think that's what Robin Williams said at one point. It was, yeah, it was definitely, it was definitely pot, and any kind of psychedelic, LSD, psilocybin, mescaline, that sort of stuff, and then speed. Speed was, you know, to get you. But you know, the flip side of that is, we looked at a culture that was running on cocktails and valium, and didn't think that that was much healthier either, which was of course our big argument, you know- how dare this generation, who's like, you know, popped half the time on cocktails and valium tell us we shouldn't take drugs, because, you know? So, that's sorta that.

MB: *What were your favorite musical groups or movies?*

AI: Oh my god, in 1968? Well, 1968 was the summer that *Sergeant Pepper* came out. And *Sergeant Pepper*, although maybe not my favorite album, was a major turning point in rock and roll. It was the first time, if you think back, well, you won't; it involved a lot, it became, rock and roll became much more sophisticated after *Sergeant Pepper*. The production values were higher, they involved a lot more orchestration, they brought in instruments that were more than the three guitars and a set of drums. But I was a folk, folk, I was a fan of folk music, and this, particularly in '68. What year did Joplin go to the, what year did Joplin go to the Folk Festival? '68 may have been the year Janis Joplin played the Folk Festival. I saw her, up until then it was like Joan Baez had been the queen of the Newport Folk Festival, and this year Janis Joplin and the Holding Company came out and blew everybody out of their seats, it was fabulous. But I was a, so I can't say a particular group- I liked pretty much any kind of rock and roll, but I was also a folk musician fan. I was a Full Oaks because it was, you know, social consciousness stuff, Eric Anderson, Bob Dylan, the Birds, you know, that kind of stuff. But '68, anybody that doesn't remember '68, 'cause that was the summer of *Sergeant Pepper's*, wasn't paying attention.

MB: *Do recall your understanding of the Cold War?*

AI: The what?

MB: *The Cold War?*

AI: I recall my understanding at that time was that, well, because I'm from the generation of "duck and cover", I'm from the generation where we were seven years old and they took us to school, they had these civil air patrol air drills where they'd run sirens and we'd all jump up, hide under the desk waiting for the Russians to bomb and, bomb us and obliterate us. So, yeah, we were brought up to think that the Russians were evil. That they were the evil empire and they were gonna bomb us at any moment and we were all, which was where like you know, beat poetry, I liked beat poetry 'cause it was about you know "tick tick tick, countdown to death" and my favorite poem in, was it '68?, no it was earlier than '68, Gregory Corso, *A Happy Birthday to Death*. He was this fabulous poet of the Sixties, and he wrote this whole poem in the shape of a mushroom cloud. Hmmm, (laughs) But, that's the mindset, I mean that's, what did they expect? This is what they had trained us, I mean, we were seven years old and they're telling us to duck under our desks and worry about Russians bombing us, so we grew up with this sort of twisted black humor about things.

And, so, my understanding was that we had these two superpowers and that we were just at the one minute to midnight kind of thing. And, we were, we were, like it was high noon and we were face to face but no one had drawn their gun yet and we were supposed to like live in fear every minute that the Russians would draw first. Or you know, and that we would go to World War III. By the time it got to '68 I think the Russians were starting to look silly to me. I can't remember what year, there was the Missile Crisis, under Kennedy, that was early Sixties, and that kinda scared us, and we were supposed to worry a lot about Cuba 'cause it was only 90 miles off the coast, but by 1968 I had been studying stuff about Cuba, and I had found the Cuban revolution very interesting, 'cause they had addressed a bunch of social problems that we had failed to address. We still had people in rural Texas living without running water and electricity, and Castro had done this interesting stuff in Cuba called Evencerasmos Brigades, and the Literary Brigades, where he would take an agrarian culture where people were out working in the fields and they would stop work for a period of time every day and you had, had teachers go out to where the people were, because their literacy rate was so low before the revolution. And he had moved the

literacy rate, he had bumped the literacy rate up to it was almost, I think it was by the late Sixties, I think it was almost as high as American literacy rate. Which was phenomenal social thinking, from my point of view.

So Castro didn't scare me, although he was supposed to. I was supposed to be terrified of him. But I just saw him as this little guy on this little island, and America, you know, and he was trying, and the Russians and the Americans would use him as a pawn, and plus the whole Missile Crisis, and we had gotten all these ex-patriots, and we were trying to invade Cuba and again we were seeing it as America being the big bully. You probably don't know anything about these kinds of things, but the Bay of Pigs, you know what the Bay of Pigs was all about?

MB: Uh, no.

