

Interviewee: Susan Tellier
Interviewers: Samuella Akaab and Emily Casella
Date of Interview: October 3, 2019
Location: Assumption College, Worcester, Massachusetts
Transcribers: Samuella Akaab and Emily Casella
Overseen by Dr. Carl Robert Keyes and Dr. Lucia Knoles, Assumption College



Abstract: Susan Tellier was born in Kingman, Arizona, in 1949, and is the former Vice President of Administration at Nichols College. She grew up in Rochester, New York, and attended elementary and high school there. Susan was married during her junior year of college and moved to Massachusetts to attend UMass [University of Massachusetts]. She and her then-husband graduated from college, and both enlisted in the military, just as the Vietnam War was coming to an end. In this interview Susan discusses her childhood in upstate New York, her experiences in elementary and high school, her career in accounting and as a college administrator, traveling across the United States, being a member of WISE as well as her life experiences as a woman. She emphasizes her mother being the main breadwinner for the family and her own personal relationships with many women who worked outside the home during the 1950s and 1960s.

SA: Okay, so we are conducting a city- wide oral history of the lives of Worcester women, aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences. [pause] Based on the goals of the 1850 National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on the areas of women's education, health, work and politics slash community involvement. We want to focus today on your experience as a woman, as this project is for our Women's Studies course. Thank you for your help with this important project.

SA: First off, what is your name, including both maiden, and married name if applicable.

ST: Okay, my name is Susan Tellier, T e l l i e r, and that's it. [laughs]

SA: [laughs] When were you born?

ST: July 3, 1949.

SA: [pause] Have you been married before?

ST: Yes.

SA: Do you have any children?

ST: No.

SA: What culture slash ethnicities, do you identify with?

ST: Caucasian.

SA: Tell me about your parents.

ST: Sorry?

SA: Tell me about your parents.

ST: Well, my mother was a musician. She's a graduate from the Eastman School of Music. And she taught [pause] stringed instruments to people in high school and in grade schools. I-I think they've gotten rid of that and the things that you can get free in school now but...

EC: Yeah.

ST: In her days you could take an instrument. [cough] Excuse me. And the school would give you the instrument to play on and free lessons. So, that's what she did, and she did the orchestra. And then my dad was, he worked for Boeing and built, B 52's [long-range, subsonic, jet-powered strategic bomber].

SA: Oh!

EC: What is that?

ST: It's a plane.

SA: A big one.

ST: Yeah, it's a bombing plane. It was a sort of a major part of the arsenal in World War II, but it kept on, they kept using the B 52. Gosh., when I was in the service [United States Armed Services], they were still using B 52's. So that was 20 years later.

EC: Wow, did you just see -- did you see the plane at Bradley Airport?

ST: No.

EC: It was recently on the news. There was a plane that crashed at...And it was one of those WWII planes.

SA: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah I heard about that.

ST: Oh.

SA: Have you lived in Worcester for a long time?

ST: I don't live in Worcester. Susan Perschbacher, who told me I should participate in this, said they didn't have to live in Worcester, I live in Webster, which is about 20 miles south of here almost to the Connecticut State line but, I'm in Worcester County, if that helps.

[All laughs]

EC: It does help.

SA: Have you lived in Webster for a long time?

ST: Yeah, 20 years now.

SA: Where did you live before that?

ST: I was in Texas.

EC: Texas!

SA: Oh, what part?

ST: Do you know where Houston is?

SA: In the middle?

ST: No, its way over to the east side. It's on the-the damp side, Texas is like 900 miles across. The east side is damp and it's where you know there's alligators and mosquitoes that never die, and it's-it's it's where it's always getting flooded. And then the west side of Texas is dry and that's where you need to think of when you see the cattle ranchers and all that kind of stuff.

SA: Yeah.

ST: Well, I was almost to the Louisiana State line in a little city called Beaumont, and I worked for the Texas State University system.

[PAUSE]

EC: You can do it. You can go, it's fine.

ST: [laughs]

SA: No, you go.

