Interviewee: Suzanne Belote Shanley
Interviewers: Keith Plummer and Emily Champagne
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Transcriber: Keith Plummer

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Abstract: Suzanne Belote Shanley is co-founder of the Agape Community, a residential, lay Catholic Community dedicated to prayer, voluntary simplicity, and gospel-centered nonviolent witness in the world, in 1982. She has studied the topic of women and war for over 35 years, bringing to life biographies of pacifists in the women's movement past and present, while inspiring young people to claim their nonviolent heritage. In this interview, Suzanne reflects upon the many factors that contributed to the cultivation of her activist spirit and commitment to nonviolence, sustainability, and Catholicism. Suzanne describes the unique historical contexts such as the Sexual Revolution, Vietnam War, and Nuclear Arms Race that radicalized her as an anti-war and generally pro-life advocate. In addition, Suzanne describes her journey to passionate and subversive Catholicism through relationships with her husband, activist priests, and other religious protesters. Suzanne concludes the interview by discussing the mission and functions of the Agape Community and giving her take on the current socio-political climate.

KP: So we just started the recording. Today is what? March ?

EC: [laughter] 20…

SS: Fifth was Saturday, 26th Sunday, 27th

EC: Yes! 27th

KP: It's the 27th so let's just…

SS: Not May, did you say May?

KP: I said March [laughter]

EC: Two months too soon.

KP: March 27th.

SS: Are you both seniors?

EC: No, I'm a junior

KP: I'm a senior though. March 27, 2017

SS: And what are you majoring in?

EC: Sociology, well I'm Sociology

KP: I'm Sociology...Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Double Major

SS: Excellent

KP: With a minor with Latin American and Latino Studies

SS: Excellent… Fantastic

KP: Lots of words [laughter]

EC: That is a lot.

SS: Good for [College of the] Holy Cross that they would let you do that, okay

KP: So our first question would be just could you tell us a bit about your childhood and where you were born and raised?

SS: I was born in Washington D.C. I was a probably what you would call a war baby. My father was away in WWII for four years, probably conceived shortly after he returned [laughs]. I think that's a fact and so then they moved from Washington to Buffalo, New York, and that's where I grew up for the most part. I just heard that it's the third poorest city in the United States.

EC: Wow and when was that?

SS: Anyway

EC: So can you tell us more about your parents like what did they do, what was your family life, you have any siblings?

SS: Well, I grew up in a lower middle-class, ethnic Polish neighborhood where hardly anyone had a college degree. There was a lot of—you wouldn't really call it poverty as in African American situations, but it was pretty poor.

EC: Mhmm

SS: Struggling middle class, lower middle-class people, some without jobs, a lot of alcoholism including my father and so the kids like myself we were schooled in Catholicism because we were Polish and it was very ethnic, a Polish thing. But I'm not entirely Polish, Russian-Pol-French on my Dad's side. So the influences in terms of Catholicism were strong because, you know, I would go to mass and we'd have all these Polish foods, kielbasa and pierogi and all these kinds of things, and the blessing of the baskets at Easter, and just very, very culturally, ethnically Polish which meant very, very white. No exposure to people of color or any kind of ethnic diversity so it was kind of a limited background. But I did go to Catholic high school and I did go to Catholic elementary school. So there was a lot of formation there in the notorious '50s and early '60s. So I was there when the climate was very conservative and I was Catholic when the when the birth control pill was introduced and we had the transition.

EC: Mhmm

KP: Alright, so could you tell us a little bit about when you first became aware of like the social issues that you are passionate about and what kind of issues they were. Where did you first like dabble in these social justice sort of enterprises

SS: Good, good, good, good, good, good, good question. I think my first exposure was realizing how conservative the Catholic Church was and feeling very trapped emotionally and psychologically by all the sexual prohibitions and the way that body image was presented to us as young women in an all-girls Catholic high school. And I—some of my friends in high school, we started to say, "What? What is this all about," because the cultural context, too, in the beginning of the '60s was starting to be more open. Women's liberation was just spiraling forward. So my first consciousness of social justice in a really profound sense came seeing the way that the power structure of the Church seemed so imbalanced to me. But I didn't have the

words for it! I didn't have the vocabulary. But I felt like when this priest—and I love priests and I have many, many good priest friends—but when the pastor used to come in, we'd all have to stand up and, "Hello Father, yes Father," and it was like, it was almost like bowing and I used to always think, "Well why do we have to do this?"

[Laughter]

KP: Why are we bowing to a man [laughs].

SS: Then I was afraid of him because it was some kind of a god, you know, and I equated father to Father, God, so all that power dynamic. I didn't have the language for it, but I knew that there was something off with it. So that's the first glimmer really of social justice to some extent and then questioning all the time, "Why do we have to be so poor?"

KP: Mhmm

SS: Why, why does there have to be such a struggle all the time. Why are my father and mother always worried about paying the rent and isn't this terrible. So then I had that strong desire, "I gotta get out of here," and that, that—so those are the economic injustice, wages, lower-middle class, lower income people, all the same things that are churning now in so many ways. Things don't seem to change too much in some ways.

EC: So after high school where did you end up going to college and what did you study there?

SS: Okay, so I couldn't afford to go anywhere so I had to work and at that time college cost 800 dollars a semester [laughs].