AI: We sent a bunch of people over there and we were pretending it was this internal revolution. We were trying to destabilize Cuba. So, it just looked silly. The whole Cold War thing was starting to look like a construct to me, and it was just another part of not believing in our government, that they were exaggerating and lying to us. They told us a bunch of things that weren't true. They, you know, they told us that Cuba was a danger and anybody that really studied Cuba thought, "Oh my god, these guys aren't a danger, they, they've, you know, we've, the only thing they ever did was sell us sugar, and as soon as the revolution came Eisenhower cut the sugar quota, so here's poor Fidel trying to survive, so of course he's gotta buy his equipment from the Russians, because we won't sell it to him anymore. How stupid are we? He could have been our friend, but we didn't want him to be our friend 'cause he said he was a socialist, so we drive him into the arms of the Russians, and then we say, "Oh look the Russians are trying to invade Miami", so that seemed kinda silly.

Oh, and then they told about LSD, if you take LSD your chromosomes will all get weird and all your kids'll have two heads, and you know, and then we started, and people were having babies and they didn't have two heads, and we went "Ah, you can't trust the government", you know. Oh, and then we'd known about the Bay of Pigs, I mean, there was a whole bunch of stuff, there was stuff that was coming out everyday in this new communication age about what goes on in the FBI and the CIA, and, and you know, conspiracy theorists were running wild. So, we were starting to think that the Cold War, although we understood where it came from, was not the big threat that the government was trying to tell us it was. But it, you know, we were in a highly skeptical state of mind over the government and anything they told us anyway.

MB: You've mentioned the Cuban Missile Crisis, did you think about the threat of nuclear war?

AI: Not in 1968, I did all, my whole childhood. I was crazed that my father would not build us a fallout shelter, I was completely crazed. When we were little kids, they used to give us plans to bring home, on how to build and stock a fallout shelter. And I would bring them home, and my father kept saying, I kept saying "We could dig one, we could put it in the backyard", and would say "I'm not living in this cement hole in the ground, if they're gonna drop it on us, we're going," you know. And I thought this was just horrific. So yes, when we were little we all lived in terror of nuclear war, as we got older, again, I said, we started to see other things and I think that was replaced by a certain cynicism about all government. By 1968, was I living in fear of nuclear war? No, I was living more in horror at the kind of foreign policy that we were exhibiting in these small third world countries, and you know, us napalming, you know, us napalming small Vietnamese villages, that was more horrific to me than the fear of nuclear war.

MB: Was 1968 and the election of John F. Kennedy an important turning point for you?

AI: Well, John F. Kennedy wasn't elected in '68, he died in '63, he was elected in '60. LBJ [Lyndon Baines Johnson], that was the year LBJ didn't run again. So try, one more time, which part of the question do you want? Kennedy dies in '63, LBJ goes in, in '63, finishes out one term, runs for second term, runs in '64. In '68 he announces he's not gonna run anymore, which was a big surprise to the whole country. 1968 I worked for Gene McCarthy, who thank God didn't get elected because he would have just been terrible. But he was the only anti-war candidate. Bobby Kennedy was, would have been a, potentially a solid anti-war candidate.

So the election of '68 was very interesting- plus, in those days you had to be 21 to vote, so we couldn't vote, so there were a whole bunch of us who did things like cut our hair and dress up in respectable clothes and go out and work for Gene McCarthy, and it was called 'Clean for Gene', and all the guys cut their hair and shaved their beards. And 'Clean for Gene', and went out, in an attempt, this was the ultimate sacrifice we made, in an attempt to stop the killing we were willing to cut our hair, which just shows you how intensely self-absorbed we were. And we really thought if we cut our hair, the war would end. So, '68 I was going to rallies and doing literature drops and stuff like that for Eugene McCarthy and then, and then we went from him to, I guess, when he was gone, I never warmed up particularly to McGovern. Bobby Kennedy was a lot of peoples' choice but he was killed before, so then we got Hubert Humphrey.

MB : How did you feel about the Kennedys' Assassinations?

AI: Well, I think that there were a couple of, one because they were young, because both the Kennedys were young. I think we identified, as young people, identified very closely to them. Secondly because JFK was killed on my birthday I felt very personally attached. I had a hot date that night and him being assassinated sort of messed with my social life. But, in all seriousness it was a, that was a defining moment in, anyone who was alive at that time, in their life. There's, it's like, everybody can tell you exactly they were the moment they found out. It was shocking.

