

Interviewee: Claire Schaeffer-Duffy
Interviewers: Alicia Perry, Emma Garaban
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Abstract: Claire Schaeffer-Duffy, was born in Memphis, Tennessee in 1960. She is currently a freelance journalist, lives in and runs the Catholic Worker House in Worcester, Massachusetts, and is involved in a wide range of peacemaking activist work within the city and beyond, with a focus on anti-war efforts. Claire describes her childhood as formative in that her international, highly diverse upbringing in a home that cultivated a curiosity of the world has played an integral role in her interest in diverse cultures and peoples. Her educational experience studying political and social thought increased her interest in social life and its connections to institutions, particularly that of religion. Claire is a convert to Catholicism and is highly influenced by Catholic social teaching's tendency to question the status quo, particularly in relation to suffering. Her work is driven by the coupling of a strong faith grounded in seeing Christ and the value in all humans combined with an active resistance to structural inequalities through demonstrations and other forms of disobedience aimed at sending a political message.

Alicia Perry: We're recording on my phone too, just in case, we've been doing that as kind of a little back up...

Emma Garaban: Yeah just in case. We put....

AP: [laughter]

Claire Schaeffer- Duffy: Is that your house key, or is that just a different key?

AP: It's my house key.

CSD: Really? You're so funny. Oh my god

AP: I wish that we were...

CSD: Oh I like that

AP: I know...it's...it works most of the time but sometimes we forget to...yeah...you know...I mean sometimes I forget it on my bureau...but...it keeps it usually on my wrist...

CSD: I place it in my purse....you know...that's a clever idea

AP: [Laughs]

CSD: I love that

AP: For sure... well yeah thanks so much for having us we're so excited and, as I'm sure—I mean you're very close to Selina, but we're conducting these interviews for the Worcester Women Peace Activist Archive [Worcester Women's Oral History Project] and we're really excited about it. So yes, Emma and I are in Selina's seminar, Women and Nonviolence, so yes it's just pretty awesome to kind of, you know, meet you and other women and learn about all of this. So, basically we're just going to kind of ask you pretty much to kind of provide us with a biography...important stories to you...just learn about you. Anything you want to tell us. I guess if we just could start maybe with your childhood. Kind of if you want to talk about where you were born and raised. Were you born and raised here in Worcester? If not, where? Yeah, we could start there.

CSD: Okay. I was not born in Worcester. I am a southern woman. I was born in Memphis, Tennessee. I think a Baptist hospital. And six weeks after birth, my mother took me back to Burma, which is where my father and older siblings lived. He was a foreign service officer. So he was stationed in Burma, which is known as Myanmar. So the first two years of life were there in a big grand house with a sweeping drive. A nanny named Gracie took care of me. I don't remember, I just have photos from the family. After Burma my family lived for seven years in India. Five and then two in the U.S. So, it was a childhood of growing up in different countries. India being the longest. We were also in London, England for two years during middle school. And in Japan and Tokyo, Japan for a year during high school. But like a lot of foreign service families, we would have stints in the United States before my father would go out again. But I have been in Worcester since marriage, which was 1984. So, I got absorbed by the reality of my New England husband.

EG: Aw

AP: [Laughs] Awesome. So, were you...so you were travelling abroad with your father doing foreign service. In this service or...?

CSD: Right. So to be clear, foreign service is very different than military.

AP: Ok.

CSD: Foreign service refers to a country...diplomatic.

AP: OK

CSD: So, at the State Department, the Trump administration is eviscerating right now. That's the U.S. agency that determines who's working in the embassies. And my father's era, there was an agency called the United States Information Agency. So, people say it was a soft front for the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] but I don't [laughs]. I don't think my dad was CIA. I am quite confident he wasn't. He was a Cultural Affairs Officer. And the Cold War was in throws during that time period. And so these Foreign Service Officers were there promoting American culture, American literature. In Burma he helped set up libraries, he brought Mahalia Jackson to come and sing in the country. She's one of our kind of famous black gospel singers. So it really was kind of to promote a cultural exchange. He did a lot of—you know the Fulbright Program?

EG: Yeah

CSD: So that is, or was, overseen, by this big department. And a lot of people in the embassy would help set up those scholars that were coming into the country and what university will I be teaching or lecturing at. So that would all come under USIA or the embassies. So it's not military service. It was diplomatic. Another way to put it is that I was a diplomat brat.

AP, EG: [Laugh]

AP: So funny. Awesome. So, in terms of...we would love to maybe hear just a little bit more about particular memories you have with your family. If you want to kind of talk about what your parents were like, if you have any siblings.

CSD: Sure. I have four children. My grandmother was very memorable and my childhood is that my grandmother lived with our family my entire life. She is the one who really made sure we had a sense of our southernness, even though we were children raised overseas. She had never left

the south until her second husband's death, which happened the year I was born. So she went from living in this one region until she was sixty to getting on a plane and flying to tiny Burma and staying with her son's family for the rest of her life. Her presence kept that sort of southern identity in a family that's always on the move. She was also very—I'm a convert to Catholicism, my parents and family are Methodist. But my grandmother was, I think you could say, she certainly was a pious woman and had a sense of the immediacy of the Lord. And so that kind of [had] a deep influence on my sense of faith and how faith is expressed. My father was strict. My parents were very, very responsible and very conscientious. They were very curious about the world, they really wanted to see the world. And my father particular, he got into the foreign service because he's a man with wanderlust. Or he was. And I inherited that from him. I got—all of his kids seem to be deeply interested in other cultures, other people, travelling. So that comes from our father. And my father had the stamina. And my mother was also equally that way. So they were—there's a photo of them.