KP: Oh my godddddd.

SS: I'm sorry [laughs]

[laughter]

SS: Isn't that horrible? When you think of it? Well, anyway that was a lot to me. It was 800 or 1,000.

EC: Yeah.

SS: And so I worked at a local department store and I took three buses to college from my house to college and I couldn't afford anything except what was called the "State Teachers College" for poor people for the most part, but now it's a very credible place, State University at Buffalo. So it was kind of like a college-y version of what is now the University of Buffalo but I didn't go there because I couldn't afford it, that was too high class. But I did go to the State University College at Buffalo and I got a very good education. My bachelor's was in English, teaching high school English. And then I got a master's there, an MA, and then I got another Master's and was working on my PhD at Simmons College.

KP: Were you involved in any activism when you were in college?

SS: I was a—you know it's so funny. I had a professor friend when I taught at Simmons College who used to call those of us who kind of sat out a lot of the Vietnam War "The Silent Sisters" [laughs]. And I was kind of one of the "Silent Sisters." It was all so new to me and so foreign to the very sheltered environment that I grew up in so no, I was not an activist. I was very aware and thrilled and I used to watch the marches and so on from the side, but I didn't really become radicalized until the '70s. Isn't that funny how culture and your upbringing—because my parents would never, ever discuss things like that and I came from politically conservative family. But actually, that's a good thing. I just thought of this. My two brothers were going to be drafted and my father said, "They should go—World War II—you know, a good war," and my mother said, "They're not going," [laughs]. And I remember, I remember that very distinctly, but I wasn't out there saying, "They shouldn't go."

KP: And how did all that resolve, did they go?

SS: They got medical deferments.

KP: Okay

SS: And in those days doctors who were enlightened would just give them out.

KP: Giving them out like candy

SS: Both of my brothers fortunately were legitimate, but even if they weren't I think my mother would have, "push, push, push, push."

EC: So what were some of your first experiences after college?

SS: At the college?

EC: Or afterwards like...?

SS: Oh, oh, oh, afterwards. Oh well that's very significant because by the time I graduated, which was 1966, the Vietnam War was full speed and then I was radicalized. Then I was out of school, I was seeing, as we all were every day, the killings, slaughter, the body bags, the Vietnamese people, the children running, burning with Napalm. And it was just too much and so by '66, '67 I started to think about anti-war things and by the '70s I was really ensconced and beginning to think—because I moved to Massachusetts after two years of teaching outside of Buffalo and in the '70s you come to one of the most radical, liberal states in the country and you cannot help but get very involved.

[laughter]

SS: Because [George] McGovern was running for president andso I worked for George McGovern and I don't know how much of this you know because we're talking '71 I think. And he's—the only state in the union who voted for George McGovern, who was the first and only candidate that ran on peace, who ran as a peace-maker, the only state in the union who voted for him was Massachusetts.

KP: Not shocked [laughter] And then were you exposed to any ideas while you were at college that helped to awaken your radical spirit or is it the people…?

SS: Sure, especially the whole notion of sexuality. It became very big because of the pill. And so there was an explosion of things that were very foreign to me. People sleeping with each other, talking about abortions, talking about the pill, talking about free love, people going off to communes, and talking about all that. And I was like ohhh a little wallflower coming from an all-girls Catholic high school. And that was very predominant there that whole flavor. Woodstock happened when I was a junior I guess, I think junior/senior. My mother said, "You're not going," [laughs] and I said, "Okay, mommmm," but I'm sort of glad I didn't although Brayton went I believe, my husband. So yeah, more than the anti-war stuff, it was more of the cultural context of the sexual revolution that was more—because that was the time of the explosion of drinking on campus and therefore this kind of free atmosphere of the '60s which was great in a lot of ways, but it was also fraught with danger on multiple levels you know?

KP: And then what exactly...do you feel like...what exactly, what exact experiences or events contributed to your passion for peace and like resolve in these sorts of conflicts?

SS: Okay, well so then by the time I was teaching here, I was teaching at—I went from teaching high school in Buffalo to teaching high school here at our own high school. And there were a lot of radical teachers there and it was the era when you taught elective courses. You could design your own courses as a high school teacher. And everything was on fire with the Vietnam War and the secret bombing of Cambodia and then I became very radicalized and jumped on the band wagon, the anti-war band wagon. And so one of the key things that happened was that I taught this course called The Literature of Dissent and I taught Thoreau and I started reading about Lucretia Mott as an abolitionist and not just—I always thought of her women's movement, but then I realized and I studied that she was a pacifist. Then in the '70s Brayton and I met and by that time he was well-ensconced in nonviolence. He had been reading Gandhi and Eastern religions. He was teaching yoga. He had travelled all around the world and had been in different ashrams and he went to one Buddhist—I don't know if it was then or another monastery and he had a wonderful time there. He talked to one of the monks there and he told one of the monks that he was totally committed to nonviolence and then the monk said, "Then why don't you check Jesus out if you are so into it" [Laughs] You know, "Did you know Jesus was nonviolent?" and of course Brayton, but Gandhi was the big name so he came back checking out Jesus. Then we met at about the time where I was kind of—I left the Church in a manner of speaking for a while and I didn't go to mass or anything because of all the cultural issues that were impinging on so many of us, but then I was missing it. So we met at the time where both of us being Catholic, my going to Catholic school and being raised Catholic, met in a very incendiary time with nuclear weapons, nuclear war, all the questions of what we are going to do whether it be a nuclear war, Russia, the United States, mutually assured destruction so all that was in the air. And that's when I—that came this turn to nonviolence and it came through Brayton and a lot of clustering of peace-making communities all over Boston, everywhere.

