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A love of the outdoors blends career, marriage

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Throughout her life, Polly Chandler has been passionate about the environment. For nearly three decades, as a teacher, administrator, environmental scientist and educator, she's encouraged others to follow suit.

Today, she works at Antioch University New England. As chairman of the graduate school's organization and management department, and program manager for the university's Green MBA, she now prepares future community leaders not only in sustainable business practices but also in social responsibility.

"We're on the cusp of incredible opportunities to inform businesses how they can make a difference in the planet," she said. "It's all about connections. I show students, communities and businesses how organizations, people and the environment are all connected. I'm the weaver who connects them all together."

Chandler developed her love of nature as a youngster in Wayzata, Minn.

"The environment played a huge part in my life as a child," she said. "I grew up on a lake and spent an enormous amount of time just swimming, fishing, exploring marshes, hiking and biking ... My mother was always naming plants and animals and giving me field guides to wildflowers and birds. It was a fantastic way to grow up."

Following her 1981 graduation from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point with a bachelor's degree in resource management and environmental science, she landed her first job as a naturalist with the Delaware Nature Society. There, for three years, she taught outdoor environmental education and ran a teen volunteer service program until relocating to a Philadelphia private school to teach environmental science.

After earning a master's degree in science education, she taught for several years in various Quaker schools until accepting a position with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation in Maryland.

There Chandler, an expert sailor since childhood, served as first mate and educator on an 80-foot skipjack, a boat developed in the Chesapeake Bay specifically to dredge oysters. Daily, she brought different groups of 30 to 50 students out on the bay, where she taught environmental history, rolled sails and managed the dredges.



Polly Chandler grew up learning about the environment, and hasn't stopped since.

"It was cold in winter, and brutally hot in summer," she said. "I spent one year there. It was a physically demanding job with repetitive teaching. But, I learned a lot, made great friends with the captain, and picked up a wicked southern accent."

Soon she returned to classroom teaching, this time in an urban Philadelphia setting.

"It was great fun," she said. "I taught 8th- and 9th-graders environmental studies. One day I took them to the woods. They'd never been to the woods before. They went crazy. They were so nervous and uncomfortable. I told them, 'Now you know how I feel in the city.' "

Five years later, following an interview for a teaching position at a private Massachusetts elementary school, she took a walk in a nearby state park. There, she met then-park manager, Greg Chanis, who was also from the Philadelphia area. The couple connected instantly, and dated for four years before marrying in 1998.

Throughout the mid- to late '90s, she taught environmental science during the academic year and, during summers, worked for her husband as a naturalist, giving tours of the historic Misery Islands in Salem Sound, Mass.

Eventually both wanted career changes. "I had been working in environmental and science education," she said. "I was ready to switch from teaching young students to adults. My husband wanted to work for a larger facility. The time was right."

Quitting their jobs, the couple exchanged their car for a camper, and traveled for nine months throughout the country, touring national parks and state forests.

After spending five weeks in Utah, the pair soon headed to the Sierra Nevada mountains in eastern California; then to Oregon and Olympic National Park in northwest Washington. From there, they made their way to Los Angeles, drove east to Florida and finally traveled north through Appalachia during spring.

"We were just wandering," Chandler said. "We had no idea where we were going day by day. It was great fun. It was amazing. It

At a glance

> **Name:** Polly Chandler.

> **Born in:** Philadelphia; grew up in Wayzata, Minn.

> **Residence:** Keene, since 2004.

> **Family:** Husband, Greg Chanis.

> **Education:** B.S., resource management and environmental education, University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point, 1981; master of education in science education, Arcadia College in Pennsylvania, 1991; master of education in administration and supervision, Antioch University New England, 2005; also holds a professional certificate in sustainable business practices from the University of Vermont.

> **Employment:** Antioch University New England. Chairman of the department of organization and management; director, master of business administration program in organizational and environmental sustainability (Green MBA).

> **Hobbies:** Running road races, hiking, biking, competing in triathlons, playing the piano.

> **Question:**

When you first arrived in Keene and were employed by the Antioch New England Institute, what type of projects did you work on?

Answer: "I spent two years at the institute. I worked at the now-defunct Rachel Marshall outdoor learning center. It was a collaboration between the public schools in Keene and the parks and recreation department. We did innovative projects with environmental topics and community education services. Once we had 3rd-grade students come to Ashuelot Park for a project about Keene history. The Keene High School drama club acted out roles of historic characters while the 3rd-graders walked through the park."