AP, EG: Aww

CSD: I mean I think when you travel as a family, you're—you know we moved every two to three years. So, as a result, I was quite close to my siblings. They're basically your ready-made friends until you get your new friends, then you abandon them and go back to them when you're in a new country. But I think it cultivated a kind of closeness. So, we remain quite connected to one another. It's not a family of estrangement. And I can—my husband is also one of seven. We're both kind of middle children in big families.

AP: Yeah

CSD: And I think that's shaped our pacing, our way, you know, the way that we live.

AP: Awesome, thank you. Do you have anything else to say? Anything you want to touch upon?

EG: Sure. I guess we're just wondering. Because you were travelling so often throughout your childhood, how did you go through school? Was it...

CSD: Oh. We always went to an American school.

EG: Oh okay

CSD: So in India they had excellent schools. It was called AIS, American International School in London. I went to the American School in Japan which was never exclusively American kids. So a lot of internationals, British kids would go, anybody that had English even Indian kids went to the American school. The important detail for American families is if you wanted your children to stay in that system so that when they were headed to college, their education translated into the American credentials or whatever.

EG: Right, right

CSD: But we always went to American schools.

AP: Were you...would you say that you and your siblings were involved in the communities when you were living there? Did you play sports or what were your hobbies growing up?

CSD: Well, in India, India is just the best place from my perspective. I'm addicted to India, I love it. To grow up. But it was [a] ridiculously privileged existence. I mean, we had servants. So we had a cook, we had a nanny, we had a guy...a barra (sp) who oversaw the servants, we had a sweeper, we had a man to tend to the garden, we had a man who would come and wash the clothes. So we really had a group of people that were maintaining the household. So it was very privileged...our house was in a couple houses in rows in compounds. But because we were small children and, you know, I was little in Delhi [India] I was always with Jenki, or nanny, or Iyaz (sp) as she's known in Hindi. You know, she would take us to the market. The mayadan (sp) the was the park. Life walking around in Delhi is never boring. Oh, you want to see the snake charmer? Let's talk to the snake charmer. Here comes the balewala (sp), the man with the dancing bear, the dancing monkey, watch out that you don't get hit by the scooter, don't step in the dung...

AP, EG: [laughter]

CSD: ...let's go to the market and buy some bangles. So it was just a very, very vital childhood. When I got older I was on the swim team for a little while. When I got back to the U.S. it always dismayed us you know how car reliant...

EG: Ohhh

CSD: In the suburbs in my high school year and it was a shock because I came from London and in London, because of excellent transport, you know even at the age of 12, it's like if you have

any friends in New York City, you can hop subways and go to museums. And because you don't need a car, you don't need your parents.

EG: There you go! [laughter]

CSD: Well, I mean it's true, you're not waiting on their schedules. So you know in London, the after school things that I did—my sister and I were both very involved in theater, and we didn't do that much sports. I did gymnastics in Japan for a year. A lot of dance. A lot of dance when I was a little girl growing up. But there was just great freedom as children and even in the U.S. it's so different from—it's just the era that you were growing up. I mean we had a lot of roaming space. So, in the suburbs, you we crossed into the woods and great distances by ourselves. So that, that's how we amused ourselves.

AP: That's amazing, thank you. So, I guess has moving throughout your life...did you...so you attended high school in the U.S.?

CSD: For three years...

AP: Ah, three years...

CSD: Yes three years and one year in Japan. My senior year in Japan.

EG: Wow

AP: That's amazing

CSD: Yeah so that was a little hard

EG: Yeah

CSD: Yeah [that] was tough

AP: And did you attend college?

CSD: I did. I went to the University of Virginia.

EG: Oh!

CSD: I applied there because the foreign service kids, a lot of them end up in the D.C. [District of Columbia] area and so I ended up there. My folks lived in Northern Virginia. They had a house in a residential area. I was there four years.

AP: What was your major?

CSD: I was a political and social thought major.

EG: Cool

CSD: So that's where my kind of turning point towards a more radical life occurred. I mean there were many incidents in childhood growing up that were formative, but it was at the University that I started to...

AP: Could you recall any of those, maybe formative moments?

CSD: Yeah, yeah. You know in India I am clearly the minority. A white child in a land of brown people. So that in and of itself, just to live in a world that's very mixed, not only mixed in color, but mixed in religious practice I think was very, very informative. And in Delhi the predominant faith tradition is Hindu. It's a northern Indian city. But, of course, there [were] Muslims and our family was Christian. In our house, for example, and actually Lazarus, our cook, was Catholic. But down the street was an old tomb, Mayan's tomb and a lot of Muslim architecture has domes and the call to prayer, would emanate from that dome five times a day. And as a child playing, I would hear it wafting above the street. And we're walking to the market with Jenki, we would pass Hindu shrines, just like Catholic shrines, you see tucked in street corners. So these would be street shrines or maybe somebody just had incense going for a particular goddess, like right there under the tree and there would be some flowers. And of course church was like, a mile and a half away. I would always go with my grandmother on Sundays and stay there for hours. You know the practice, that swirling of a kind of faith practice, especially amongst Hindus and Muslims in daily life, I think influenced my thinking. My exposure to Hindu influenced my migration towards Catholicism. Because Catholicism is very sensual, compared to Protestant practice. You have—I don't know if either of you are Catholic or no?