EC: Mhmm

SS: And Brayton and I became very involved with all of them and then, I would say the turning point, the pivotal turning point was that I met Philip Berrigan and Daniel Berrigan with Brayton. And I don't know if you know—most young people don't know who they are.

KP: Yea

SS: But they were...do you?

KP: I don't

SS: They were the first two priests to ever be arrested protesting war in the United States. They made the front cover of—let me show you something—they made the front cover of *Time Magazine* and it was called, the cover of *Time Magazine* was called "Berrigans." And so Philip was a Josephite priest and Dan was a Jesuit. So there's Phil and there's Dan and they were the big or the great Catholic prophets and Phil died in 2002. He spent 11 years in jail protesting nuclear weapons and the Vietnam War. So 1968 they burnt draft files with napalm. They made homemade napalm and it was called the Caonsville Eight, one of the most historic moments in the '60s—Catonsville Nine rather. They spent a long time in jail and in the '70s is when I met them and this is me would you believe? [shows photo] And Philip, Philip was in his 50s, this is when I was teaching at Simmons College. So this is in 1978. And he became my kind of mentor and my life was never the same after because this is what God intended, I guess. That I would meet these radical priests. So my faith took a turn because Jesus was no longer like all the little Sunday things I heard and then you go do your own thing. All of a sudden, Jesus was vital and the challenges that they put forth were alright. So Jesus, is Jesus a pacifist? Is Jesus against war? If he is then what are we going to do about it as Christians and as Catholics? Are we just going to sit idly by and say we are Christians, but when it comes to war, "Mehhhhh, maybe Jesus really didn't mean love your enemy. He probably meant something else." And let's contextualize it, he was living in a different time. The Soviet Union wasn't going to drop a nuclear weapon. And there was all this explaining away of Jesus, but Phil and Dan did not explain Jesus away. They said, "Jesus calls you to a radical stand and the crucifixion is a symbol of a radical rejection of the power structure of the state and your birthright as a Christian is to take a stand whenever there is injustice, whenever there is war." And so some people become nuclear pacifists where they say, "I don't believe in nuclear war, but I can see how some wars would be just." But they were totally uncompromising and then I started reading Thomas Merton, the woman Dorothee Sölle. I started looking at women and nonviolence, that was my introduction to meeting and finding women who were totally dedicated to this whole notion that you cannot kill.

KP: And then you are talking about how Catholicism really forms your radical nonviolent stance. How did you reconcile like the patriarchy or like the sexual regulation that you spoke about earlier?

SS: Yeah, well I haven't really reconciled it. I mean I still feel unreconciled as long as women can't be priests, as long as women aren't treated equally in the Church as far as the ability to

become ordained if they want to be ordained. I don't have that particular call. I'm much too old for that even to be relevant. Even if I did, it wouldn't be at this stage in life. But they're unresolved because sexism is still so prevalent within the Church. Sexism is still so prevalent in the world. I was just reading some statistics which I can't throw out now, but women are still in terms of offices around the world, in politics, in parliament, in all the various organs of government, are still very underrepresented and that's true in the United States. So I didn't really ever reconcile it, but what I realized was that there was this dimension of the Church which I had missed which is people like Joan Chittister. I don't know if you have ever heard of her. Sister Joan Chittister, she's a Catholic nun, totally uncompromising pacifism and totally speaking about women's ordination from the '70s on and not being silenced like some of the men were. The priests were being silenced for saying, "Birth control should have been passed and we should have had the legitimacy of birth control." And it was just a small segment of very conservative priests and bishops who allowed the sanctions against birth control to go through in the Vatican Era. So, you know, I'm not reconciled, but I stay because I love the Church. I love, I love being a Catholic. I mean I love all the mysticism and I love all the women I have met who are radical, but you really have to examine it if you are a woman. I don't blame any woman for saying, "I can't do this," You know, "I'm a second-class citizen if I can't be ordained." Too radical huh? We will have to cut that out. [Laughs]

KP: No, no that's fine.

EC: It's fine

KP: We want to hear all about it, tell all!

SS: Who is your professor?

EC: Selina Gallo-Cruz

SS: Oh yeah, I know Selina.

KP: Oh yeah, she'll love this.

EC: Oh yeah.

KP: So now that we have gotten a chance to go over some things that factored into your activism and your upbringing, I just want to get some demographic information that's important as you are put in this archive for like research and what not?

SS: Oh is that what you are doing?

KP: Yea, this is for the Women's…

SS: It's for the Archive

EC: The Worcester

KP: The Worcester Women's Archive. [Worcester Women's Oral History Project] Yes, yes, yes you are going in an archive. It's going to be great.

