

CONSULTANTS: Rebecca Salmaso, Alicia Wells, Tamar Wells, Richard Wells  
AGES: Rebecca (30), Alicia (28), Tamar and Richard (unknown)  
RESIDENCE: Watertown, MA  
OCCUPATIONS: Alica (teacher); others (not specified)  
INTERVIEW DATE: July 30, 2016, approx. 9:00 am  
LOCATION: Durham Farmer Market @ Durham Central Park

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*Two sisters, Rebecca Salmaso and Alicia Wells, approached my table. They were in town for a family reunion. Their parents, Tamar and Richard Wells, arrived and joined the conversation mid-way through the interview.*

**SG: So, you already know what's going on. The idea is, I'm trying to get more information about people's memories from that time. So, we've been talking about it a little, maybe jogged your memory. You started to tell me, what do you remember from that day or that night?**

Rebecca (RS): So I believe we were at home at my parents' house. I don't remember clearly, but I remember when I was in middle school, so I wasn't driving yet, so I was probably at home, because we grew up in a town that had about 4000 people, so there wasn't a lot to do, a lot of places to go. So I was probably at home. And I do remember watching the clock, and when it turned midnight, nothing broke or sparked out, so all the hype around electronics and how they would be able to handle the new...

Alicia (AW): The zeroes [laughs].

RS: Yeah, it was okay.

**SG: Alicia, what about you, do you remember?**

AW: Um, I remember that as well. I also remember that we watched other countries, and when it became the new year in their countries and nothing broke, the hype just seemed to disappear then, too. I remember having conversations with either parents or friends about how, if nothing broke in Japan, then we're probably going to be fine. [laughs]

*I mention that other people had brought this up in interviews earlier that morning.*

**SG: What if somebody asked you -- like a really young kid who doesn't remember, wasn't even born then -- asked you, what was your life like in 1999? What would you say? What's the first thing that pops into your mind?**

RS: Didn't have a cell phone. I probably talked to my friends more, because we weren't so connected to our devices.

AW: Yeah.

**SG: You mean face to face?**

RS and AW: Yeah, oh yeah.

RS: Real conversations, not so much in texts.

**SG: So you remember that change. You're old enough that you can remember how that changed over.**

RS and AW: Yeah.

AW: I remember that evolving. At some point, you would...it changed over. All of a sudden, you were sitting in front of your computer, when AIM was a big thing.

RS [*as if she had forgotten this*]: Oh yeah.

AW: And you would sit on your computer for hours, talking to your friends. And like, your parents would be yelling at you from the next room because –

RS: And playing SIMS

AW [laughs]: Playing the SIMS. But they would be yelling at you from the next room because they needed to use the computer but you were talking to your friends, and there was only one computer in the house.

RS: If you had a computer.

AW: Yeah, if you even had a computer. And so there was this shift from when you talked to your friends on the phone – it was like face-to-face, on the phone – and then, on AIM.

*Rebecca and Alicia's parents arrive. RS asks her mother where they were on NYE99.*

Tamar Wells (TW): At the Francises.

AW: That's what I said [*note: Alicia had mentioned this in conversation before we started recording the interview*].

RS: So a family friend's house, then. Parents remember.

*I introduce myself to the parents and explain the project. I ask Tamar (the mother) to share her own memories.*

TW: Everybody was worried that the whole Internet would crash because it wasn't up to speed [laughs].

RS: That's what we said.

Richard Wells (RW): Yeah. I remember that.

*RS tells her mother about her memory of watching the New Year's celebrations in different time zones. Her father laughs.*

TW: I think we spent the whole evening, like, doing a puzzle.

RS: Probably.

**SG: So was it anything out of the ordinary, in terms of what you did, or was it pretty much another New Year's night?**

TW: It was pretty much the same as what we had been doing for a while. We don't do that now.

RW (to wife): Did we stay up until twelve?

TW: Oh, we did. I think everybody stayed up.

RS: They usually go to bed before New Years.

RW: We turned the clocks ahead [daughters laugh].

TW: We did it, like, on Greenland time. So that, you know, "It's bedtime in Greenland, so let's go..."

**SG: You said you were in Massachusetts at the time, and you still are, right?**

Group: This was Connecticut. We were in Connecticut.