EC: I didn't think of anything.

SA: So, you say that you work for high school in Texas?

ST: No...

EC: No, it was a university.

ST: A university, uh colle-, a university

SA: University.

ST: Yeah.

SA: How was th-

ST: Lamar University.

SA: Lamar University. What was that like?

ST: It was very interesting because the state of Texas has a lot of control over the universities as opposed to --- I previously worked for the University of Virginia, in, of course, Virginia.

SA: Yeah.

ST: And that school had almost total control of what they did themselves. Whereas in Texas, the schools were much more tightly controlled by the state. So, the-the, you know, the state would let you know what you're supposed to be doing and when you were supposed to be doing and set all the deadlines. So th-there wasn't a lot that you could do without state approval there.

EC: So, have you traveled a lot? You said that you were in the military. What -- I don't know kind of like when you started growing up. What made you want to go into the military, especially being a woman?

ST: Well, my husband was going in because this was draft -era..

SA: Mhm.

ST: For the Vietnam draft was on and his draft number was I think 67. So, he decided he would volunteer for the Air Force, as opposed to being drafted into the army. So once the recruiter had him signed up, he looked at me and said, "Now what are you doing [laughing] with your time?" So, it's very interesting they were very eager to recruit women at the time. So, even though my husband came out of, out of a much more prestigious school than I did...He was an MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] graduate. They made him into an enlisted airman, and they made me into an officer.

EC: Cool!

ST: So [laughing] it was very interesting, but they really wanted women they were actively...

EC: Oh really?

ST: ...recruiting women.

EC: Do you know why?

ST: Well, [pause] I think women's liberation was just getting started.

EC: Mhm.

ST: And they were looking around and saying, you know, all of the women that we have in the service are all in the classic positions of nursing or, you know, office administration and so they were looking to get women--more women in just--for the person power...

EC: Mhm.

ST: ...because, of course, we were involved in the Vietnam War and they needed more people. But they were actively seeking women.

SA: How's the experience like, like working with other women during that time?

ST: Well, I didn't, I worked in an office that was exclusively men, in a field that was almost exclusively men. I was a management engineering officer. I was the second woman through the management engineering school, and almost everybody in that career field was male. So, I had a bunch of guys in my office. The only other woman in the office was the secretary.

SA: Oh, wow.

ST: [laughs] It was sometimes a little lonely.

SA: Aww.

EC: I was going to say, yeah.

SA: How'd they treat you, the men?

ST: They were fine. They really were.

SA: Oh, that's good.

ST: I had an army friend at the time who was subjected to some harassment, but she was enlisted. There's a real class distinction in the military between enlisted and officers.

EC: Mhm.

ST: I don't know if it's gone away now but at the time, pretty much, officers got treated really well and enlisted people did not get treated very well.

EC: I think it's the same.

ST: I wouldn't be surprised. [laughs]

EC: Yeah, I don't think it changed.

[Pause]

ST: It was a career field I never would have picked, it was a lot of math. We had to know how to do regression analysis, which they taught you how to do by hand because there were no computers... [laughs]

EC: Oh!

SA: Oh gosh!

ST: [laughs] ...in those days. So, they taught me how to do that at the school and what we did was... If we--- we created equations that told you if you were going to add a wing, which was a whole group of planes. You're going to add a wing to an airbase, how many more people would you need in food service and HR [Human Resources] and all the support functions for all of those people, so that when they added or subtracted people and move them around, they could tell automatically what the impact on the budget was going to be and where to send these resources over there because they're going to need them so it was...I thought very advanced for the time.

SA: Mhm.

EC: I'm sure big corporations have that now. But I don't think they did at that kind of time.

[Pause]

EC: I kind of want to talk about it more.

[Inaudible]

EC: Where were you like stationed?

ST: In Las Vegas, Nellis Air Force [Base].

EC: Oh wow.

SA: Oh!

ST: Base. Yeah.

EC: Vegas!