SS: That's really wonderful. But I wanted to give a little plug for that fact that—I haven't talked to Selina about this, but I teach courses on women and nonviolence myself. I teach seminars and give programs in colleges and such. And most of us women don't know our history in terms of nonviolence. And so, when I give talks, a lot of women through no fault of their own have never heard about Jane Addams as a pacifist. They have never heard of Lucretia Mott giving up her cotton industry with her husband because of her opposition to slavery, but also because she was a total pacifist. And so, we as women need to reclaim our nonviolent history. The first Mother's Day was an anti-war declaration so most women don't know that

KP: Oooo, I didn't know that. Mother's Day…

SS: Buy your mom some candy. Let's make, let's make all the flower companies wealthy and Hallmark, buy cards. But the first mother's day was a strong—Julia Ward Howe who wrote the Battle Hymn of the Republic, wrote an anti-war declaration and that was the first Mother's Day in 1853

KP: That's fascinating.

SS: Yeah. What am I supposed to say now? Oh archives, what did you want?

EC: Yes, so, so how many people, how many siblings did you have in the family…

SS: I had three siblings. I have two brothers and a sister.

KP: And then what is your current profession? What would you describe it as?

SS: Well educator still, but I am the co-founder of a lay Catholic community that's ecumenical, interfaith, and open to all. So, this includes—no one is unwelcome here under any circumstances and so Brayton and I co-founded this community with two missionaries from Haiti and a priest. He's a Melkite priest in the Eastern Rite, in 1982. So now I am part of this whole sustainable operation and we teach. We do courses here. We do programs here. We have hundreds of college students come here every year for the immersions and stuff like that.

EC: Going off of that, how did you...how did this come about?

SS: Agape? Well we started in 1979, we started a peace group for Agape and that was called Atlanthus (sp?). And the express purpose of the peace group was to protest nuclear weapons and a bunch of us wanted to live together and live more simply. So we were withdrawing our support from our tax dollars from going into the military to kill people. And there's that famous '60s quote, "Join the military, go kill people in foreign lands, visit the world," and you know, Japanese, you know it was a really famous quote. So we began to feel, Brayton and me, that we had to simplify our lives and that we had to start living in a way in that we weren't giving our tax dollars to the military. About 57% was going to the military at this point. Now it's about 50. So we started this first community in 1979 and it was what we called a resistance community so many of us got arrested and went to jail including me. Protesting nuclear weapons in Cambridge, Massachusetts where there's a think tank for nuclear weapons and it's called Draper Laboratories. And then in 1982, we started this community, Agape, but in Brockton, sort of in the inner city of Brockton, with the idea that we would become more residential. People would come and live with us. We started a community with this family, but then we had this dream after five years with the family, the McCarthy family, we had this dream that we really needed to reduce our lifestyle even more, grow our own food, not use fossil fuels, heat by wood. We drove a car that drove on vegetable oil, we had a grease car for a while. Now we have an electric car. So we really wanted to scale down even more so this afforded the opportunity to come to this land and we got interest-free loans and we got donations. By that time, by the time we moved here in 1987, people knew us fairly well. We had been at the peace issues or doing one thing or another with peace-making for about 15 years so people knew us and people were willing to support donations, stuff like that.

KP: Have you been involved in any activism in Worcester?

SS: Oh yeah. Oh the wonderful Catholic Worker there. You probably, did you interview Claire?

KP: Yes!

EC: Yes! She's coming up.

KP: She's on the line-up.

SS: You can tell her I said hi. So in the '70s there was the first Catholic Worker in Worcester, very active Catholic Worker both anti-war and feeding the hungry, following Dorothy Day. Of course I should have mentioned her as the great nonviolent exemplar. And so we've joined in many activities with the Catholic Worker, public witness in Worcester. but also public witness at the Pentagon in Washington. We just went to the counter-inaugural. We protested Trump's inauguration in DC as well as the Women's March. And we also just came back from DC where we went to the Native Nations Rise Rally which was amazing. I'll show you pictures before you go. And so yeah, Worcester has become a home in a lot of ways because of some of the great people like the Catholic Worker, especially Scott and Claire

KP: Yes, and then can you tell me looking back about some of those peace communities you were initially involved in. How they radicalized you?

SS: How they did?

KP: What were they like? What were they doing?

SS: Well it was really cool. We were not much older than you are now, maybe 8 or 10 years older than you. And everybody was into it. It was like, "This is really great," and we all want to live together and we all want to reduce our lifestyle and we all want to be dedicated to peace and it was a much more hopeful time than it is now. Even though there was tremendous peril, we never had someone who was mentally ill as a president. So you are experiencing something that we didn't experience. And so there was an energy field that radicalized us, radicalized each of us. And there were peace groups all over Boston and that's where we lived. We lived in Cambridge. So we energized each other, we got arrested together, we went to the Pentagon together, we drove and protested in DC, all kinds of issues around nuclear war and nuclear power, that type of thing.

EC: So the arrest was for just protesting?

SS: Yeah well, when I was arrested the first time it was at this Draper Laboratory. And it was intentional. We wanted to draw attention to what they were doing there. So a group of us, when we were asked to leave, didn't leave. So then we were arrested. But I think probably, the arrest I am most proud of was we were arrested the day the United States started bombing Iraq. And there were about 2,000 of us. The second—I think it was about the third largest Air Force base in the United States is here in Chicopee [MA]. And we were arrested there with the Buddhist peace pagoda and a number of other peacemakers.

