

Interviewee: Susan Paradis
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Abstract: Susan Paradis was born in Worcester in 1972. Susan's family owned a candy store when she was a child but they eventually sold the store. Susan reopened it on her own when she was older, bringing Parker's Candy Store, a staple to West Boylston, back to the town. In this interview, Susan discusses what her life was like when she was a child living with her dad. She then moved to live with her mother and stepdad in the town of West Boylston where she lived for most of her life. She discusses how her grandparents and parents ran the candy store and how she reopened it because it was something she was passionate about. Susan provides information about how she runs the store now, including the suppliers she uses.

FB: What is your full name including both maiden name and married name if applicable?

SP: Okay. Susan Marie Paradis. That's what it is now. Susan Marie Grenier was my maiden name.

FB: When were you born?

SP: October 31st, 1972.

FB: Have you ever married?

SP: Yes, I've been married for gosh almost 23 years.

FB: And do you have any children?

SP: I have two sons. Zachary is 19 and Benjamin's 18.

FB: So what cultures/ethnicities do you identify with? So what's your family background in a way?

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SP: I am French Indian, Polish, and Scottish. Imagine that. And my husband's basically the same. Well he's not Polish but he's French and Scottish. Yeah.

FB: French Indian as for like, American Indian?

SP: Yes.

FB: So could you tell us something about your parents and how that kind of...?

SP: Gosh. Do you want to hear this? [laughs] My parents, ok. So my mom and dad went to school together actually. As teenagers and then they got married and had my brother. They got divorced when I was three so my stepdad he's actually a packer and it was his parents that started the candy store and the flower shop way back when. So that's when I got introduced to the candy store and all that was at three years old when it was my grandparents running it. And it was completely different then, but it was awesome.

FB: So where have you lived during your life?

SP: I lived with my dad when I from age three. Me, my dad, and my brother from age three to 12. And then when I was in eighth grade I moved to West Boylston and lived with my mother and my stepdad and that's when I started working here at 14. So Millbury from birth to 12 years old and then West Boylston until December of last year. And now we just moved to Clinton which is a huge move for me because I don't like change really. So I moved from my house which is basically next door like you could see it from here if we went out back, to this house which is my first apartment and we had the kids here and stuff. And then we finally moved to the other end of town like 10 years ago.

FB: Was it just like because the town was expanding kind of thing?

SP: Yeah. Yup. Yeah. We grew out of the apartment over there so we did buy a house on the other side of town which was huge for me because I've never really left the parking lot as far as living you know. So yeah. First to move out of town is huge but it's good.

FB: So what was your, yeah what was the neighborhood like generally? Like where you lived what was it like?

SP: It was a fun neighborhood. I mean it was right here so it was a nice neighborhood. Everybody got along like we were all very close you know we'd play tag in the cemetery at night and stuff like that [laughs]. I live in a good neighborhood.

ES: Do you, like do you have a connection to Worcester?

SP: The only connection I really have is being born there. I was born there, my kids were born in Worcester. So yeah. But that's about...

FB: But you live in this area?

SP: Like Worcester county? Yes. Yep. We've lived... yep. So I'm very familiar with Worcester. But yeah. My husband lived in Worcester like his whole life.

FB: So like the place that you, like this place that you live in, what kind of challenges do you think the city is facing in a way? Like do you think it's a good place to live so far or do you think there will be for example like room for improvement or like something you notice?

SP: No it is. It's a nice place to live. West Boylston is a nice place to live. But I went to West Boylston schools and I just—my kids I felt got let down there a little but... so I don't know I'd probably change some of that if I could, but you know it is what it is. But it's a nice town to live in. A petty small town you know. I'm happy to be in Clinton actually. I've had enough.

FB: So what changes have you seen in like here over time like the city?

SP: A lot of new buildings. A lot of new businesses going up. We have like so many pizza places in town like I don't know. Like a lot went up. A Cumberland Farms, just restaurants so stuff like that has changed a lot. Yeah.

ES: What distinct characteristics make West Boylston the place that it is?

SP: The old stone church. Parker's Candy. This is like a staple to this town. It's been literally like a hundred years. Just stuff like that honestly. There's not much old time stuff left you know because everything's changing and becoming new. I don't know. What a boring interview I'm

sorry [laughs]. That's the only history I really know about our town is like the old stone church. I mean we have a historical society over there and stuff like that but besides me you know. Meola's Ice Cream, they've been around a while.