ST: And then I was sent to Chanute Air Force Base, which is in Illinois, and is now closed. So, I was at two stations in the four years that I was there, but very interesting, being in an airbase in a place like Las Vegas.

EC: Yeah, I'm sure.

ST: The airbase is still out there. And they, it was the home of the [United States Air Force] Thunderbirds you know they, their flying demo training team [air demonstration squadron]?

SA: Yeah!

EC: Mhm!

ST: So that was--that was exciting, but at the same time, they were practicing in the desert---was where all the bombing ranges were. So, they were flying F11's and 105's, when I was in...And they go out to the range and they drop those bombs on the range and instructors would say, "Now remember you're dropping a brand- new Cadillac." [laughs]

SA: [laughs]

EC: Oh man yeah.

ST: Because they were exceedingly expensive.

EC: Yeah. [pause] Did you have any siblings?

ST: Uh, two brothers

EC: Two brothers.

ST: Now, neither...Well one of them went to college, the other one told me I was wasting my time going to college. [laughing]

EC: [inaudible] Both sides of that.

ST: Yeah, well, and the-then, of course, as he moved up in his career, they wanted to send him to college, you know, so he had to do night classes.

SA: Oh.

ST: So, got him in the end. You should have gone when he could've gone, and done it during the day.

EC: Are they older than you?

ST: No, they're both younger.

EC: Both younger.

SA: How's it feel like being the older sibling?

ST: Oh, you know you're the test child.

SA: Mhm!

ST: You know you, you, you know if it works out on you, then it's okay for the rest of the people, the rest of the group to do it so you're the one that always gets told no you can't do that and then tell you um -- you have to show that yes you can do that.

EC: Mhm.

ST: And then both my brothers just cruise, being able to do things at lot younger age.

EC: Because you already went through it.

ST: Yeah.

EC: Mhm.

ST: And I didn't kill myself so they would say, "Oh alright."

[Inaudible]

ST: You can learn to drive or... [laughing]

SA: Uh, how's your childhood like?

ST: Uh, I think [pause] it was lovely. It really was. We spent a lot of time at my grandmother's house in Penn Yan, New York. I don't know if you're familiar with the Finger Lakes.

EC: Mhm. Five-isn't there five?

ST: Yep.

EC: Yep.

ST: Yep. Well, she lived on the little finger lake that looks like a "Y".

EC: Okay.

ST: She was up on that finger lake and so I had three cousins there. So, the three of us kids would go and spend the summer with our cousins, it was wonderful.

EC: That's awesome.

ST: It really was. [Pause] I have no complaints. [laughs]

SA: [laughs] Uh, how was elementary school like?

ST: Elementary school, wow! Um, [pause] it's very interesting in light of the complaints I hear about elementary schools these days, nobody talked back to the teachers. You just didn't do it.

SA: Mhm.

ST: I mean if you get sent down to the principal's office that was like, you know, the whole school knew about it.

SA: Oh!

ST: [laughing] It was...

EC: Yeah

ST: ...not an everyday event at all. So, we got a lot done, we learned a lot. It was a quiet classroom. People did what the teachers told them, and they were concentrating on their--on their work. It's very different from all of this, yo-you two probably came through more group-oriented learning. Ours was all individually right with that little desk, And you know you had these things to get through, and you got to test on it. And they saw if you'd learned it or not, and then you moved on.

EC: Hmm.

ST: [Pause] But the teachers did not have to, you know, fear for their lives. They didn't have kids that were disrupting the classroom.

EC: I know I-I wonder what's changed about that.

SA: Yeah.

ST: Well, I have to say one thing is, you did not want to go home with a note from your teacher. [laughing]

EC: Well, it's true even when I was in elementary school, I feel like after my generation was just like, like changed.

SA: Like everyone gets sent home with notes now.

ST: Yeah, yeah. I think the teachers have a hard time, re-, you know, retaining control of the classroom and I think it is the upbringing of the kids that come into the classroom. They're used to having their own way...

EC: Mhm.