It was, it was, assassination was just not something that was in the current, was in the mind of anybody. We'd gotten through World War II, the Fifties had been you know peace-, relatively peaceful and relatively secure, la dee da, and now we're in the Sixties, and all of a sudden, you know, this comes out of nowhere. And in the beginning there's all sorts of theories about who kills him? You know, we go on and on about, you know, did the Russians kill him, did the Mafia kill him, did? So that was pretty unnerving.

And then Martin Luther King is killed next, right? Martin, he goes second, and then Bobby goes third, as I recall, yeah, can't remember. Then Martin Luther King is killed and then all the ugly racist stuff starts to bubble to the surface, and that becomes very problematic for many of us, and then, even personally. I mean, that was problematic for me because living in my parents' house when Martin Luther King was killed, there are people saying things that's making my hair stand on end, I'm fighting with my parents' friends all the time

because of the stuff that they're saying. And then Bobby Kennedy gets killed as he's a candidate, and your thinking 'what next? who's next?', you're really, it's, you're developing this sort of paranoid sense of, you know, 'what's going on out there, who's out shooting all these people, is there a conspiracy?'

I did not particularly relate to Bobby Kennedy as a candidate, although I thought he was a good public speaker, I had my personal doubts about him, so I was not a huge, I know there are a lot of people in my generation who came to their understanding of politics and their belief in good government, and being able to change things because of Bobby Kennedy, but he didn't do that for me. But again, he was a nice Irish-Catholic boy from New England, and I was a nice Irish-Catholic girl from New England, there are a lot of things about his family that, you know, you want to relate to, it was sort of, they were sort of the aristocracy of where I came from, you know. So, so it was not only personally upsetting, it just gave you the whole sense that the world was off-kilter and you couldn't count on anything. And it was all from within, this wasn't the Russians, this wasn't the big threat of Russia, you know, coming over here and bombing us, this was, we were shooting each other.

MB: Oh, can you explain what the ROTC is?

AI: Sure, ROTC. ROTC is the, what did ROTC stand for? Officer's Training, what did R stand for? [Reserve Officers Training Corps] When you, if you wanted to go to college, or if you were in college, you could join ROTC, and you could be trained, I grew up during the draft, guys were drafted to go to Vietnam, I grew up in a neighborhood where kids didn't go to college, very few kids from where I came from went to college, those are the guys who went in the service. Those are the guys who died in Vietnam, poor kids and black kids died in Vietnam. ROTC was a way you get a deferment, and you go to college and you go into ROTC and you get this Officer's Training Program so that when you come out if you do have to go into the service, you go in as an Officer. And they had them on, I assume, every major college campus. And it was a military presence on the college campus. And, they trained kids, the guys drilled, they went out, they had, you could tell the ROTC kids, they all had little military haircuts, and they went out and they drilled in the morning, you know. And they had guns, and they did all the things that you have to do, you know, to learn about the military, and being in the military.

Well, you can well imagine that if you're an anti-war protester and you don't trust the government, ROTC is not your idea of a good thing to be on campus. So they were the target of everything from protests to firebombings, and as a matter of fact, there was, there, we, I think URI's ROTC was firebombed, but that was much later, that was in about '70, I think. Get milit., there shouldn't, there were a number of us who didn't believe that there should be a military presence on a college, on a university, 'cause we saw the university as something separate, and pure, and aside that was supposed to address difficult issues and controversial stuff and not be affected by the military which was "the control of the government telling you how to think and trying to turn us all into little cogs". Yup, so that's what ROTC was, and there was a lot of friction, there was a lot of, I wouldn't've wanted to have been, well, I wouldn't've, it worked both ways. The guys I hung around with who had ponytails got beat up by gangs of drunken ROTC kids all the time. And I wouldn't have wanted to be a ROTC kid trying to make friends with, you know, trying to date some, some little hip girl who didn't believe in the war. So, it was, you know, it was unfortunate, but it drove a wedge into peer groups, again you were breaking down again into camps which I don't find particularly healthy or productive, but there you had it. Don't they still have ROTC? They used to have it in high schools too. They still have ROTC, don't they? What's the R stand for? Recruit? Recruit Officers Training something, I can't, oh I can't remember what the R is for. I can't remember. Oh and they used to break into ROTC [offices] and pour fake blood on the files and all that kind of stuff. 'Cause they, we thought they were being trained to be baby killers and we thought that was immoral. And, also there's you know, there were the incentives where there were.

Oh, wanna stop?

(tape ends, new tape)

I'll give you shorter answers. Yes I know what ROTC stands for.

Unknown: No, no no please don't, you're doing very well

MB: Were you involved in political groups?

AI: Yup.

MB: Can you describe them?