EG: I'm Catholic, yeah....[laughter]

CSD: We have all of these saints and if you go down to the [Boston] North End, the Italian Catholics, they've got Mary with the dripping hair and golden earrings and bright red lips and I mean we really have very—and candles, people lighting up candles everywhere. So, that whole immersion in the sort of daily holiness, was a part of my Indian experience. Just sort of a sense of the sacred not being removed, being very close to because those same streets that you would hear the clanging of a temple bell. I mean a guy would just be pissing right against the wall, you know. No, no, you know, no obscuring him. It's just like, okay, I get it, pee.

EG: Hmmm

CSD: Or honking or a cow could be defecating. It's like, that juxtaposition ...

EG: Mhmm...[laughter]

CSD: ...that juxtaposition is just loaded with this very vivid experience. And I remember, one afternoon in our house in Sunder Nagar which was one of the neighborhoods we lived in in Delhi. My sisters and brother had gone—I had taken a nap. And they were gone. They just went somewhere and didn't tell me. So I woke up and I felt very, like, how could you?

EG: Aww

CSD: Like, you love me, and I'm so bored. Really you guys? I can't believe [laughs]. So I was hanging off the gate of our compound kind of feeling sorry for myself. It was really hot as it can be in the afternoon. And I looked up and I saw a man who, in those days, this is like the sixties, early seventies they put—actually they still do it—but they have free-standing walls on one side of the street. Sunder Nagar [Delhi] was an affluent neighborhood. It's incredibly affluent now, but even then it was affluent. So all of the trash was put behind these free-standing concrete walls. And cows would come by and maybe eat something and the pie dogs would come by and graze in the trash and, I mean, it was a stench and all this. So, this very emaciated man with a burlap bag was ferreting through that trash looking for something to eat. And I went in the house and got two pieces of bread and spread jam. And just held it out because I didn't speak Hindi. But he came over and we were, you know, just holding it like this. And I remember, kind of our two hands connected. And just, that curiosity about who's the person on the other side of the fence, [laughs] in my life I think has been an early trait of mine. And that was just who I am [laughs]. But in India there were lots of opportunities to ask that question: who is on the other side? And you know, there were these lines of division. I think at the university there were many, many experiences. I worked at a battered woman's shelter. And I was very evangelical. And in

those days, there wasn't the lot of knowledge about domestic violence. Women who were experiencing it were organizing themselves. There wasn't a lot of legal reports that they have. I mean it was getting better, but I mean restraining orders were still warily provided. You had to prove a great deal. And in Charlottesville, which is where the university is operating, battered woman got together, formerly battered women, some of them not all, and they created a shelter, a domestic shelter. And they did training for these college women and they had the women volunteer and you could stay the night at the shelter. It was incredibly [long pause] empowering. I mean, we were only 19. But they, after this Saturday training, you were good to go and you did screenings at the emergency room of women that would meet you in the emergency room and say, "I'm seeking refuge from a battery." And you'd do the intake and you had to determine at that place, whether the woman was suicidal. [

EG: Mmm

CSD: And they gave you indicators of what you're looking for. And if she wasn't, we'd take her to the shelter and she could stay. So that, was a real—I had seen suffering as a child, of course, in India. But, I think, at 19 you're thinking of life's big questions. So I was more ponderous about suffering at that point in my life and I remember doing an intake with a woman, who said that she was down in Chattanooga [Tennessee] and the husband or the father of her child—I don't know if they were married—she was pregnant at that point and he kicked her abdomen. You know? While she's carrying this child. And I was so shocked at that. It's a very small, and very intimate detail. But it seemed like, very inexplicable. Like, why would somebody be that cruel? And my evangelical friends, you know, the emphasis is on the state of a person's soul, their relation to Christ, "Have they been saved?" And they were very supportive of my work at the shelter. They would get any kind of material good for the women if I'd ask for them. They would raise the money or whatever. But they would say kind of like, "Well, where is she with Jesus?" And I thought that question, it started not to have the same resonance for me. I thought that it was important to just make sure the woman wasn't kicked and then we'll talk about Jesus afterwards. So, there was this slight movement away from this faith base that had shaped how I saw and understood the world and my faith within the context of the world. And at that same time I was always procrastinating on a paper.

EG, AP: [laughter]

CSD: Always. And I was walking one afternoon to the library and a church was showing a movie about Mother Theresa. So instead of working on the paper [laughs] I stopped in to watch this documentary by Malcolm Muggeridge interviewing Mother Teresa and I had heard of her.

But this particular clip, he's [Malcolm] asking her [Mother Theresa], "Why are you spending so much time taking care of the dying?" And while he's asking the question, there's a sister bathing a dying man, who looks like barely human. There was a photo of a person from Yemen in yesterday's paper. I thought it was a model. I thought it was like, in the store, what do they call them? Dummies. [Mannequins] Because the skin was so...it seemed to be so artificial in its smoothness. It had no texture. And the eyes were large and luminous. I looked again and it's a starving Yemeni. And the person was just so incredibly skin-stretched, so much over the skeleton of the face. So this person that the nun is bathing looks like that. You know, just brown paper over some bones. And the nun is bathing the man like he's a child, like an infant, so gently, so gently. And Muggeridge is saying to Mother Theresa, "Why are you spending so much effort on this? This person is gonna die. You have limited resources. Why don't you invest in something...you know, that is more effective?" And she has this kind of slow, unique accent that I can't imitate, but she said, "Well, basically we believe we're bathing Jesus when we bathe this man." And it was the most significant, sort of fusion of sacramental theology with image for me. You know? And that dissonance that I was feeling with my dear evangelical friends, it sort of was coming together in that. So, oh, the battered woman is an expression of Jesus. The dying man is an expression of Jesus. So, it was very incarnational the explanation that she gave. And at the same time I was doing my thesis on the Catholic Worker. And so all of these things were coming together.