ST: ...and doing things on their own time, and we were trained to never have our own ways. You know if the teacher said, "Okay now we're going to do this," you didn't raise your hands, and say, "I don't feel like doing that." [laughing]

EC: Right, yeah you do it.

ST: You would do it. So, it's--it was a different view. [pause] Now, maybe the kids learn better these days, maybe kids that have uh learning difficulties have better, easier time in the classroom. I never heard of a child with learning disabilities, when I was a kid. It was the same way you never heard of anyone with peanut allergies.

EC: Mhm.

SA: Yeah.

ST: It just didn't--everybody brought a peanut butter lunch, [laughing] or maybe bologna, or tuna fish. And you did not get food at the school and bring your little lunch, and they would give you for three cents, you could get a one cup container of milk.

EC: Wow.

ST: That was all the school. So, you had to bring your own food.

EC: Wow.

ALL: [laughs]

SA: That is different. How's your high school experience like?

ST: I had a great high school, too, I was fortunate enough. I lived in Rochester, New York, which was Kodak city, at the time, you probably don't even remember Kodak, but at one point in time...

EC: Is that a camera?

ST: Yeah.

SA: Yeah.

ST: Camera film.

EC: Film, okay.

ST: The downfall of Kodak was that they had digital photography, before it was out in the world, and they said, "We're not going to embrace this, we want to sell film." So, they stuck with film, and they went right down the tubes. And there's almost no Kodak at all left. They still do movie film if a director decides that they want to actually film the action versus putting it all on to digital to begin with. I'm trying to remember what movie I saw recently. Oh, *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, was actually filmed.

EC: Mhm.

ST: Because I can see the Kodak credits at the end. Kodak still does film. But anyhow. I got distracted here.

SA: [laughs]

ST: The section of Rochester that I lived in was called the free school district, and they had built this entire city for Kodak employees. And they paid the cost of the school, so you didn't have to pay it in your real estate taxes. So, we had superb teachers, we had beautiful schools. They were all brand new, couldn't ask for better. And the people that taught us were totally dedicated to teaching as a career.

SA: Mhm.

ST: Did you see anything different with the male teachers and female teachers? Like was it...

ST: There weren't very many male teachers.

SA: Oh really?

ST: Almost none. It was a woman's profession in those days because if you are a woman, you could become a nurse, or you could become a school teacher. And that was pretty much the only things that little girls were encouraged to think about doing.

EC: Yeah.

ST: So, all my teachers, except for sixth grade, were women, all the way through.

EC: Uh in sixth grade did-- was it different? Could you...

ST: Yeah, you could really tell. Um, I look back on it now and I try and remember was there any difference? And would **Mr Dianetti** call on boys more often than he called on girls? I don't know if... I can't remember if that was the case.

EC: Mhm.

ST: But I'm sure the guys were thrilled to all of a sudden, have a role model that they could identify with.

SA: Yeah!

ST: Because they've been taught by women all their lives.

EC: Yeah.

EC: That's very true. Interesting. [Pause] So you went to college?

ST: Yes, went to Stony Brook University [State University of New York at Stony Brook] on Long Island. Then I got married in the middle of my junior year and I transferred up here to

Worcester Women's Oral History Project

30 Elm Street – Worcester, MA 01609 – info@wwohp.org

www.wwohp.org

UMass cause my husband was at MIT. And then once we got out of the--of our undergraduate education that was when we went into the military.

EC: Makes sense.

ST: Then once while we were in the military, the government came out with something called Palace Chase. They were now---the Vietnam War was winding down, they were trying to get some people out of the service. So that they would let you out early if you would go into the [military] reserves. So, my husband got out early. He went--- didn't join the reserves in, in Chicago, and I stayed in the, in the service till I finished my four years. Then I joined him with the reserves, we were both at the University of Chicago at that time. And I have to say one thing about being in the military was, it taught me an appreciation for business because I had been an English and philosophy major.

EC: Mhm.

ST: And I had no use for business. And then I could see the work that it took to keep something like the Air Force going. And they, at the time, really embraced good business practices. So, I came out with a greater appreciation for business, and I thought well I think I'm going to go to University of Chicago and get an MBA [Master's in Business Administration].