ES: What do you think women's experiences here have like generally like been like?

SP: I think it's been pretty positive. Our town... yeah. Do you come from small towns?

FB: I live in Rome so.

SP: Ok, so in my class there was 50 kids so it's kind of hard. Yes, everybody's close but it's so, I don't know, catty too but I people pretty much try to boost each other up here.

FB: Where did you attend school? You attend school here?

SP: Yep. In West Boylston High School.

FB: And did you attend college at all or did you graduate?

SP: I went to art school for a couple years.

FB: Where?

SP: Right in Worcester actually. WITI [Worcester Industrial Technical Institute] Which I don't even know if it's a school anymore. It's right up on Bell Hill.

FB: I think it is. I'm not sure.

ES: Did you have any challenges in like your education and your schooling?

SP: Not really. I never liked school. I know it's awful but I couldn't wait to get out of school everyday. But I loved art and I was good at art and this is what I did. I always worked at the candy store and then the gift store because my mother owned a gift store. Way back when this was a flower shop and there were greenhouses off the back. And then we added a candy store so that's where I worked and then later on my mother turned this into the gift store. We had a Christmas barn next door, an Irish shop and we added on a candy store and we got rid of the greenhouses and flowers so that's basically what I did for years. That was my thing. Even in high

school, so back then even when my parents said “No, you should go to college you should do this and that.” I said, “Why? This is what I want to do, this is what I’m doing.” So that’s what I did when they sold the business, 10 years later because when they sold the business my son was only like a baby and I was pregnant with my other. So I wasn’t able to keep it open or anything then, but I reopened just the candy store years after. That’s why this came about again otherwise it wouldn’t even be but it was in the family for years. But they took off and went to Florida so that’s good.

FB: So you always saw it as kind of like what you wanted to do like working in the candy store?

SP: Yeah. I never knew that I was going to own a candy store. I would have laughed years ago, I would’ve been like, “No way,” but that’s just how it ended up being. It was a surprise to me too but I thought, “You know what? I think I’m going to open the candy store again,” because I was bored. When they were in 1st and 2nd grade I volunteered a lot and after they don’t let you anymore, I thought “What am I going to do?” So that’s what I did. I reopened the store. I actually went to work at the hospital gift shop for a couple months and it was such a nightmare. I said I can never work for corporate ever. I can’t. I can’t have somebody ruling me that’s not even in the area, not even in the state telling me what to do in my store. It just wasn’t working out so that made me open the store and I’m really glad I did.

ES: Was it difficult opening up a store again?

SP: It was. People come to me about opening stores and what should they do and that’s what I tell them basically like I grew up doing it so I know what I’m doing. And I work it like you can’t just walk away, you can’t just—like my stepdad tried to do with me. You know like you run it this and that. You can’t - he has to be here because he’s throwing all this profit away by paying people when there’s nobody here right now. I don’t mind it. I love it. I actually come here to get a break you know [laughs].

FB: So, during your life, what kind of support or mentoring has been important to you?

SP: I learned a lot from my parents, which is good, but they are also tough, so... It was good, you know what I mean? It’s good in both ways I guess, like, now that I look back on it we butt heads, but in a way it’s good, because I’m stronger, and I think it made me a better worker. Now I can rub it in their face that I’m doing well and they are in Florida and I’m on my own, so that’s good.

FB: So like, did you have any support in opening the candy store or...

SP: My husband helps me. We go pickup the orders because I have to call in and place my order every Tuesday and they would bring it because that's what we used to do back in the day. We'd get A & D once a week, and Smillie's every other, but I go to Smillie's once a month and I pick it out, just so I can see what they have that's new, what they don't have in stock, and I just like it better that way. It's like a big warehouse with just candy, and there's no prices on anything. So now I ask, I've been doing it long enough so I kind of know too, but it's not as shocking, but sometimes it is. I'll think, "What? I would have never bought those if I knew they were that much," or, "I should have bought more of these," you know? So, that's the big shock with that but it's good and it's the same distributor—one of them is one that my grandparents used and now it's the third generation with them too. We have known them for years and it's just kind of cool because other ones shut down recently. Two of my main distributors have shut down in the past year, so it's good that this one—thank god this one is still open because I don't know where I'd be. I'd have to be scrambling to all different distributors to find all my stuff again. It's rare to have candy stores too nowadays and some people like just the chocolate shops. I try to be for everybody. Cabot's to me is boring now. I loved it when I was a kid, but it's not the same owners anymore so the chocolate doesn't taste the same. The sundaes are fun because they have the make your own sundae station. I've always loved that, but it's just towers and towers and boxes of chocolate, it's all the same thing, you know? And I'm the only one that bags it too because otherwise I would have a store of just those bins when you come in and you dump your stuff and you weigh it.