AP: Wow

CSD: Yeah

AP: Would you like to speak about your thesis on the Catholic Worker?

CSD: [laughter] that was also procrastinating....

EG, AP: [laughter]

CSD: I'm pretty sure that was a new concept to do—so in those days, I graduated in '82—you had political science and sociology. And I think what happened at UVA, those academics that said, "Well, we want to give a less scientific lens to these two disciplines." And so they put together political and social thought. Which means you did a lot of intellectual history, political philosophy, it was one of the things that people took if they were pre-law. It was a good pre-law major. Which I had sort of been thinking about. You did have to do a thesis, which is not typical for undergrad. You had to do a big three, six, nine credits—a major work.

EG: Wow

CSD: And, I could not come up with a topic. [laughs]. “Oh shit, what am I gonna do?” [laughs]. No idea! So I was in the library like, “topic, topic, topic,” and I just migrated to a book by—I don’t even know how I came across it—William Miller, called the “Harsh and Dreadful Love.” And it was on the Catholic Worker, Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker—it’s one of the early—there are a lot of books on the Catholic Worker now, but that was one of the early ones. I read the introduction and I always thought the introduction was by David O’Brien, a former history professor at Holy Cross, but I’m not sure.

EG: Oh wow.

CSD: And I was just blown away. Because, again, this kind of, here’s my political self. Because in political philosophy, I don’t know if you’ve taken any sociology course, social thought?

AP: Lots of sociology [laughter]

CSD: Okay, well in social thought, you’re sort of looking at social arrangements and what’s the common good, what’s the social contract, how is power maintained? And you’re looking at economics. So that’s my intellectual self. And then there’s a faith self and this tended to be, you know, you get a lot of questions that are questioning the status quo. So, if you’re alert, you could become more radical in your political thinking, but how does faith intersect with that? You know? And here was this Catholic Worker...they were trying to answer that question. Because they were, I don’t know if you’re familiar with the Catholic Worker Movement at all? [pause]

EG: Not really

CSD: That’s shocking! The Catholic Worker. [laughs] What Church did you go to? I should talk to your CCD teacher?

EG: I know [laughter]

CSD: So the Catholic Worker was founded in 1933 by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. And Dorothy was an American journalist and, by the way the Pope identified her as one of the four

most important Americans ever. So, yes. [laughter] Martin Luther King, Abraham Lincoln, Dorothy Day, and Thomas Merton.

EG: Wow

CSD: When the Pope spoke to Congress, the U.S. Congress, when he was here for that trip in September 2015, those were the four that he identified. So she was a journalist and very, very, very bright and writing for Leftist publications—*The Masses*, *The Call*, *This Is New York*—in the time of a lot social upheaval. There was the war the country had just finished. There was a lot of disaffection after World War 1. There was economic upheaval, the Depression, job displacement, the Communists were quite active and many Americans, more Americans than probably at any other point in their history, giving them an ear because they were organizing for labor protection. They were even organizing for veterans to get their bonus, you know, salaries. So, that's her world in New York City and it's also bohemian, it's kind of without social mores, you know? A lot of writing and late night drinking and quite a few lovers. So, she falls in love with the man and has a child and that really is such a tremendously happy experience for her and she'd always had a movement in her heart towards God. But she converts formally—she was raised Episcopalian—to become a Catholic. Kind of for the sake of this daughter because she wanted to give the daughter a faith foundation. But her Leftist friends say, “What a betrayal, the Church is built on the backs of the poor. Why are you joining a faith institution [that promotes that].” And she would say, “Yes, but it's made up of the poor.” So she had a dissonance within herself and was kind of praying for guidance and she met Peter Maurin and he was a strong advocate for Catholic social teaching and creating houses of hospitality for men and women in need—creating rather than sending people to the shelters. Why doesn't each home have a Christ room to take in the stranger? He advocated for roundtables where workers and scholars could come and meet together. So really changing the social order through the gospel. Thought that the gospel was quite radical. And they put out the *Catholic Worker*, which is a newspaper that got its name—a play on *The Daily Worker*. So, the Communist paper in New York is called *The Daily Worker* and so we'll call ours *The Catholic Worker*. Because they were talking about the common good and concern for the common man, to use language of today. So they opened a—well, Dorothy really—it was very much implemented by her—opened a house of hospitality for New York's poor in 1933. I think it was Saint Joseph's House first and then Mary's House. But, there are over 150 houses around the U.S. now. and then there are Catholic Worker Houses in Australia and Europe. And so that is what this is.

EG: Uh-huh

CSD: And we have men and women in need who come in and live—stay upstairs and most, all the houses are autonomous, but many of them are engaged in a lot of anti-war, political work in a movement sense. Not a political party sense. And we put out *The Catholic Radical*, so, lots to tell you about that, but don't want to overwhelm you [laughs] with how much to...

AP: Oh yeah no we would love to get to that. I guess, so...so you learned about The Catholic Worker your senior...

CSD: Yes, while I was doing my thesis I stumbled across this book and decided to write my thesis on this movement and I was studying it intensely for the last year of university.

EG: Right

AP: And did that influence what you ended up doing

CSD: Hugely. Part of the research was that I went to a Catholic Worker House in D.C. in March of my senior year. I spent my spring break there. I just visited. And then when I graduated I ended up going and moving into the Catholic Worker House probably within two months of graduating. I moved into Saint Francis House in D.C. and then I've been there ever since. I mean in a Catholic Worker house.