SA: Mhm.

ST: And then so that's when I decided that I really liked accounting. So, I finished the MBA there, and then went to work for a public accounting firm that no longer exists. I think one of its names, it was Ernst & Ernst at the time. And I think there were eight large accounting firms across the country, and I think they're now down to four and Ernst got sucked up into one of these mergers, and so it doesn't exist as Ernst & Ernst anymore. It's Ernst and something else. And so, I spent two and a half years doing public accounting, which was very interesting because as a junior accountant they send you to all these different companies to work on the audit. So, one day you could be at a bank and then the next day you could be at a chocolate factory. I had a chocolate factory on my list. But then I also had central stamping and forging, which was a really gritty looking factory where they did stamping and forging of metal. And if you went out into the factory, you had to wear a hard hat and keep your eyes open because there are cranes going overhead. You really had to be alert. They also had pits with hot metal in them. So, look up and look down while walking. So it was, it was fascinating in terms of seeing all these different kinds of businesses, and the sorts of things that they did. I also did a grocery wholesaler. This company was the biggest warehouse you ever have seen in your life. We rode around in those little---I don't know what you call them.

EC: The lifter things?

ST: The forklifts! We ran around in forklifts because it was just so much space. And one time I counted the boxes of, the blue boxes of mac and cheese. Who makes that?

SA: Kraft?

ST: Yeah, Kraft mac and cheese! Over a million boxes of Kraft mac and cheese, and I mean I didn't count each individual box

SA: [laughs]

ST: You had to figure they were in these big cartons and over a million boxes of Kraft mac and cheese. America loves Kraft mac and cheese.

SA: Were there any other women in the warehouse where you worked at?

ST: Ohh yes! They started to get a lot of women in public accounting so that the company that I... I interviewed with several companies, some public accounting firms. One of them, in a real season of bad taste, invited their candidates to a luncheon at a mens' club where the women had to go in the back door. I thought, "Oh this sends a great signal." [laughs]

EC: Yeah.

ST: It is not the one I went to work for, but hey had just started recruiting lots of women in public accounting. So, when I came in, I would say at least 30% of the people they were hiring were women. So, it wasn't as lonely as my previous job in the military.

EC: Mhm.

ST: But I still...The company I worked for did not have a female partner. And it had been around for like 80 years.

EC: Wow.

ST: I never had a women be a partner. It was a major heyday when they finally did.

EC: Mhm.

ST: So, then my husband got his Ph.D. [Doctor of Philosophy] and he got a job at the University of Virginia, so we moved to the University of Virginia. I worked briefly in banking, as a bank auditor for about a year and a half. And then I went to work for the University of Virginia, and stayed there for eight years in two different positions, primarily in the business office, doing finances and collecting tuition...[laughs]

EC: Oh, man.

ST: ...and student loans and registering people. This was the year when I bet when you guys came here, your first year. You didn't have to go through a mass registration, everything was already done.

SA: Yeah.

ST: Yeah, well this is back when everybody got some paperwork. And then they had to go through snow fencing that had been set up to go to all these stations and make sure that you paid your bill and pick up this and pick up that and pick up your room assignments.

EC: Yeah, it's all online now.

ST: Yup they've gotten rid of all of it. As a matter of fact, I was back at the University of Virginia this past year, and they were imploding the arena where we used to do registration. We watched it go down and just kind of [inaudible] So, they don't you know---They have a bigger arena now. They're really into sports, but at one time, it was a major two -day effort to get 16,000 people registered into their classes.

EC: Thats crazy!

ST: [laughs] It is so much more efficient now, it really is.

EC: Yeah.

ST: But the other piece of it though, that I think people miss, is that as we're coming through the lines, everybody would run into people that they knew from the previous year, and they'd stop. And they, you know, get off into the seats and chit chat and catch up.

EC: Mhm.