AI: I was, oh in '68, well '68, was I in a political group in '68? It was little, in '68, it was a little more diffuse, and I was just, I was in that transition from high school to college, but after that I was involved with the Strike Committee on my college campus, where the people who closed down. What happened was Nixon, by the time Nixon became president, he kept saying "I'm gonna close the war", and god knows why he did this, "I'm gonna close the war down by invading another country. I'm gonna end the war in Vietnam by marching into Cambodia. I'm gonna end the war in Vietnam by marching into Laos" which didn't make a lot of sense to us at the time. Although, militarily now that I look at it, it probably did make a certain amount of sense, but to us it morally didn't make a lot of sense.

And I was involved with a group that was in, as a matter of fact, Yale, New Haven, at Bobby Seally's, at a Free Bobby Seally rally. Do you know who the Chicago Eight were?

MB: No.

AI: Well, Chicago 8 were, you don't need all this. Anyway, Nixon's silly enough to go on TV, when like, half the radicals in America were assembled in New Haven one night, and he goes on TV and says he's invading, I think it was Laos. So everybody goes back to their respective college campuses and closes them down.

So, I was a member of the Strike Committee, I think, I can't remember what year it was, and then from that we, I was a member of the Women's Union, which was like a women's, quote "women's lib" group but it was a political women's action group. And I lived in a

collective that was essentially, all the people who were the political activists on campus got together and bought these run down, falling down, unlivable, uninhabitable mill houses where we all lived, so that we could plan our political strategies and make the revolution and change the world.

Yup, I was involved in political groups. I was not a member of SDS [Students for a Democratic Society]. I can't remember, I can't remember what the names, I mean they were, political groups, you have to understand, were not like clubs where they like elected officers and had, they changed, you know. They changed according to whatever they were addressing at the time and they morphed into one another. There was, you know, the twenty people who did this became ten other people who did that, and so. Yeah, I was politically active. I was active in the anti-war movement. I was active, not so much in the civil rights stuff specifically, like I didn't travel to do voter registration or any of that. And I was involved in women's rights groups and issues and marches.

MB: Rallies and stuff?

AI: Yeah, yeah. rallies, oh they took the administration building at URI. We were all in Washington protesting the war, I used to go to Washington every year in the spring. It was like spring break, you went to Washington to protest the war. 'Cause Rennie Davis, who was one of the Chicago Seven [Chicago Eight], came to URI, I remember one year and he got up and he said "Now here's the thing, we're gonna go to Washington from all over the country, and we're gonna target all these places, our target was DuPont Circle, and we're gonna sit down and we're gonna stop traffic. And when we stop traffic no one in Washington will be able to get to work. And when we stop the traffic and no one in Washington can get to work, government'll close down. And when government closes down the war will end. And we all kinda went OKAY! Now, I don't know where my mind was, clearly I was smoking too much pot, but it seemed to me if I sat down in this traffic I could end the war. Now, I, you know, it's a big leap for me now, but in those days it made perfect sense.

So we all went down to Washington, sat in traffic, got the living bejesus beat out of us by the police, got jailed in large stadiums, it was just, you know, and, but the war didn't end- we were so surprised. But we came back, I remember coming back from one of those one year, one spring, and we get off the bus, I'm at URI, I went to URI, we get off the bus at URI and we look over and there's all these people at the administration building. And we said "What is it?", and someone said, "Oh, the black student group took over the administration building". Now we're all black and blue from getting beat up from the cops we haven't slept in four days, we're dirty, we're hungry, we're miserable, we've been on this stinky crowded school bus for eight hours coming back, and we had to go sit down and like protest. And so, I remember sitting there thinking, oh God, and we're saying "what are their demands?", well they didn't have any demands, "Don't they know they have to have demands, who the hell would take over a building without demands? Don't they know how to do this?" You know, eventually they had demands, the demands got met, they got out.

But it was like, you know, I was like I'm not in the mood to get beat up by the local cops, thank you very much. And of course, we did, the funniest part was, we had just come from Washington where the tactical police had been on alert, these guys had their gas masks on, their holsters unbuttoned, they hadn't had a night off, in you know, they had kept them on duty for a whole lot of hours to make them really mad at us, and they'd do stuff like they give you permits to camp in Rock Creek Park, and then they'd pull the permit in the middle of the night so they'd come in and roust you in the middle of the night, they think this had to disperse you. So the cops are like tired and cranky, they haven't been home to see their family, and you're tired and cranky 'cause in the middle of the night you had to fold up your tent and go, you know, walk the streets 'til the next day and you couldn't have been crankier, but the cops in Washington were all trained.