EG: Yeah. Do you want to transition to, I guess, maybe how you got to Worcester?

CSD: That's a great question. I graduated and UVA is in Charlottesville. And then I moved back to Washington, D.C. with my younger sister. So the summer after—to give you a sense of the time [laughs]—I got a job working at *Sojourners Magazine*, which is, I don't know if you're familiar with them? A wonderful magazine, Jim Wallace is an evangelical minister, but very progressive and so, it's like a progressive, Protestant publication. And I was paid \$280 a month. I filled up book orders. That's 280 dollars! [laughs] And my youngest sister was subletting in Maryland. So, what did I have to give Michelle? I think I had to give her \$200 a month, maybe a \$100. So, leaving lean in the capitol. But you could do that then. *Sojourners* was located downtown and I would take the bus back to my sister's. But on the way to the bus stop from my work I passed the Saint Francis Catholic Worker House, where I had visited and researched. Kind of like you all are doing now. But I had stayed out there a few days during my spring break. So, "Oh yeah, there's Ruth!" Ruth was one of the bag ladies that lived there and Marcia, one of the workers was there and her husband—well, she wasn't married at that point, but she was engaged to Paul. And, [Marcia would say], "You want to come have dinner? Sure, come have

dinner.” So, I would go there after work—this is like a free dinner! And tons of free coffee! I’m a real caffeine addict. Because Paul worked part time at Georgetown Tea and Spice. So he would come home with all this great gourmet coffee and none of this, I guess cheap [laughs]. It was just really great coffee [laughs]. So I tell everybody to join the Catholic Worker because it’s really great coffee.

EG: Ah, that’s really funny!

CSD: So, that summer everything was hopping. I mean, it’s always hopping in D.C. You can’t be there without—the whole city is—I mean I suppose you can snooze through the political life there, but it’s kind of hard [laughs]. They had a young Jewish man at the house who would just come off of living on the streets for like six months as part of his faith practice, he was very much inspired by Hasidic Judaism, and now, he was organizing demonstrations against Ariel Sharon who was in the capitol to meet with [President Ronald] Reagan and Sharon had just bombed Lebanon. So, we were marching against the bombing of Lebanon and then, of course, *Sojourners* people would be down there to protest and then at night we would sit around the table and talk. I’d have Paul’s free coffee [laughs] and then go back to my sister’s. And then, one summer day, Marcia, I passed her from work and she just looked so defeated. And they were moving from one location around the corner and needed help. So I started helping out and they said, “Why don’t you just move in?” And so I did. And that was probably late summer, August of ‘82 I was in a Catholic Worker House. My sister had to go back to school.

And so I lost my cheap digs [laughs] outwards of the city and went from there to my husband who had been in the friary and who was not my husband at that time, came into the Capitol. Here he is looking to have a year with the poor. And he’s at Saint Benedict’s Catholic Worker and comes into *Sojourners* looking for part-time work because we had to kind of survive [laughs]. So that’s how he and I met—we met at *Sojourners*. And then I ended up moving over to the Catholic Worker where he was because I felt the place—well, I was driving everybody crazy. I had a very “open door policy” and they were just like, “We can’t take all of these people in” and you know, I was very young and they really were nervous about how many people and guests I had taken in. So I moved over to Mary House which was a woman’s Catholic Worker next to the one where my husband—not my husband at that time, but where Scott was at Saint Benedict’s. These were two tiny row houses on P (???) Street, which is quite fixed up now, but very, very ghetto in those days. I mean, rats in the alleyway and in the house. And lots of cockroaches and lots—well, three, three houses on that street that had serious drug dealing—and everybody else extremely poor in between. Very few white people went down there unless you were a dealer or

bill collector. And a dog named Satan that lived on Fourth and P Street, that all women hated, including myself [laughs] because he was aptly named. Yes, he was the most bizarre dog.

But I moved in there in the fall of '82 and lived just a really exuberant expression of what I had been reading about for the whole of my senior year. You know, I was so fried from working on the thesis and reading, reading reading. And now, "Yes, just go out and do it!"

EG: Yeah!

AP: Awesome!

CSD: And yeah, so, we were a trio. It was Scott, myself, and Carl Sisliano (sp) an 18-year-old who came fresh out of high school to work and he's just an amazing soul. And the man that founded these two Catholic Worker Houses, Michael Kirwan, he was periodically there. But, it was more the three of us that kind of had a day to day relationship. But it was in D.C. that, you know, this was in early 1980s and there was a very charismatic homeless advocate named Mitch Sneider (sp) and he was constantly fasting to call attention to both the plight of the homeless. This was the Reagan presidency so D.C. had 2000 people on the streets at that point. Literally sleeping on the street, you know? On grates and things. And our houses, we had—well, they weren't ours, but where we were working and living. So, the men's house, Saint Benedict's, was four rooms. You came in, well, the front room was kind of like this, but you didn't come right into the front room. You come into the hallway and then there was a room smaller than this and a kitchen, and that was the downstairs. the kitchen had a table in it. There was also a bathroom down by, I think by the front on the first floor. And then upstairs I think there were two rooms. And 30 men slept in that space the first winter we were there. And at the woman's house, which was, you know, a row house. if you're on the street, it runs long, kind of like our triple-deckers do. But, they're small and there are no yards in between, there's just house, house, house. They share one wall on the same side. Which meant, if your neighbor has rats, so do you because the rats go back and forth. But at the woman's house we had 17. So, that first winter, every night we put mattresses on the floor. You put the mattresses down, you put the mattresses back up during the day, you wash the floor. We women tend to need more space. We had fewer [inhabitants] by the second year. But in the midst of doing the hospitality, cooking the food, there was a war in Central America that was going on. So, there was a lot of demonstrations around that. As well as looking at the domestic policies that were creating so many people who were homeless.