KP: And then, in your activist history, are there any movements that were like going on that you chose not to take part in for various reasons or there was like...maybe the leadership was not that inclusive or any other reasons that you may have disagreed ideologically…

SS: I never went to the anti-abortion huge rallies even though I feel for me personally that I have evolved over the years to a feeling that omy feelings about life are inclusive of all stages. And yet, I always felt that the pro-life rallies even though I had feelings that were similar to some ways, many of the pro-life women I met and talked to and men were for capital punishment and believed that war was just and justified. So I never felt myself drawn to any of the huge anti-abortion rallies. And, I guess we—all of our protesting came out of our faith. So before we went anywhere and witnessed against anything, we said we would pray together. We said we would have long periods of prayer together. What is God calling us to? How is God calling us? How is God touching our hearts? Before we would act and then we would act nonviolently. So anything raucous or giving anybody the finger or being mean-spirited that wasn't in the frame of nonviolence.

KP: I was wondering if you could briefly explain how you would characterize your pro-life ethic? Like what does that entail, how do you live it out and seek to make change in the world?

SS: I would say that abortion is a very difficult aspect of the pro-life ethic. What we would call, seamless garment because it seems so condemnatory oftentimes I think to women who have had abortions or have been in a really difficult situation and men too who, who had no idea that they were going to be fathers and helped a woman have an abortion. So even though that is one of the issues of the pro-life circle, I think it's the most fraught with anxiety and it has one of the most difficult centering theories about it because it's so personal. And war is personal too of course. So, all the issues of sexuality now as we all know are so fraught with condemnation and exclusion and so on. In being pro-life as far as abortion is concerned, I want to be very open and

welcoming to the positions that people take and what they are feeling and what their anxiety is as opposed to doing what I do with my war stance! Which is "AHHHHHHH!"

[Laughter]

SS: Absolutist! And in a sense, I am absolute about life, but I just think that one, especially a woman, needs to be very welcoming to women who are struggling and need comfort. Like the Rachel group that sprung up in the '80s. Rachel's Children it was called. You know, if you had an abortion or are going to have an abortion, we welcome you.

KP: And I was thinking about like how this is going into an archive and I was wondering if you could give us a brief activist timeline like when did you start? What movements do you feel like you were involved in like chronologically and where you are today?

SS: That's a great question! We actually have …

[Laughter]

KP: Because you've done so much you know?

SS: We actually have a timeline. It is true. I mean when you get to be almost 72, we've got a lot of history there. So, I would say the beginning was meeting Brayton in 1974 and then meeting Phil Berrigan and Daniel Berrigan and the whole what they called The Atlantic Life Community in 1979, very radicalized by then, began this group, the radical protest group called Atlanthus (sp?) in 1979. And then, 1982 Agape started in Brockton and that was teaching nonviolence in schools so that was a kind of teaching ministry, but we also were still very active in protests. Then 1987, we came here, the sustainability component became very predominant and it still is because Brayton went to Standing Rock and protested Standing Rock. And then, so from '87 on this has become a sustainability center and the whole concept of sustainability is now integrated into nonviolence. And it's ongoing. Right now—and the biggest event of the year that attracts over 200 people and usually 300 to 400 is called Francis Day. So we celebrate the life of Saint Francis of Assisi. The last Francis day was called "Listening to Muslim Voices in an Election Year' and it was an all Muslim day. And it was awesome! This year it will be "Listening to Native American Voices." So we will have some Standing Rock People. So that takes us right up into the present which is we do these rural immersions. We're still protesting. If called, we would do civil disobedience. Brayton was arrested protesting a pipeline five or six years ago...[Keystone] XL. We went to the XL pipeline rally in DC that kind of thing.

KP: So you've had such a long life as an educator. I'm wondering how education factors into how you live out your social justice work?

SS: I think it's really, really so important. And because I love teaching and because I have been an educator all my life, I just think you can't act on ideas that you do not have. So you have to formulate the ideas and you have to read about them and you have to study them and so formative for me as a woman, was studying and reading Dorothy Day, studying and reading Lucretia Mott, studying and reading Joan Chittister, and now Elizabeth Johnson. I don't know if you have heard of her, but she is one of the most radical spokespeople, very prophetic voice.

KP: Did she write liberation theology?

SS: Yeah, and she teaches at Fordham and she's amazing. She's my age and now very into writing about the earth. And I could go on and on about all these incredible women. Sister Mary Therese MacGillis (sp?) They all stayed in the Church and are radical sustainability. Earth people, you know. And Selina is too, isn't she?

KP: She's definitely into peace, her specializations are women and nonviolence. She worked for a number of NGO's [non-governmental organization] before going to pursue her PhD, I'm not sure what particular ones.

SS: Okay. So I'm hoping both of you, but particularly you, Emily, will look at the long history.

EC: You just answered my question. I was going to ask if there were any activist women, like who inspired you? How did being a woman shape your experience?

SS: Probably Liz McAllister. If you haven't heard of her, Elizabeth McAllister is the wife of Philip Berrigan. He was a priest and they got married. He left the priesthood and they had three children. And she's still...she's 78 and still protesting. And then a lot of Quaker women were inspiring to me and there's one Quaker woman locally that's 94 years old, 94 years old and she still goes to protests. I think Dorothy Day stands out too, of course. Does that help?