ST: And I don't know. You know, probably doesn't happen anymore, there was like a big party gathering spot for people to touch base with the people they'd known from the previous years. So, that was a good side of it. The bad side was going through all those lines.

SA: Yeah.

EC: It seems like it was a lot. I wouldn't want to do that.

ALL: [laughs]

ST: So anyway, when I left the University of Virginia, I left because my mother had cancer. And I wanted to live near her and spend some time with her. So, I moved up to New York State and went to work for a women's college, which was a major eye opener. Boy I love that place and I thought I was cheated. I should have gone to a women's college.

SA: What's the name?

ST: Wells college.

EC: Wells.

ST: It's coed now, but at the time it was all women. And it was just such a wonderful environment for those girls, it was really amazing. They come in, and it was particularly good for the person who almost never raised their hand in high school.

EC: Mhm.

ST: I mean they would go out, totally changed.

SA: Awe That's kind of like me.

EC: What?

SA: That's kind of like me with Women's Studies.

EC: Oh yeah. [Laughs]

ST: So, I was there for I think four years. And then I decided that the problems for recruiting women were not going to change, and I didn't see a future in that school. It was/ is too bad but it is about 20 miles from Cornell University on the lake, just a beautiful setting. I think it was done by Olmsted [Frederick Law Olmsted] who did umm Central Park in New York. It also laid out the college is the most beautiful place I've ever worked at, and they had a mile of lakefront. And a boat dock and it really was a great place to go to school, but it was 20 minutes from guys, or more like about a half hour.

EC: Mhm.

ST: Usually, the girls get on a bus on the weekend and head down to Cornell and date the Cornell men. But I could see where people might look at it and say, "Whoa, I don't know what I'm going to do out here in the country."

EC: Mhm.

ST: So, and a lot of what we found was that the dads did not want their daughters at a single sex institution. They would say, "Well, you know they're going to have to deal with men anyway. They should get out and go to a coed institution."

EC: Mhm.

ST: But there is something about spending that four years in a safe environment...

EC: That's true.

ST: ...that I think really gave these ladies the umph to go out and do things that maybe they wouldn't have done without that four years in that environment. So, anyway, I was very impressed by that school, I was sorry to leave it. Now and I went down to Texas. I just was looking for a change. But there was too much of a change, and I'm not a Texas person.

ALL: [laughs]

EC: How long were you there?

ST: I was down there for four years. And don't get me wrong. People in Texas were really lovely, but they're very conservative people.

EC: Yup.

ST: And umm.

SA: Would you consider yourself more liberal?

ST: Yes, definitely! Certainly more liberal than Texas [laughs]. So, then I came up here to Nichols College and spent I think about 15 years there before I decided to retire.

EC: Mhm.

ST: But Nichols was my big triumph I think of my career, because it was really in financial difficulty when I came there. And I was lucky enough to... I came, I started the same day as the new president, and she was a wonderful person for being gutsy, and willing to, you know, make the changes that needed to be made to save this school.

EC: Mhm.

ST: And so, [pause] between the two of us, we made substantial changes to the institution and it is now flourishing. It really is doing very very well so, you know, I can't take 100% of the credit for it but as a team...

EC: Yeah.

SA: Yeah.

ST: The two of us worked together and made those changes and I'm very proud of that accomplishment.

EC: What kind of changes like?

ST: Well, you'd look at the budget and say, "Are these people on drugs?" This huge amount of money coming in as revenue, and then budget offsetting expenses when you knew you weren't going to get that revenue.

SA: Oh yeah.

ST: The first conversation I had with Deborah, the president... I've been there about a month. I looked at the budget. I went down and I said, "You know, we've got a problem. We're not going

to make this money, this isn't going to come in." So, at the same time, we had people that were in dormitories that were virtually dangerous. I mean they had--- they didn't have sprinkler systems.

SA: Wow.