And then there was a very vigorous anti-nuclear movement that meant weekly vigils at research and design facilities for nuclear weapons because that was what you saw more in the D.C. area.

So we would have demonstrations, risk arrest. The first place I was arrested was at a research and design site for nuclear weapons. So, there's a lot happening in those very, very fervent, very fertile place to be when you were 23 and a lot of, you know, good times. No money, but a lot of good times really.

AP: And did you get married down in D.C.?

CSD: No, no.

AP: Or did you move...

CSD: We married up here.

Ap: O.K.

CSD: We married up here. We came up here in March of '84. And we had been at these row houses probably about 18 months and then we knew, once we were going to get married, we knew we couldn't hold the marriage there. I mean, stay married in that setting. I mean, there was no privacy. You lived cheek to jaw, so, we hitched up here and got married in June.

AP: Awesome. So yeah, I guess, when you moved up here, did you immediately know that you wanted to open up your own Catholic Worker or did you become involved in other things first?

CSD: So, in Catholic Worker language, most of the houses are doing some form of hospitality. They're living in poor areas, or either have a soup kitchen or a medical clinic or legal clinic or, in our case, it's modest, but we take in guests and our guests stay here until they get situated. So that is the hospitality part of the Catholic Worker life and in many communities, there's resistance. And resistance—or political action—and the political action is often in the form of resistance. And that can mean, tax resistance. For many, many houses it means taking part in demonstrations in which you're risking arrest, going to jail. You're in jail for 30 days, you come out, you're back in the soup kitchen. You're kind of moving in between these two expressions of a faith: hospitality and resistance. It's always a tension because whoever goes to jail is leaving others with the—you've got to keep the soup kitchen going or the soup line going, especially if some of your neighbors are regularly, you know, you have an established line. So, in D.C., the hospitality was constant. Like if I left the house, it really meant Carl and Scott, the two others, had to juggle a lot to keep the woman's house going, and the men's house going. And we certainly couldn't all three leave at the same time. So, when we moved up here, we said, "Let's

take a break from the hospitality,” because it was pretty—we were pretty exhausted by the time we came up here. And, “let’s focus on resistance.”

So we got a small apartment. We had our first baby was born in the first year. We lived on Castle Street. By the time that we moved up here we were part of a network of anti-nuclear activists. So that first year of marriage was risking arrest, demonstrating at the sub-bases in Groton, Connecticut. Or in Boston. Or at GTE here in Westboro that used to work on trigger parts for the MX missiles. So we decided we would not do hospitality for our first year here and then we had a new baby. Probably six months after Justin’s birth, I think about six months, we started to think, “Could we open a house here in Worcester?” My husband, he and I had broken up when we were down in D.C. and he came up here briefly and looked into opening a house because he felt that’s what he would be doing. He’s very committed to Worcester, which is why we ended up here. He went to Holy Cross and he really loves this city and loves the region, so he’s unchangeably New England. And, so, we began to meet with Carl, who had been with us in D.C. or we had been with him at the Catholic Worker there. He had moved up to New London and—not New London, he was in another place in Connecticut. He was in Connecticut working at a shelter. So, we brought him to Worcester mostly just sitting around talking, you know, let’s see what’s possible. And he had a friend, Sarah Jubloski (sp) who was interested in intentional community and another gentleman named Dan Ethier (sp). So, we began to meet at our tiny apartment on Castle Street. We had met Dan through anti-nuclear work. He had joined the demonstrations against nuclear weapons and we did some praying together and studying the Bible, like, “What’s possible? Can we start a community?” By I think it was April of 1986, so, at that point, [whispers to self], no, it was August of ’80, 1986 we found an apartment on Jake’s Avenue, which is less than a mile from here [the Catholic Worker]. It was a spacious ground-floor apartment in a very poor neighborhood and I believe the person that helped us with the first rent was Monsignor Tinsley, who had been part of Catholic Charities, and we rented.

So we were now a couple with the baby, Scott and Claire and baby Justin, and then Sarah and Dan, who had been an anti-nuclear activist. And then, I think within maybe two months, or I can’t remember exactly, we took in our first guest. We said we wanted to be the Saint Francis and Therese Catholic Worker. I think Carl helped us choose Therese. We knew Francis because Scott had been a Franciscan Friar or, you know, in a officiate with the Franciscan’s. I don’t think Carl ever moved in with us [Scott says something] Okay, so he did. [laughter]

So he stayed with us for a month. And then, we took in our first guest from the Mustard Seed. So the Mustard Seed still had its soup kitchen going, but, they had a guy there that needed a place to stay. Or, was it—no I don’t know if our first guest [was] from the Mustard Seed. One of our

guests, Kenny, was a young man my friend... my husband befriended in prison. He suffered from schizophrenia. But, he came and stayed with us. And then Joe and his dog came and stayed with us. His dog, Lucky. Joe was a very old man. Actually, not that old, but old-ish with alcohol—he was an alcoholic. He was very much a fixture at the Mustard Seed, so we were six blocks from them and Donna, who was running the Mustard Seed at that point, said, “Can Joe stay?” Then we had Ron Hessleton (sp) another man with schizophrenia. So, now, we are a couple, two single people, three single men, a dog and a baby, all living in this first-floor apartment. [laughs]