EC: Yes!

KP: No, no I got another question! My question is kind of about like your incorporation of ecology and sustainability into like your social justice stances. Like how did that come about and why do you think that is important?

SS: Well, the footprint, the carbon footprint and all of the issues around fossil fuels and what they do to the environment and all the ways that we now see climate change being so fundamental to your futures, because it's going to be your generation that will reap the benefits. We already passed the 350.org. I don't know if you know there is this organization 350.org led by Bill McKibben who teaches at Middlebury [College] and that was the number that if it was reached in terms of the amount of carbon in the atmosphere then it would say game's over, the planet is in a ruinous state. Well we have exceeded the—it's a very complicated description of how many carbon particulates in the air, but we have exceeded that so we became more and more conscious of the weather changing and we became more and more conscious of how Native cultures revered the land—sacred water, sacred land—and of course the evidence of the melting of the glaciers, of Antarctica, the Amazon forest. We're vegetarians because of what meat-eating does to the planet not only in terms of methane from cows that deplete the ozone layer and are a major contributor to climate change but the amount of water that is takes, the amount of grain that it takes that could be feeding the starving nations of the world. So all of these intricate intersecting things became very prominent in our minds. So we said, "We can't have nonviolence without loving the Earth." And how do you preserve the Earth? You preserve the Earth by reducing your carbon footprint but now, as you know, today in the news he [President Donald Trump] wants to dismantle the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency], he wants to renege on all the climate change that [President Barack] Obama started so we're in deep trouble with this man.

EC: You mentioned that you are vegetarian, so what other environmentally friendly things does the community do?

SS: That's, that's really good. So, solar number one. This is all solar, solar panels, solar hot water, solar panels, solar hot water. There is what they call a "grid tie" however which means that we do have some connection with the National Grid. What happens is we use to solar and it gets stored and if they need to tap into the stored solar energy that comes from us and a number of other people that have solar power then they can tap into that and that's called a "grid tie." And, so when our electricity goes off at the straw bale house because we have photovoltaics which are batteries, we don't lose our solar. Our solar keeps the heat on and the lights on but here it's different because it's totally grid tied. And Brayton would know if you want to get into any of the specifics about it, I'm not very good at explaining it all. Solar hot water, also energy

efficiency in terms of lightbulbs. Every year we have an energy check, we just had one the other day and the Energy Star because you pay into it because we have solar on this grid tie, they come in and change all our bulbs from the normal bulbs that reduce your electricity but aren't as good as the LED's are. So all of that. So all of that, but I would say the primary way is that we grow our own food too. Sixty percent of the food that sustains this community is grown here. So when you leave you will see the huge garden out there. So it's a commitment also to reduced lifestyle, to reducing our own lifestyle. We don't buy new clothes, we buy at Goodwill. We live under taxable income which means we don't make enough money to be taxed and by living under taxable income and living off donations, we don't pay for war. And one of the single most devastating things that can happen to the planet is war because of what war does to the environment. And what it does to the atmosphere, what bombs do to the earth. All of those things. Probably one of the biggest polluters in the world is the Pentagon with the making all the weaponry and the launching of weaponry, all of the oil it takes, all of the fossil fuels and then the devastation and what it does to the land. The poisoning of the land and now the big thing is the fracking. We're totally opposed to the fracking and that's why Brayton went to Standing Rock. So those are the energy currents. The pipelines are destroying the water of Native American people on a…

KP: And how has your identity as a woman shaped your perspectives and experiences of the movements you have been involved in?

SS: I think really profoundly because I think women and war as a gender issue is very, very key. I feel strongly that women have not had as strong a voice as we should in terms of opposition to war. Now in the 1900s, in the early movement for women's right to vote, the two fields of energy were merged but then there was a schism because some of the women that were pacifists were holding out against the women like Susan B. Anthony said it would divide the movement. So being a woman I think is still to be under-represented, to be the victim of war. Women and children were just bombed by the Pentagon in Moseul [Iraq]. Most of the victims were women and children. And men, warrior men, have co-opted the whole idea of protecting women as a kind of war cry to kill more people. So I don't want male protection at the cost of killing women and children. And I think more women need to move into that sense that the biggest percentage of victims of war are women and children, innocents.

EC: Within your social justice work, has it been mostly women or an equal men and women?

SS: I think more men than women which also is bothersome to me

[Laughter]

SS: Because even in the peace and justice circles, it's oftentimes very imbalanced. We try to balance it all the time, but sometimes it's not as balanced as it should be. In the '70s and '80s, when I was first doing this work, a lot of the spokespeople were male and not female. And therefore, I feel very strongly committed that even if you have a peace group that is a Catholic peace group and the peace group keeps inviting men to be the primary speakers or priests to be the primary speakers, I always object and say, "Where are the women? Why aren't they represented?" Because it's too patriarchal, it's too hierarchical.

KP: So you talked about in the past like how you were in college you were like the silent one like you agreed with what was going on but you didn't necessarily have that agency or voice. How do you think your activism factored into your feminist awakening, because you sit before us as a very outspoken feminist today. I'm wondering how that evolution happened.