We get back to Rhode Island and I remember saying "oh, man, I don't wanna get beat up by another cop, so I'm gonna go sit in the back of the building," so I go around the administration building and I sit at the back of the building with my back up against the back door, thinking "Great, all the action will be in the front, and I'll just sit here quietly 'til it's over." Well, don't they decide they're gonna go in the back door. So the cops come up and I remember sitting there and there's one cop and he says to me, "Move," and I just remember looking up and saying "I Can't!" And I put my arms around his leg, and he just went "thoink" with the billy club, and picked me up and heaved me, but while he was doing that, he was sort of like, I was like too exhausted to fight with him.

And other cops who had clearly not been trained and had not been faced with this kind of stuff in Rhode Island, all became John Wayne, and were going over the top. And they were beating people bloody, and it was like way too much of a response for what they were faced with. But it was clear to me at that point, that they, they were panicked, they saw "x" number of kids- and they saw an angry mob, I saw a bunch of tired kids. They saw an angry mob, so yeah we all, that's, yeah we did all that stuff, if you call that being involved in political groups.

MB: Now this is your work experiences and stuff. Can you describe your work experience after high school and college and stuff?

AI: (laughs) I have a very varied work experience. When I got out of college my interest primarily was in changing institutional approaches to things. For a while I thought I wanted to go to medical school. And then I decided it wasn't really medical school I was interested in, I was sort of interested in health administration. And so I worked in a number of institutions dealing with, I've worked in like every institution you can imagine. And I used to always start working in direct care because I always wanted to see how the inst., how it worked.

So I have worked in a locked [psychiatric] ward, the worst ward in the place. I worked, in the place where you had to have keys to get in and out, and I worked with 33 women, none of whom were verbal, or wore clothes, and none of them were toilet trained, that kind of stuff. I worked at, in nursing homes. I didn't work but I used to volunteer at the training school, go play cards with the kids on Thursday nights, see what was going on. I worked in hospitals, I did a lot of that sort of stuff. And then decided public health administration wasn't what I was interested in.

That led me, sort of indirectly, to working [in law. A legal aid agency was] looking, they had a grant to deal with, at the time, there were federal regulations coming down telling state institutions that they had to meet certain basic requirements of environment for people, I mean you, no longer could you sleep on a ward with 33 people sleeping head to foot, head to foot. So the state was undergoing some big changes in the way they were dealing with their institutionalized populations particularly the mentally retarded

and the mentally ill. I got hired...to work as a paralegal under this advocacy grant and then from there I ended up working, just out of that, that grant moved on and became it's own agency. And I moved into working into anti-poverty law.

So I was just doing, as a paralegal, was doing a lot of anti-poverty stuff, everything from landlord-tenant law, to bankruptcies, to disability hearings, to case action, case, no what's the word, class action suits, that kind of stuff. And at that point, so then I decide, well if this is what I'm gonna do, clearly there's a limit on doing this as a paralegal, I'm gonna have to go to law school, and I really wasn't all that interested in law school, and by that time I had married and had one, maybe two kids. And so, then I went into business for a while. And, that's when I had a store in Wakefield, and I was in business for a while. But the whole time I was in business, I was still interested in both political and social stuff. I did stuff like, I was on the, I was one of the original volunteers at a South County homeless shelter, and I was on the board. And I sat on, sat in town government for a little while on the planning committee. And I worked as a volunteer in a number of different agencies.

And then, business, my kids got older and business really didn't do it for me. I mean it was a good business, it was fun, and I really enjoyed people and the sense of community and all that sort of stuff but it was clear I didn't really want to spend my life in business. So I went back to URI and I finished a degree in theater. Why theater? Why theater, you may ask. So, let's see, so I go back to URI, oh, so while I'm doing theater, I'm doing audience development, which is just more sort of community organizing outreach stuff, I did publicity for the URI theater department, I did, then I worked for the group that came in and took over Theater By the Sea. They were New York producers, at the time they brought in the Big Apple Circus and did Theater by the Sea, so I was their community devel., their outreach person.

So now I'm working again in the arts. So from there, then I get a call one day and I, someone says "oh boy, there's a job, I saw this job, and it's got your name written all over it" because it's arts management, which is what I did, with a human services twist. So then I took over a little non-profit which did arts programming for kids and adults with disabilities. This is the abbreviated version there are lots of little jobs in there, this is the abbreviated version. And so I did that for a number of years, and then I was running that when the director of [a human services agency] died; and I got sort of a call from, there was a search committee, and I got a call from a couple of board members saying would you apply for this job? And I did, never thinking, you know, it's my belief you always, you always apply for whatever, even if it's just for practice, you know, someone asks you to apply for a job, you apply. You just, it's good drill, it's good for you, it's good for you, it's good for them, it's good, so I did that and oddly enough, here I am.