> Question:

Did you always plan a career in environmental studies?

Answer: "I always knew I'd work in the environment. It's always been an anchor in my life. When I first went to college, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point was known for its resource management program. I didn't even look at any other schools, didn't even apply to anyplace else. The other constant throughout my career is community service. I've always engaged whomever I'm working with in service."

> Question:

As a pianist, who are your favorite composers?

Answer: "I'm a classical pianist. I love Debussy and right now I'm playing Tchaikovsky."

> Question:

Where do you usually run races or enter triathlons?

Answer: "I enter them in Keene, Bristol and Durham as well as in Vermont. I run in fundraising events including ... the Dartmouth-Hitchcock cancer fundraiser in Hanover. I enjoy them. The first week in June, I'll do the Mooseman Triathlon at Newfound Lake in Bristol. I hope the water warms up. But, don't look for me to place. I just love to do them."

reawakened my passion for the environment."

Winding down their adventure, the two speculated on where to settle down.

"While we were wandering, we tallied a list of qualities we wanted in a community where we could live," she said. "We wanted to live in a self-contained town. We wanted to live in a college town. We wanted to live in a town with lots of natural resources nearby."

Soon after, they discovered Keene. Here Chandler was offered a job with the Antioch New England Institute, the university's consulting and community outreach center. She also enrolled in the graduate school's organization and management department for a master's degree to prepare to teach adults.

Within a few months, the couple even bought a home.

"My husband always wanted to renovate a house," she said. "We bought a wreck of a home, and he rebuilt the house from top to bottom. I worked full time, was a grad student and we lived in our camper in Wheelock Park."

"Eventually, it got cold, and the campground closed," she said. "On Thanksgiving Day, after coming home from visiting relatives, I said 'I can't do this anymore.' We went to the Holiday Inn. The house was finished two weeks later. The whole thing took 13 months."

At Antioch, Chandler worked on several collaborative community projects with the Keene public schools and other city departments; and subsequently directed the university's Edward J. Tomey Center, which provides student and faculty consulting services to local nonprofit organizations and schools. In between, she earned her master's degree, and also was employed by Keene State College as service learning coordinator.

Two years ago, she was asked to manage the university's new MBA program in organization and environmental sustainability — the Green MBA.

"The Green MBA is about sustainability," she said. "We were one of the first schools offering it. Now it's sprouting everywhere. Businesses are starting to understand that taking care of the environment and taking care of people is taking care of their profits. It's a triple bottom-line degree."

Last summer, she was named chairman of the university's department of organization and management. Besides supervising students and faculty, she coaches and mentors students on independent studies, and also teaches classes, including two that focus on how business and the environment link. A strong proponent of community service, she also promotes and oversees student and faculty consulting services, primarily to local businesses.

"I love teaching," she said. "We're really preparing the leaders in this field for sustainability. I'm still doing environmental education. Now I'm just doing it with businesses."

Keene resident Michelle Bourassa, a former student of Chandler, is now both friend and colleague.

"Polly has an amazing way about her," she said. "She has such respect for people, the environment and the universe. She brings out the best in people. She has a genuine connection with people and with the Keene community, and is so committed to service on all levels ... She's a natural humanitarian."

Chandler's personal life also reflects her love of nature. Weather permitting, she frequently bikes from home to work. An enthusiastic runner, she participates in 5K, 10K and half-marathon road races as well as triathlons locally and throughout New England. Those events generally involve a 1-mile swim followed by a 24-mile bike ride and a 10K run.

"I pick them for their beautiful locations," she said. "I'm not trying to win. I just love to bike, ride and swim. I get to do those things in places I've never been."

Beyond that, a classical pianist since age 6, she continues to take lessons with a private music teacher in Keene. But, her favorite leisure moments are spent with her husband, a Sullivan County administrator. Together, they hike and kayak throughout the Monadnock Region.

"The environment, service and athleticism are all part of who I am," Chandler said. "But truly the biggest part of me is my husband. We're truly devoted to each other. We're lucky that the stars brought us together."

"I could give up everything I love in my life but my husband," she said. "The anchors I hold onto are nature and the people I love."

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