ST: Yeah, so they needed to come down. We needed a new dormitory we needed a new athletic center. And, so we had to go out for a bond issue and that was one of the toughest things that we did because you had to convince the people... Then, great bonds were investment grade, and that was the plan for turning the college around and was that really going to work? Thankfully enough we went to Standard and Poor's for a bond rating that they assigned women to us. And they graded us investment grade so that we could get the bond issue out and get the new dormitory building and the new athletic center built and that really helped turn things around, people started seeing better facilities.

EC: People would want to come.

ST: And yes, particularly that school appeals a lot to people that love athletics.

EC: Yeah.

ST: And they had 14 teams, seven women, and seven men's sports, when I was there, which is a lot for a school with about 1,000 students.

EC: Yeah.

ST: So, that was a big drive, the new athletic center. And, you know, we had to kind of get the faculty and the staff on board because they had not had raises in a long time, and we had to go in and tell them it's going to be a couple of more years till we balance this budget before you're going to see any raises. And they had faith in us, which was nice.

EC: Nice.

ST: And they also--- you never had any problem with people coming in and asking for, you know, want money for something that was certainly really needed for those at least those two years. Everybody's requests for stuff that they absolutely had to have to keep their classrooms going so that the support of the staff and the faculty was very, very helpful. And then I noticed, that to some extent, morale started to go down once we got to be successful. When we were all in a crisis, everybody could pull together.

EC: Mhm.

ST: But then when we started to have extra money, people started fighting over it. So, it was very interesting, I would not have anticipated that.

EC: Yeah.

ST: But sometimes a crisis is a good thing.

SA: Do you think umm if like you got assigned two men to do the bonding, do you think Nichols would have been as successful as it is now?

ST: I don't think so. I think those two ladies were 110% on our side. And the other thing that was a major coup for us was that the chair of our board was the Chief Financial Officer for, let me think. It's now Mapre Insurance. And I can't remember what it was. They, they are a gigantic car insurance agency and they do most of the people in Massachusetts, like 40 or 50% of the market. And they--- just a few years ago they were bought out by a Spanish company and that's when they became Mapfre. But before that, I can't even remember what they were. But anyway, they were a mover and shaker, a multimillionaire in that company, and he got on the phone with us to help us convince these ladies that we had, you know, total board support with this project and that it was going to work, and we were going to turn things around. So, things just fell into place for us we were, we were lucky, but we were also good. [Laughs] So, that's an unbeatable combination.

EC: Yeah, that's an awesome accomplishment. [Laughs]

[pause]

EC: I feel like that's a lot. [laughs]

[pause]

EC: Umm let's go back So when you're growing up, did you see a difference between men and women? And, like if look at your parents. Was your dad you know, like the breadwinner?

ST: No, actually my mother was.

SA: Wow.

ST: She was better- educated, she had a master's degree from the Eastman School of Music in Rochester. And my dad was a high school graduate. She made more money than he did all the time. My grandmother had worked, she's a piano teacher in her little town. And get this, you won't believe this. Little kids were allowed to leave school, walk over to our house and have a piano lesson and walk back.

EC: Wow.

SA: Wow.

ST: Unaccompanied. [laughs]

EC: That's crazy.

ST: It is, I mean it was a different world. But I was always aware of women who worked and always thought I would work. I never thought I would be like a housewife, which there were in those days people...

EC: Yeah.

SA: Yeah.

ST: ...ladies who sat home. I don't know what they did all day actually when their kids were in school. Certainly, they spent time raising their children before they got to school age, but after that it had to be kind of dull.

EC: Just chillin at home.

ST: [laughs]

SA: [laughs]

EC: That's what they were doing.

ST: [laughs] Dusting.

SA: Did you have any friends that had moms that were stay- at -home moms at all?

ST: ummm [Pause] No, all my friends' moms worked.

SA: Wow.

EC: Different than like what we learn in class.

SA: Yeah.

ST: Yeah and I hadn't thought about it but now that I do think about it, everybody had a working mom.

EC: Wow, that's different.

SA: Yeah, we hear so much different in class.

ST: [laughs]

[pause]

ST: And there were a lot of non -working moms but they weren't the people that were...You know, their kids were not my specific friends, they weren't my enemies or anything, but you know that the girls that I hung around with all had, working moms.