SS: Yeah, I think that the strongest, most significant thing that affected me is the whole issue of war and the killing of innocent. And I think I have been profoundly affected by meeting Japanese victims of the atom bomb and they're called Hibakusha and once you meet somebody that was at Hiroshima or Nagasaki and you see the scars and the burns and you are a witness to what we did—the only country in the world to ever drop a nuclear bomb. It's so horrifying it's beyond description and I think that single fact about war alone was the most compelling things that moved my feminism forward and that became one of the strongest feelings I had as a feminist. Maybe in some ways, unlike Gloria Steinem and some of the more significant early feminists, my feminism is based in my belief that Jesus was a feminist. So, I mean that term that Jesus is a feminist is an anachronism because Jesus would not have been aware of that term but Jesus's advocacy for women and his radical breaking of...breaking down of all the barriers in his relationships with women became a fundamental aspect of my attitude toward Christianity even. Most people haven't caught up with him yet.

[Laughter]

SS: Too radical! You can't go to Jesus and say women aren't equal. You know, there's no way that you can read the Scripture and feel anything but that Jesus was an advocate for women.

EC: So how have your insights and experiences shaped how you approached organizing this community today?

SS: Well, I think pretty much the way—the thread that we have viewed here, because I feel so strongly about Christ and because I'm a Catholic who is a committed pacifist. When the pope came here—he's a wonderful guy—when he came here and addressed the Congress he said, "Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Martin Luther King Jr.," I mean this is totally amazing that he mentioned Dorothy Day who had had an abortion, who had a very difficult life and has become a prophet in her time, and Thomas Merton who was a Trappist pacifist. So I think all of these threads all percolate, but the energy that I bring to what I do is from the Gospel. It's Jesus, and I happen to be Catholic and feel that way, but I would feel that way in whatever denomination I would be in because Jesus to me, he is so clearly a liberating field of love and agape which is why we call the community that which is love that is beyond eros and philia, it's a kind of love that knows no barriers.

KP: Could you go into more detail about how your relationship with Brayton has influenced your activism?

SS: Well I think it has been mutual and it's an unusual situation where a husband and wife—and we have a daughter who is 31 years old and a granddaughter who is 4 and a step-grandson who is 10, so they are very much involved in our lives as was our daughter, Theresa. So I think we approach this as a family, we approached it as a married couple, we were committed to live this life out as a married couple and that unity through the covenant of marriage and the sacrament of marriage gave it a resonance and a kind of holiness. When we got married we took vows that we would live in community just like a priest and a nun do.

EC: Mhmm

SS: They take a vow and we took a vow that we would live in community. Our principle philosophy and ethic would be nonviolence.

KP: That's beautiful.

SS: It was! It was really beautiful [laughs] My wedding dress was from Goodwill and Brayton wore an Indian shirt that he got somewhere, Goodwill or something like that. But even the wedding was unusual, we got married in a Quaker meeting house and we were married by a Catholic priest and we called it a Quatholic wedding so…

EC: That's so cool [laughter]

KP: That's funny, "Quatholic"

SS: Quatholic

EC: So in all the work you have done, what movements or changes are you most proud of?

SS: I think the anti-war work, but I would say now because of the link to sustainability—the anti-war work when I think of pride—we worked with an Iraqi family and this Iraqi family, their car was blown up by American soldiers at a checkpoint in Mosul which is now overrun by ISIS. And this was 11 years ago. And I think maybe, maybe pride wouldn't be the word, but serving God through this Iraqi family has been very difficult and they are the face of war because the little boy in the family, Omar who is now 14, he was four and he was sitting on his mother's lap in a car and American soldiers misjudged, thought there was some type of terrorist car and the driver got nervous and he was kind of rushing the checkpoint and they bombed and they shot up the car. The car exploded and the mother was burned alive in the car and the little boy Omar was on her lap in the car, four years old, he was burned over 62% of his body. And he's 14 now. He has no ear, half of his face is gone, his fingers are merged like this, he looks like someone from Hiroshima or Nagasaki. And we've been kind of like grandparents and we took, we took the family in as one would take the current immigrant situation. They didn't live with us, but they were part of our lives, part of the community and I think that is the single-most significant thing that we could have done in our lives of being against war. Really looking at the face of war and making a commitment to help this family which is what we have done. So make your principles tangible so you are not living in your head and that's why all the hard work of cultivating this community—it's a lot of work, it's hard work—is significant.

KP: Can you speak to any evolution to how you felt about issues when you were younger versus how they have progressed and if your stances have ever changed or anything?

SS: Say that again? I was listening to Brayton come in, because if you want to ask him anything about sustainability, he's the one to ask. Do you?

KP: It's more of a women's history project but afterward we would totally love to talk with Brayton.

SS: But if you had anything, and he might be leaving to. Anyways go ahead, what was that again?

KP: So when you were younger do you feel any of your stances have changed like over the course of your life. In terms of your stances on social justice issues, how do you think you have evolved in how you like view the issues and what not from then to today?