FB: It's good to have the personal touch in a way...

SP: Yes, because this is how we did it, you know, instead of just doing it that way, that way is not as fun. It would be easier for me, but [laughs], I don't know, it's not as fun.

FB: I guess it's good to have that customer relationship in a way...

SP: And I can make you a two dollar bag, you know what I mean? If you don't want a 50 cent bag or a dollar bag. I buy everything in 5 lb and just break it down.

FB: So, some of these questions might repeat, by the way, what we have already said, but what was your first job and what other jobs have you worked besides for... you said you did a bunch of volunteering?

SP: Yeah that was at the school when my kids were little, I volunteered and did the art table a couple days a week, and reading, you know, stuff like that. I worked at Meola's Dairy, in the office for a few, like maybe a year while I was here that he came down and recruited me 'cause I was mad at my stepdad so I'm like: "I'll work there." So I did that for a little while and I cashed

in all the milk drivers, the dairy drivers. I took their money and cashed them in, made sure everything was all set, and then I came back and worked for my mother in the gift store. Besides that, then I went on leave because I was pregnant with the kids and I worked at the hospital gift shop, that's it.

FB: And then you opened the store again...

SP: And then I opened the store, yeah.

ES: So what has this work meant to you?

SP: Well, I like it because I'm seeing generations come back and it's just nice, it's rewarding, it's a happy store. Literally, this [points at a sign] was just because of one customer and I've been open almost... I'd say 11 years but almost 12. You know, I can count maybe four customers that like, [puffs]... really, it's a happy place, everybody is happy, it's fun. It's nice that I can make my own hours. I have set hours but I can bend them a little. Plus I had to have hours like this because my son had an injury at birth. He had a loss of oxygen at birth so he was dead for 12 minutes before they brought him back and so he's needed—actually, do you know what? He is so healthy though, as far as like, physically and everything he it's just like the perfect body mass and everything. He's worked out since he was born, he eats right, he's amazing, you know, while my other son, he's my big kid, and he has asthma and just everything, stomach issues. Every weekend I'm at the doctor's and wondering, "What is wrong with you?" And he's like, "Mom!" and this kid [the older son] is never sick but he has the brain injury and all that. So, it's a damn good thing I own my own business, because nobody would keep me on as an employer because I'm always having to go to the doctor for something. My other one is 18, he's got shingles, he just had a stomach thing last week, where we had to go for an ultrasound, then he was on antibiotics for two weeks, like, it's always something. But not this one. If he came in right now I feel like he would want to show off in front of you. He would start doing push-ups, and you know, he's funny.

FB: This actually ties in very nicely with the next question; what were your primary responsibilities in terms of housework or childcare?

SP: I was a stay home mom with them. He had early intervention two, three days a week so they'd come to the house two hours a day. He's been in school since he was three years old full time because I had a really good special needs program in town, but I'll tell you what, high school was hell for them and for me over there. This town really filled with that—it was almost

like they got brand new principals and teachers, but all the kids were the same, so it was just very weird over there for a couple years, you know, somebody else coming in and running your school that you've been in your whole life. Everything was different and just wasn't good for someone like Zach that needed kind of the same scheduling, all that, it's just a nightmare, but... anyway. I don't know where we got off base but [laughs] Sorry!

FB: It's actually better this way, we don't have to stick directly to the questions...

ES: How do you think about the choices you have made in your life? Regrets?

SP: I don't know, it's hard to say. Not really, because I love the store, I love my kids – I could punch my husband sometimes but he's pretty good too [laughs]. There is a 10 year age difference between us. It doesn't look like that though, he's in really good shape. I think I like the choices I made. I think I'm a little too safe, you know, not leaving from there, basically on the property my whole life until 10 years ago, you know what I mean? But other than that, I like my choices.

FB: So do you consider yourself politically active?

SP: Not really. It's that bad? I'm sorry [laughs].

FB: It's a matter of choice at the end.