And, I think it was while we were there that we started our bakery project, the Bread Not Bombs Bakery. Actually, that started in Castle Street. And that came because I was a nursing mother and I wanted to keep nursing, but I needed to bring in some income, you know, for our household. And so I started baking bread and when we formed community with Sarah, she was really artistic and creative and she added her love of cooking, created muffins. We decided that we would have a bakery in the model of Peter Maurin, the cofounder of the Catholic Worker, where we wouldn't ask a price for our product, we would just say, “For a donation.” And we would bake the bread on the weekends and bring it to different masses, and that idea of going to local churches, there's so many Catholic churches here [in Worcester, Massachusetts], that idea came from our friend, Michael True, who said that, “Emerging as a new community, new house, don't lose the parishes. Always, don't lose the people in the pew.” And my husband, who's got kind of a background in publication, when he was in Holy Cross, he had his own publication there, a student publication, for a while. And, so, he was very eager to have us put out a paper, almost from the beginning, and that was a way to community to a larger audience what we were trying to do, and to build. People who would support us. So, *The Catholic Radical*, I think it dates back to 1987, and we chose the word “radical” because radical means “to go to the roots” and we publish every two months and we always have a column, “The Mason Street Musings”, which sort of tells readers daily something of life here in the house, but then there's a lot of articles on peace and peacemaking and on violence and reports from warzones. So we would've—well, I don't think we would've stayed in that apartment, [laughs] but we were burned out on April 1st of 1987. At the time, my husband was in jail for an action and how did that happen? He was not in jail when the fire happened, that's not correct. He was home, but he had to go to jail shortly after for some nonviolent civil disobedience. So, my little one, my son, and I stayed with the Little Franciscans of Mary and I don't remember where Sarah and Dan, the other two people stayed. But, we were homeless for a while and, the guests that we had taken in, of course, they had to try to fend for themselves. And, then we were in this predicament of who is going to rent to such an odd collection of people?

EG: Right.

CSD: And that's when we decided we should probably buy something, because then we—if we buy it's fine if Joe's dog comes and some of us, one of us is married and the rest are single and, you know, we're all [husband speaking in the background] Oh... okay. [laughs] So, it was an interesting summer looking for a place. Honestly, I was very young, I had a little baby. It was kind of—I didn't look at many houses. I didn't have an eye for, you know, what do we really need if we're going to be doing hospitality. But, this came up and in August of [1987] we moved in, and we were able to buy quite miraculously because a friend loaned us—we didn't go through a bank—loaned us interest free most of the cash to purchase the house up front. And the real estate agent cut her percentage that she would take for a house. She kind of got into what we were trying to do. So, we bought it up front with this ready cash and then the next three years we had to pay her back and Scott really worked hard to get individuals to, you know, donate to help us pay off the house, and among them is Martin Sheen, who is a big friend of Catholic Worker's. So, the actor from West Wing. So, we been in here ever since.

EG: Wow.

AP: Wow. That's amazing. So, I guess, yeah, you just—maybe want to talk about—we don't want to take up too much of your time, maybe just your experience since, maybe any highlighting moments or kind of just like, overall, you know day to day here.

CSD: Well, I should say that, in this context of doing hospitality, we have raised four children. So, that really defined the way that we did the hospitality. D.C. was just total immersion. Our guests were in the house all day and there were lots of them and we were not asking that people be sober. But, here, we had small children and I knew as a young mother, or felt as a young mother, that I would not be able to take in families because it's very hard to see—it would be very hard for me to see other children neglected or not taken care of in the context of my own children, and I couldn't do anything about it, because I'm struggling. So, we limited our hospitality to men and women. We decided we would close during the day from 8:30 to three [o'clock]. That, a lot of times, we were on a cycle of parents, get your parents to school, get back. The hospitality was done, is done, upstairs. So, for the children growing up, we grew... our family grew up in these three rooms here and the kitchen. The evening meal was shared with all of our guests. But breakfast, people are on their own and lunch they had to get out during the day. Or they could take sandwiches with them. But we—I remember talking to a woman who had been in community and she said having your own kitchen with kids was really important. That not having it is hard because children don't eat regularly.

EG: Yeah

CSD: Because children are kind of small and you're feeding them all day. They're grazers. So, the hospitality here was shaped by the fact that it's a family. Over the years we have had guest from all walks of life. And we actually have had a mother and child that had fled Honduras after the father, her husband, disappeared. He was a labor rights activists on the universities. So, Angela Lejo (sp) walked across much of Mexico and into the country. This was in the '90s [1990s] and they were en route to Canada hoping to get sanctuary up there. But they stayed with us for seven months. He was only four at the time. And so, we did take the children in, and after the Bosnian War where both of us had been, because my husband went on international peacekeeping missions in Bosnia and I went to initially to support a woman's peace conference and then I did some reporting because I'm a freelance journalist. We took a family, a couple that were fleeing the Bosnian War, they had one little child, also a boy. We've had people who are perpetrators of... [laughs]... violence, you know? War veterans and war refugees. We had a guard from Guantanamo that—and I have been part of protests against Guantanamo. We had the former Secret Head of the Secret Police who has shot a Baran, a man that was accused of using torture and all kinds of violations of human rights, but very dignified. He came and stayed with us for six weeks. He was in need. So, the world has kind of passed through here. People from many different countries. And also economic circumstances—the addicted, the deranged, the persecuted, the lonely, they've all come and we usually say it's two weeks, but often our guests stay longer. And we have an evening meal with them. Every night we all eat together at five, down here, and that's how we kind of get to find out how everybody's doing. That's one piece of the work. We have the bakery every weekend, that's part of [our effort] to pay the grocery bills, and then we publish the *Catholic Radical* and I'm working at the Center for Nonviolent Solutions. So doing that and also travelling. Scott did a lot of travelling when he was younger with peace initiatives. He was in Iraq and Bosnia and I went in the capacity more as journalist to conflict zones and so one influences and informs the other, one part of life.