**SG: Oh, okay.**

*I ask the parents for their names, for the record.*

**SG: Wow. You're the first fully intact family that I've talked to at once.**  
*[group laughs]*

RW: Well, hopefully we'll end the day intact. *[more laughter]*

*I repeat the “child’s asks about what life was like in 1999” question for Richard.*

RW: It’s pretty well the same as it is right now, but no internet.

TW: No, we had internet, but we didn’t have...we had flip phones. We didn’t have iPhones.

**SG: Do you remember that you had a flip phone at the time?**

TW: I think I had a flip phone...maybe had a flip phone at the time?

RW: Well, you know, it’s living in the past. I just don’t live in the past.

TW: There was no cell service in our town. There was no cell service.

RS: So if they had a phone –

RW: You’re good. She’s got great memory.

TW: Yeah, so you guys did not have phones, because –

AW: No, we had to...we were in middle school, we had to, like, talk to our –

RS: I don’t think we had cell phones in middle school because we didn’t get cell phone until we started driving.

AW and TW: Yeah. Right.

**SG: Remember the big bag phones? Maybe you had in the car?**

Group: No, no, we didn’t...

AW: The Grays had one of those, though. We had friends that had those [laughs]. They were so cool.

RS: So we used the house phone a lot. Our friends would call the house phone.

**SG [*in mock astonishment*]: It was connected to the WALL!**

RS: It was connected to the wall. And they had to careful what time they called, to not wake anybody up.

RW: And sometimes, you had to turn them around, they had the...

TW: Rotary dial.

RW: Rotary dial.

**Now you're going way back.**

AW: I'm a teacher, and I spent 20 minutes explaining to my class what a rotary dial phone was. It was like an entire bulk science block; we just talked about what a rotary dial phone was.

*I mention that I have and old rotary phone that my kids play with.*

TW: We were still connected. Our TV was still connected and now it's not.

**SG: And it was probably 'yay' big and heavy, right?**

TW: It was big and heavy, and I think we had satellite because that's all we could get. But we've now eliminated that.

RS: We didn't have cable then, because we didn't get cable until Alicia and I were in college.

RW: It was network.

TW: It was network TV, right.

AW: We got, like, five channels. [laughs] And you'd flip through your five channels.

**SG: And you're laughing about it now, but you didn't give it a second thought back then.**

AW: Yeah. It was just, you got five channels. You couldn't get cable.

RS: I remember when we were home sick, and you're trying to find something to watch on TV, it was like, soap operas and soap operas and then [*jubilant voice*] The Price Is Right! [laughs]

TW: I remember we had the cassette tapes. Yeah.

**SG: Did you have a computer at home back then?**

TW: Yes.

**SG: Do you remember what it was like trying to use the Internet back then?**

AW: Dial up. Slow.

TW: Was it dial-up then?

AW: It *was* dial-up.

RW: It *was* dial-up, yeah. I remember putting together my first computer.

**SG: Oh, you built it yourself, with the motherboard and everything?**

RW: Yeah, that's how you had to do it back then. [laughs] And it was K of memory, it wasn't...

**SG: G.**

RW: The idea of a gigabyte of memory was just over the top.

**SG: And we're gonna look back and think of a gigabyte as being tiny.**

RW: That's right.

**SG: It already is, pretty much.**

TW: And we had cassette tapes to listen to.

**SG: Do you remember what music you were listening to back then? This is actually a good question, because we're getting a mix of people.**

TW: Wow. For us, it was classical.

AW: Their music was –

**SG (to AW): You probably still had CDs then, right?**

AW: I remember listening to my first cassette tape, that I owned myself, which was Brittany Spears. And then Becca had a 'Pocahontas' one...

RS: My two first CDs were 'Pocahontas' soundtrack and Simon and Garfunkel.

**SG: Interesting dichotomy. [group laughs]**

RS: From my friend. That was the same year I got a boom box.

**SG: Boom boxes, how about that, right?**

RS: Boom box. Yeah.

**SG: And your CD collection probably ends, when? When it switched over to all digital?**

RS: Oh, whenever I got my first iPod, probably. But I still have all of my CDs. I don't know what to do with them.

AW: I sold all mine. We had a tag sale when I moved, and I sold all of my CDs.

**SG: You didn't want to hold on to Brittany Spears?**

AW: I have it on my phone now [laughs].

RS: At least she didn't let go of Brittany Spears.

AW: It's just all on my phone. And now I don't even buy music. I just listen to either Google Play or Pandora or Spotify. I just..