SP: And I'm not – I know this is awful to say probably– But I'm not a huge feminist either. I just probably from living in West Boylston with catty women I just can't you know? I just want everybody to be happy honestly, I really do, I just want peace with everybody, just get along, you get along, and you get along and, enough you know?

FB: What role has religion played in your life?

SP: I don't know, not really. When I was little a lot more because I had my first communion and I got confirmed and all that. I do want my kids to be baptized because they haven't, but that's something between me and my husband. Definitely someday they have to be baptized. It's just something because I was and I want them to be and he was too so he shouldn't even be saying, "What for?" We grew up Catholic, but we're not practicing I guess that's what I should say. When I was younger I was around my girl cousins for a while which is great, so I went to Bible

Camp with them, basically that's it. I'm actually my friend's confirmation sponsor too by the way.

ES: You mentioned your son's health issues, but how have health issues had an impact on your life, your family?

SP: He's amazing. I don't know, [starts crying] that's a hard one. He is amazing; I just feel like he got totally cheated and it's just hard because he could be so much more. Like my other son has a great face, he's a really good football player, but Zack is in such good shape and he's just so regimented with what he eats, and it's amazing, even though he's like 19 and he's girl crazy. Like, today he's said, "Who should I be today, should I be Superman or should I be Paul Walker?" because he loves that and I said, "I don't know Zach, you've been Clark Kent for four days, why don't we try someone new?" It's just totally different...

FB: Feel free not to answer any of these questions...

SP: No, that's ok. I'm upset because I had a great pregnancy, it was my first pregnancy. I love my doctor and she went away during my delivery so I had to a doctor covering. And that doctor never answered to her page so I had to schedule—I went in to be induced, and she never answered her page. When my water broke it was tough which is why he was in such distress and everything, so it could have been avoided, you know what I mean, it was just hard because he wants to be married with kids and stuff so bad. And it's hard because I want that for him too and it's just really hard, and it's really affected our family because sometimes he's nice to his brother, sometimes he's not. I know all brothers fight, but it's just been really hard, you know, it's hard. My husband favors him a lot because of his injuries, and that's been really hard on my other son too, but they are close, and they love each other I mean. It's a lot, it's hard and that's why I love it here. I come here to escape. We are very close he comes to me a lot, he's a superhero here a lot, Spider-Man, whatever, all through the year. He loves Michael Myers, he loves everything.

FB: Again, you are free not to answer, when you have this kind tough times, what keeps you going?

SP: Probably the kids. I do love the store, so all that. Probably the kids most. I'm really close to both of them. I'm close to my husband too, I just want to kill him some of the times, like right now [laughs], no, I'm just kidding. We have been together since I was 19, and he was 29, now I'm 46 so that's a long time. And it's good, it is, you just go through different things at different times. [intern comes in the store, she greets her]

ES: How do you define success in your life?

SP: Gosh, still being open? I don't know, I guess by doing it on my own, never having to ask for help to my family or anything. I left at 19 and that was it. That's probably one of my biggest because my brother's gone back a few times, he's been divorced three times. Still doing it, having a family, being married, having a business—kids are still alive [laughs]

FB: So, based on your life experience, what advice would you give to women of today or future generations? If not just women just people in general I guess...

SP: Go after your dreams, if you want to do something you have to go after it. You can't just sit back and say "what if?" or wish.

FB: Maybe if you would tell us the story of the store itself, you told us that your grandparents had it at the beginning?

SP: It was my stepdad's grandparents, that first opened it, and his parents took it over. It was where the gas station is, up the street, not too far from here at all. It was a fruit stand, and they had a little bit of candy, and then I don't know what happened to that, I guess they sold that off, and then they came down here. Harry's family actually lived here, so my grandfather actually lived on the property, and they owned acres all around here. That's when they opened the, I think it was a fruit stand and a flower shop, and they had greenhouses, "cut your own Christmas trees" and stuff like that for years. Then my parents took it over, gosh, I don't even know what year, I was like twelve so maybe like 1984-ish. They took it over for 13 years and turned it into—we still had "cut your own Christmas trees" but we had the Christmas barn, the Irish store, the candy store, the flower shop just for a little bit of time, we got rid of that, and we did the Christmas store and all that, moved to candy down the end. And until 1999 to 2000 maybe, they stopped doing the business, so that's when I reopened in like 2008. So for eight years it was nothing, it was like on the market, until [the intern's] dad bought it. So her dad owns the property now, and I pay rent. And after a 100 years! [laughs] but it's all good because I'm here. It's good.