EG: I kind of have a random question.

CSD: Sure.

EG: When did you convert to Catholicism?

CSD: Well, I was—that's a great question. So, I backpacked in Europe between my junior and senior year of high school—of college.

EG: Awesome

CSD: And I found myself constantly going into Catholic churches and I would say I'm doing that for research on the Catholic Worker. But really—and then I was attending mass throughout my senior year and I was going to kind of keep it that way, be a Catholic on the outside, on the rim. But then I got married and the question is asked very formally, you know? “Are you...?” not that I had to.

EG: Right

CSD: So, then I decided to formally confirm that I was Catholic. So, that was when I was 24.

EG: Okay. Wow.

AP: One other thing, you just mentioned you work at the Nonviolent...

CSD: Center for Nonviolence.

AP: Yes right, and what are you involved in [there]?

CSD: Well, we're a tiny non-profit that does peace education...

EG: Oh!

CSD: So we have a peace mediation program that we're running at one high school, and we're doing this performance of civil rights texts that feature women, women who were part of SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, during the 1960s. So, that's like a general community project that we're doing. I was just on the phone because we have a tiny youth radio project where we're asking these two kids, we're working with two kids, a middle schooler and a high schooler—one's a war refugee from Burundi—to interview people about peace and we're making short clips and these are available for JD on community radio stations so they can play these clips during their program. And then we have social justice “happy hours” every five weeks or so and that's bringing together educators, youth workers, teachers. They hear a talk, a short talk, usually, and then it's a chance to sort of network, like, “How can we bring in some peace education to your—into your setting?” And, we're probably going to do another one-time training for adults on mediation coming up soon.

AP: Great. So much in the works! So exciting.

CSD: Yeah, yeah. That's local. I mean, a lot of my previous work has been being in conflict zones overseas, but more in the capacity as journalist.

AP: Awesome. [whispers] I guess if there's anything else you want to tell us, or maybe if you could think back to kind of like, to one of your fondest memories involved in peace work that maybe kind of speaks to your... kind of like, what inspires you, what keeps you going. Anything really that you might have on your mind.

CSD: Well, my children and grandchildren are huge motivators because they are the future and especially on climate activism. I mean, Professor Gallo-Cruz and I were part of a standout at TD Bank that was calling for divestment from the Dakota Access Pipeline Project. So, they are just a daily and constant motivator and inspiration. But you know, the travelling and talking in Bosnia, I interviewed women who were recovering from war and spent some time in the Middle East interviewing refugees, Syrian refugees. It makes you—it provides you with a completely different understanding of what war and violence does to human beings. I think that particular violence [that of war], people in the U.S., myself included, we have a remote understanding of war. We don't connect its human consequence. But when you go and you see in the town of Cozaratz, it's not just that the house is bombed. It's that the doll is on the side of the street and the smashed dish and the very intimate domestic articles that clearly made that house a home. They're just, out there. Gone and rubble in five minutes. I mean, a detonation is very fast. And to build a community, to build a home or to build a house, to create a home out of that, it takes so much time to have it all undone. Undone with such indifference, without so much as a, "here we come with our bombs," is devastating for people and its consequences go on for years, you know? It's not just that the walls are crumbling, it's what is the life now that I make for myself? And that takes a long time for people to figure out. So seeing what war does to people has been a really big motivator. But also, there's just a remarkable number of human beings I have met, and thanks be to God, have met in my life, whose commitment to the common good, whose commitment to living peace, whose commitment to putting flesh on the Gospel, many of them are Catholic, but not all, is just so inspiring. I mean, you can't help but think, "Oh, well, I'll try to add to that lineage." It's just a small link in a chain of human endeavor that, I think, you know, is the Holy Spirit, like, working. We had a young woman your age come and visit us last spring and she was biking to all these small intentional communities. I mean it was incredible. She biked from Philadelphia down to Arkansas, up to the Great Lakes...

EG: Wow

AP: Wow [laughter]

CSD: ... region. And she did not use GPS [Global Positioning System], she did not use her smartphone, she relied on locals to advise her on the bike-friendly roads. But, she also had a map of the country that was drawn on lined, eight and a half by eleven...

EG: Oh my God.

CSD: ...you know, college-ruled paper. So, it was like a fifth-grade geography project where you outline the United States.

EG: Oh my God.

CSD: You know, just the external borders, not the states. And very, very neatly drawn, very neatly drawn. And then, in this red pen, or marker, thin, felt-tip marker, she had made out the route of where she was going so starting at, I think, was she in Philly at Thanksgiving? And then along the way, on these dots were the different communities that she was visiting.

EG: Oh, cool.

CSD: Like the Agape Community, the Catholic Workers in Worcester, and I just had this image—it's like a current, an unseen current of goodness pulsing through the country, and she's along it. And this is only one of them. There are hundreds and hundreds and thousands of them. And so that, that keeps me going.

AP: That's so cool.

EG: That's awesome. [laughter]

CSD: And this history, I hope you guys can come see this performance, because this history of SNCC is pretty incredible. Amazing.

AP: Yeah. That's awesome.

CSD: Yeah, so...

AP: Thank you, I think we're good. Yeah, I know, I hope we didn't exhaust you too much!

CSD: Oh no, no, no! [laughs]