SS: Yea, sure. I think that when I was younger I was vaguely pro-choice. I didn't completely understand it. All I know is the rhetoric of the '60s was affecting me and, you know, I have a right to my body so reproductive freedom became kind of a floating idea. But as I lived my life and met women that had had abortions, I saw all the pain and the suffering that they carried and that along with looking at nonviolence as Gandhi called it, "ahimsa" non-injury, so that includes animal rights that includes everybody. I did not really think that inclusively about animals and the earth and so being a part of this movement, the earth consciousness, has been incredible. You know, it's eco-feminism that is really important to me right now. And I read a lot of the eco-feminists and I see my ideas being shaped by people, but like Sallie McFague, she's not Catholic but she comes out of a deeply-centered Christian attitude that the earth has been objectified just like women have been. And I would have never made those connections before this period of time that women are treated the way the earth was treated as objects to be pillaged. You know, to be raped, to be destroyed. And that image of digging into the earth and "Mother Earth" and then you have all these pipelines carrying all this potentially water-damaging pipes that can pollute especially native lands, that type of thing. So that's been an evolution.

KP: Can you tell us more about the Agape community? Like, what's it like day to day, how would you describe this community, what's it like?

SS: We, we pray every day on schedule at 7:30 so this is our chapel here and I don't know if you will have the chance to look at it but then we pray again at noon. We have a reflection, a Scripture reflection. Right now we are reading Joan Chittister, the Benedictine nun who is the radical nun I told you about. Wisdom distilled from the daily that is our living the rule of St. Benedict today. That's our noon-day reading. Then there's an optional evening meditation so our life is based on prayer and we have young people. There's an intern here now from St. Mary's College, he's only 22. He's been here for three weeks and he wants to stay for a year so people come and live with us. So it's a very active life of people moving in and out. Dixon is here for two years. We have a governing body called the Mission Council and on the Mission Council there are about seven people in their 20s and they're kind of the voice and the excitement of young people saying how are we going to move the community forward. I think the dynamism of the community is youth because we have a lot of young people that come here and hopefully some young people will take over because we are in that transition phase. We are looking to

talking to the young people on our board. We don't call it a board because it's too secular a term about what will this place look like 20 years from now? We may not be here? Where is the challenge, what do you feel the legacy of this place should be that you helped to build and sustain and maintain?

EC: How many people are in the community?

SS: We have about 100 people who are deeply and profoundly committed in terms of financial sustenance and attending most of the events and being deeply involved. But the core of people who do the nitty gritty day-to-day stuff is about 20 who come and help on the board and that includes the board, the young people I told you about.

KP: Do you feel like your identity as a mother influences how you view issues and activism and stuff like?

SS: Yeah, very much so. And yet, I don't feel—it's so interesting when you think of yourself as an activist or you think of yourself as committed to alternative lifestyle and not cooperating with the structures and the powers that create all the havoc in the world, you think of all the world's children and I think our daughter is a reflection of all the children of the world. And so you have to make some sacrifices. Sometimes maybe that she didn't always understand or like. She didn't choose to be a vegetarian [laughs] and she's not now. But certainly seeing our granddaughter who is four years of age is a pretty significant reality of the generations to come and what is going to happen generationally if we are not constantly giving our women an opportunity to see what nonviolence means. And I'm afraid—you know, I get very worried about nonviolence being taught in schools and so …

EC: And that kind of parlays into, what do you worry most about in terms of social justice issues today?

SS: Well, I think the singular most important worry I have right now is whether or not Donald Trump will be impeached or not because what he can do in four years, he can destroy because of the power of the American presidency which is really not at all—it should not have the significance that it does in terms of the domination of the world and American exceptionalism and so on, but I think one of the most compelling issues of the day is how do get him out of there and how to non-cooperate with what he does. And because it's the singular most significant

event in terms of the way in which he has chosen people and what they represent will be a setback for generations to come. So I hope you all rise to the occasion.

KP: And then are there any questions that we should have asked you but didn't? We are just wondering, is there any stuff you want to make sure ends up in the archive or something we didn't necessarily touch upon?

SS: Well, just that I can't speak more strongly about how our generation had this notion that a community like Agape is the way people need to live. This is the way the early Christians lived, sharing things in common, working the land, growing the food. And that whole notion of community has kind of faded and dissolved because of how oppressed you have been, your generation by college costs. And really your generation has almost been like indentured servants to the United States government. And it's oppressive because you can't do the things we did. The choices that we made were so freely made because we didn't have hundreds of thousands of dollars of loans to pay off. So that, I mean, that's the thing I would most want to say to the two of you or any people of your generation. Really, don't give up and don't let the forces and the powers that be dictate terms to you as to how you should live your lives. When I think of the indebtedness and how that changes—like a lot of the people, a little older than you, that hang out here in their late 20s and early 30s they feel really bad. They call themselves "risk averse." They're averse to risk because their parents had mortgaged their houses to send them to school and that contributes to a feeling of [breathes in] feeling uptight, you know, "I can't get arrested, I can't protest, oh god." And colleges are very quiet for the most part. So how does your generation stir up the waters the same way Jesus did you know?

KP: Alright!!

SS: Alright!

KP: Thank you so much

EC: Thank you

SS: We did it! Who else have you interviewed?

EC: I can't think of her last name, but her first name was Jo. She was from the Catholic Worker.

SS: Oh Jo Massarelli.

EC: Yes

SS: Yeah, slightly different, but we know Jo well. So just take a quick look at the chapel.

[end recording]