MB: When did you first become aware of the war in Vietnam?

AI: Oh, I guess I first became aware when, when Johnson sent troops. When Johnson started to increase, Kennedy sent advisors, I don't, and I, probably I'm going to guess Kennedy sent initial troops, but I don't remember that. I knew that there was a problem. I knew that Vietnam was a hot spot, and I knew there was issues around Vietnam; but I didn't really start paying attention, until Johnson kept upping the troop counts and people I knew started getting drafted. I think I became more aware of Vietnam through the draft than through being, paying attention to public policy. I lived in a poor neighborhood, those kids went, those kids went to war. So, it was a, certainly before '68, but probably '66, '67, maybe '67, I can't remember, but when the troop count started going up and the death number, count started to go up, and we were watching it every night on TV. When was the Tet Offensive? What year was that? '67? The Tet Offensive? I'm gonna guess around '67, I don't remember, I'm not, see this is my life, not history, I didn't memorize the dates. Go ahead.

MB: Americans were said to have committed atrocities in Vietnam,

AI: Yeah, there weren't said to; they did! Yeah.

MB: Were you were aware of these, but what did you think of them?

AI: Yes, we were aware of them.

MB: Were they avoidable?

AI: Of course they were. They were, they were what war. In order to hate, you have to hate the enemy to kill them, you know, you have to find ways to hate them, and one of the ways you find to hate the enemy is to make them really different from you. And Vietnam was a real racist war, we had to turn people who were Asian into 'gooks' so we could hate them, so we could kill them. But it was really kind of schizoid war because some of were on our side, and we couldn't keep track, you know, 'good gook' 'bad gook', you know, it's really hard, we had a really hard time with that. We also had a hard time because it was not a war fought by armies, you know, our guys were all wearing uniform, packing guns, and their people were like living in villages and were old women and young children- these were, this was, this was, these were peasants fighting. You know, they were both infiltrated by the other side and they were people who were actually, you know, fighting for what they believed to be their way of life.

So we went in to, it didn't take, you didn't have to go far to see the images of kids being napalmed, people being executed, I mean what are the two most famous photos from Vietnam? It's the little girl running down the street naked burning up from napalm, and she's running, screaming naked down the street; and the other one is the guy on the side of the road getting executed. I mean these are the images of Vietnam. My Lai, just what, two nights ago, they finally decorated two of the three guys who actually addressed My Lai. Was it Sergeant, can't remember his name now, Calle, that went in to My Lai? And they massacred a village, they cut off ears and noses for trophies! I knew kids who went to Vietnam, now in '68 I may not have known these stories, but they came back and told me stories about sitting in camps, watching the poor village people going through their trash, you know, their dump, their dump sites, you know their, where they threw away stuff, looking for things to make houses or, you know, cardboard to make houses and things, and they would pick them off, boom boom boom, like target practice.

It was a, it's a, war is a dehumanizing hideous experience. This one was a particularly awful, 'cause it wasn't good guys and bad guys wearing uniforms that you could identify. So they were killing everybody, they had to kill everybody, 'cause you didn't know who the enemy was. And in those days I wasn't terribly sympathetic to the soldiers, because I saw them as killing babies and old people, but when you put yourself in their position now you understand, they go into a village, it could be a thirteen year old kid who's gonna kill

them, they don't know. So they're in this constant state of high-adrenaline terror, and they just overreact to everything. It's sort of like the cops coming to URI, and they see an angry mob, I see a bunch of kids who don't know what they're doing.

So, yes we were aware of them, and yes, all it did was further solidify our belief that our government was immoral and wrong and lying to us, and just out there, and we're napalming people! We're dropping burning chemicals on them! We're contaminating their food and water supply, so that some of the reports that are coming out of Vietnam are you know, babies being born looking like French poodles they've got such incredible, high levels of birth defects from all the chemicals we've dropped into their environment. So yeah, we knew about them and it just further made us want to separate ourselves from the mainstream of America more. It was a somewhat superior attitude we took on, but you didn't want to be allied with people who would do such things.

MB: Overall how would you say the Sixties affected you or, and the United States in general?