**SG: Yep. That's been the other change --**

AW: I don't even own music --

**SG: -- is that it went from having a physical copy, to all just digital, to not buying anything because it's on demand.**

RS: Right. And paying for subscriptions for your music.

TW: It's really, really, really horrible for the musicians.

**SG: Absolutely. I'm not supposed to have an opinion, but absolutely.**

TW: It's awful. I mean, the music industry did not see that coming.

AW: It's been hard in New York, for the musicians that were there. Because even like, Broadway shows, it's not...they're not doing live orchestras for a lot of the Broadway shows anymore. It's just recordings.

**SG: That's crazy.**

AW: So you get paid for your recording that you put out --

**SG: Pennies.**

AW Yeah. But then, you don't get paid for every single show.

**SG: Well, in your line of work, it would have been a totally different ballgame, if you had started in 1999. I mean, teaching, I can't imagine how different that is.**

AW: Yeah. Yeah. We have a smart board. We have iPads for all of the kids.

**SG: What subject do you teach?**

AW: I teach special ed. But I'm in the general ed classroom for most of the day.

**SG: I was gonna ask you if they still teach cursive.**

AW [with surprise]: They do! I do. [laughs]. In third grade, in Redding, Massachusetts, we still teach cursive.

**SG: Interesting.**

AW: At my school. I actually don't know if all the elementary schools in Redding are that way, but in my school, we still teach cursive.

**SG: Wow. I can't even remember the last time I wrote cursive.**

TW: I still write cursive.

**SG: I was gonna say, signed a check, but I don't even do that anymore, either.**

*Richard laughs.*

AW: Yeah.

**SG: In general, do you think things are better or worse than in 1999? Comparing now to then.**

TW: In some ways it's better, in some ways it's --

RW: Better. I'd say it's better.

**SG: Is technology a big part of that?**

RW: I think technology has made it better.

TW: Well, I think technology is a double-edged sword because you get kids who are attached. They're hooked in so much to their media that they're not communicating --



RW: -- But they said that with televisions, too, when televisions came out, telephones came ut...

TW: -- I think it's...yeah but, iPads and iPods, I mean, iPhones and everything, are ubiquitous. They're everywhere, and so...

RS: You can't get away from it.

TW: With television, you'd walk out the door and it's not there anymore.

**SG: Rebecca was saying that back then, it would have been talking to people face-to-face.**

TW: Yeah. Uh hmm. And I think it's going to be interesting –

RW: But you had a limited number of people you could talk to. Now you can talk to...you can connect with all your high school, college friends.

**SG: That's a good point.**

TW: That's true.

RS: But have conversations changed, when they're in text messages versus actually sitting down and having a conversation, and not being interrupted by taking your phone when you're bored and looking through Facebook?

**SG: Maybe it's breadth and not depth, you know?**

RW: I like that, breadth and not depth. That's a good point.

*[Note: I think subconsciously, I purloined the 'breadth and depth' line from one of my thesis committee members, Glenn Hinson. Glenn used it in an email discussion about oral history, and I found myself saying it in my millennium interviews. Thanks Glenn.]*

RS: I do kind of miss the depth of conversations that you used to get into, when you weren't distracted by technology. We still do that sometimes, but I don't know.

**SG: Only when someone has a microphone in their hand, right?**

AW: Yeah. [laugh]

**SG: Let me ask you something. I was thinking about this in the car on the way over. Presuming you have Facebook pages...**

RS: Yeah. All of us.

**SG: Do you have any neighbors in your Facebook friends? Current or former.**

RS: I don't know my neighbors.

RW: No, we lived out in the country, so we really didn't have neighbors.

TW: Yeah, we moved recently. So, yeah, no...

RW: I'm sure we do...Becky Clark...

**SG (to AW): Are any of your friends current or former neighbors?**

RS: You don't really know your neighbors.

AW: Not really, but I rent, so I move a lot. So I don't really get to know...Actually, you know, former neighbors, yeah. When I lived in, like, a three-story apartment and I knew everyone in the building.

**SG: And they became Facebook friends?**

AW: And they became Facebook friends.

**SG: Interesting. (to RS): But you just don't know your neighbors anymore, you don't think?**

RS: No, we didn't in Watertown.

TW: And you're in the process of moving, so...

RS: Right.

*I thank the Wells family for their time and end the interview.*