AI: Well I wish I could say I thought it affected the United States more. We seem to be, it affected me personally a lot. It affected the people, if I count the people in my life who mean the most to me who are my longest standing, dearest friends and I clicked off for you the things they do for a living, they all in some way or another are involved in things that require personal commitment to make the world a better place, you know. Everything from, they're involved in politics in the best possible way, they're lawyers and they either do a lot of free pro bono work or they're anti-poverty lawyers, or they run veterans' centers, interestingly enough I have a lot of friends who run veterans' centers, working with the guys who were destroyed by Vietnam, you know. Who, the mainstream who complains we didn't give them enough recognition for it seems to have turned their back on, thank you, veterans' administration. Or they do what I do, you know. I deal here with the people who have no place else to go, the people who've just fallen through the cracks everywhere.

Most of the people who I know and care about in, in my life are people who have a shared value system, and when you, it's not like this buzzword value system you get in the Nineties about 'family values', what does that mean?, I have yet to have Ronald Reagan explain to me what family values means to me, a man who's, you know, was probably the lousiest father in America, you know. Deserted one family, started another one, you know I mean, and didn't, and pretended the first one; where does his family value come from, I don't know what he's talking about.

But I know what the values, when we talk about social justice and fighting to end bigotry of all sorts, that's bigotry against people of different colors, different cultures, different experiences, different sexual orientations; I mean, I have no tolerance for any kind of bigotry. You stand on, you stand on who you are and who you are is based on what you've done in this world you know, what kind of integrity you have, I see not in what you say but in what you do. So it had a pretty profound effect on me or else I would be out working in corporate America and I'd make a whole lot more money and I would drive a car that didn't have restored insides. And I mean I have a pretty good business sense, I was in business for a while, and I do okay in business, but it's not meaningful to me. Money doesn't do it, money's great and I wish I had more of it, but it's not enough to make me happy. I see it as sort of a, it's just a tool to do something else with.

So, it, it's clearly impacted, all of those values that sort of coalesced in my life in the Sixties, clearly impacted all the choices I made. It affected the way I raised children, I never bent over my kids' cribs and said, "grow up and be, grow up and be a doctor; grow up and be an astrophysicist." I said, "grow up and do something that's meaningful to you, be decent, be honest, and be happy." And that's very much a Sixties mindset 'cause it's clearly not what my parents said to me, and I don't think it's not what parents are saying to their kids now either. I never said, "make me proud, make a lot of money." I said "be a decent person, make me proud."

How much impact did it have on the world? Gee, I don't know, I wish I could tell you that some of the values that we saw were, were a little more longer lasting. I wish I could tell you that there weren't more people who in the Sixties said one thing and are, now are doing something entirely different. I wish I could tell you that it was all really true and terrific and it wasn't sanctimonious and there weren't a lot of people who were just in it for the high, or in it for the free sex, or in it for the whatever.

I thought it was a pretty, I thought it was artistically a pretty interesting time. I mean, it broke down a lot of the rules, now what we've found is some of the rules need to be reinstated, you know. A world without boundaries is kind of a messy situation. So some of the boundaries got re-established, and that's okay, I'm willing to live with all of those things. But, you know, I don't see, I guess I see some of the people who are now presently in public, in public capacities born of the Sixties. But I don't necessarily see the best of that coming through. Like I'll look at Bill Clinton, who claims have been shaped by the Sixties, and although I agree with a lot of what he says he believes in, he's a huge disappointment to me as a member of my generation. You know, he's charming, he's very charming, and he's smart, and he talks the right talk, but I'm not pleased with who he is as a leader. So, you know, that's, there you have it. I mean if it weren't for the Sixties, you wouldn't have Bill Clinton. Now is that a good thing or a bad thing, I don't know, that's up for discussion.

MB: How do you feel about young people like us still striving to answer questions about the American involvement in the Vietnam War?

AI: Well, I think it's the job of young people to strive to answer questions. I think it's the, well, actually, I think it's the job of young people to ask questions. And I think the more questions and the more uncomfortable you make people with the questions, the better they are. I think that's your job. As we get older even those of us who are still rebels in our heart, get you know sedate and lazy, and we've got more to protect, and you know we just really buy into the status quo to one degree or another. So that's your job, to keep everybody off-balance. Why you would still be futzing around with the Vietnam War, I don't know, because it seems to me most, a lot of those questions have been answered, even by guys on the inside. And Robert McNamara says, "Look, we knew we couldn't win it, we lied to people." I'm not sure why anybody's, you know. I think, as naive as we were, a lot of the views that we had, (interrupted)

Excuse me, do you want to turn this off for just a sec?

(recorder turned back on) . to young people, because I think it, not so much the specific issues about Vietnam, but whether or not your government lies to you. You know, whether they lie to you, because young people are the people that get sent off to fight these wars. And you want to know if your government's, you know, blowing smoke or not. And I think certainly Vietnam, well Vietnam for us, was what planted doubts in our mind about government, but you guys live in the post-Watergate society where you just, nobody trusts government, because clearly they're always lying to you, you know. So I think Vietnam made us a little bit cynical, I think Watergate then made the rest of the nation who didn't go, didn't buy into our cynicism about Vietnam probably bought into about Watergate.

Unknown speaker: Definitely, it made people question the reason, rightfully so, because people didn't just assume that going into war was automatically the right decision.

AI: Oh absolutely, we were very naive, my father, I had brothers, and my father really felt that if the country called my brother to go, he was to go, and he wasn't to ask why, and he wasn't to ask, because that's just the way it was, you fight. My dad fought in World War II, he fought for freedom, and he believed in that, and he didn't believe for a minute that your government would ever put you in danger for anything other than protecting the country. And of course then we come along, with a generation, saying we don't see why going to Vietnam and killing Vietnamese is protecting democracy or the United States, we don't think that these people are really a threat to us or our way of life.

So I think probably that's why it's important for young people to look at Vietnam, but frankly, as naïve as we were, in all our reasoning about Vietnam, I think we were proven frightfully accurate. I mean, I look at some of the stuff we used to think, it was like, based, it was, it was, bordered on paranoia. But when you really start to read, thirty years later, what was going on in terms of the inner decision-making circles, we weren't that far off, which is really horrifying! They knew they weren't gonna win, there were political decisions being made, not military decisions, not security decisions, but political decisions. It's pretty awful, so.

MB: What advice would you give us about like, anything about trying to find answers and stuff?

AI: I don't think there are! I think the advice is- get very comfortable with the, the process of asking questions and don't expect to find answers. I mean, there aren't, there are some answers but the big questions can't be answered, and I think the whole you know, "What does it all mean? What does it?", the things that you young people are searching for the answers about, what does this mean?, where do I find meaning in my life?, where do I find meaning in what my government does?, where do I find meaning in calculus?, where, you know, what is this about?, I don't understand how this fits in. That it's just your job to continue to ask those questions and to continue to try and remain positive and imaginative in the way you approach problems, because otherwise you can get surly, self-absorbed, negative, and that doesn't, that doesn't.

Challenges bring progress, and bringing your imagination to a challenge and saying, all right I don't like this, let's try and find another way to do it, let's look at another opportunity, let's try and find another way to solve this problem. That's what makes change and that's what makes life exciting, and that's what creates art, all of, that's what builds bridges, all of that kind of an imaginative, positive approach to, "All right, if I don't like it, I have to find a positive alternative to apply here." I can't just say, "Oh I don't like," 'cause then otherwise you're just a surly adolescent. Which is really unpleasant for everybody, when you're just sitting around going, "Well, that sucks. Well, that sucks." Well, yeah, it sucks, all right what are you gonna do about it? And I like it when young people, because it empowers them, when they go, "well, that sucks, I'm gonna try something else". And it's very empowering, and that's what makes all the interesting things in the world that happen happen.

And that's what I loved about being in the Sixties, 'cause we thought a lot of things sucked, but instead of sitting around drinking beer going "That sucks!" we went out and, you know, made a lot of trouble in trying to change them. And some of them changed for the best, and not to say that there weren't people who were really damaged in that process along the way, but you know, I think if you kept a positive healthy attitude and you did things out of a sense of moral, I hate to use the word moral, 'cause it sounds so, sounds so sanctimonious, it sounds so righteous, but you did things out of love rather than out of fear, you were more likely to find new solutions to problems, and if not a solution, at least a better way of handling them.

So, I think it's, I love, I love being around young people, because they're just not gonna buy it all the time. You know, it makes me nervous, if I hand somebody the package and it's all wrapped up with a bow, and I go, "All right, here's life, here's the road map, do it this way, here it is, all in a package, all you have to do is follow from A to Z, and your life will be fine," and someone says "Okay," and does that, I gotta worry about that person, you know. And it's easier to do now when you're young than it's ever do it, and when you go to college, man, there is not four better years in your life, because you can be a Republican on Tuesday and a Buddhist on Wednesday, and nobody's gonna look cross-eyed at you. You get out in the real world, it don't work that way, you know. It's a little harder to, like, shift gears that rapidly, so.

MB: We're all set, do you have anything else you want to add?

AI: No. God help you, I hope this wasn't some twisted view of life in the Sixties! (laughs)