[Pause]

SA: I'm like amazed.

ST: laughs]

EC: It's just so different than what I thought.

SA: Yeah! And your childhood was in New York right?

ST: Sorry?

SA: Your childhood was in New York?

ST: Yes.

SA: So, there was a lot of work going around in New York, because it is bigger.

EC: I mean, she was upstate. Right?

ST: Yes.

EC: Rochester.

ST: Right, snow country.

SA: Oh, it isn't?

EC: It's not New York City.

SA: Oh it isn't?

EC: New York City is down she up near you know like the five finger lakes.

SA: [laughs]

ST: You know where the Great Lakes are?

SA: Yes.

ST: Right on Lake Ontario.

SA: Oh.

EC: So, she's way up.

ST: Yeah, a cold country, the snow would come in over the lake and dump right on Rochester.

SA: Oh!

ST: I never realized until I left Rochester, I was probably depressed for a big chunk of my childhood because the sun doesn't shine there.

SA: Yeah.

ST: It has so many gloomy days. I moved out to Las Vegas and I'm like, "I love it out here." There's sunshine all the time.

SA: What was your favorite place to live?

ST: Mmm, oh that is tough. [pause] I actually like it here.

SA: Really?

EC: [laughs]

ST: Yeah, New England. You know both of my brothers are in Florida. I gave some thought to moving down to Florida, but after having lived in Florida-like climate at Lamar University, there's the same amount of time that you don't go outside because it's too cold here and you don't go outside cause it's too hot down there and buggy.

EC: What part of Florida are they from?

ST: They're near Tampa.

EC: Tampa, I have family that lives there, too.

ST: Well, they love it down there. They are not moving and I'm thinking with climate change, I think we are in the perfect spot.

EC: Yeah.

SA: Yeah.

ST: We are not going to sink under the ocean like Boston might and if it gets warmer here, I wouldn't complain.

EC: I wouldn't either.

SA: Me either.

ALL: [laugh]

EC: I'm not a winter person.

SA: Me either.

ST: So anyhow, now that I am retired, I spend my time volunteering and spend time taking classes at WISE [Worcester Institute for Senior Education] here. I'm the treasurer and I'm also the treasurer of the Massachusetts Genealogical [Council]. I have an interest in genealogy that I picked up once I got retired. It's been great to be able to do just what I want to do.

EC: Yeah, so what do you do with that you know the whole genealogy thing?

ST: Well, my mother had gotten started on it and she traced us back to the English ancestry.

EC: Mhm.

ST: And so, I've been adding to what she found and putting it onto the computer.

EC: Mhm.

ST: And Boston University offers a fifteen- week course every Saturday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. class in Genealogy that I took.

EC: Wow.

ST: And I mean the homework was probably...There were weeks when I put 30 hours into the homework for the next Saturday because they would send you out to research stuff.

EC: Mhm.

ST: And you would be spending an enormous amount of time on the computer and in the libraries. And all that stuff is a hobby with me....

EC: Mhm.

ST: ...you know, and just pretty much working on my own family history [Pause] but...

EC: I always think that stuff is interesting.

ST: Yeah, it really is.

EC: My grandmother does that. She's one out of 18 kids so...

ST: [laughs]

EC: She's actually your age.

ST: What I found is there's two things that I enjoy now. I found there are things that you pick up that are interesting when you get older. One is genealogy. When you turn 50, you'll be happy to learn whatever your grandmother did.

EC: Yeah.

SA: [laughs]

ST: And you kind of have to be over 50. I have to admit a few people that were interested in genealogy as young kids, but they're wild exceptions. Almost everybody that comes to our conferences and stuff--- it's all grey hair. The other thing is opera, opera is all grey hair.

EC: Mhm.

ST: But I love opera, I never thought I would.

EC: Huh.

ST: And in my retirement years I now travel around and go to various opera festivals.

EC: That's cool.

SA: Yeah.

ST: So, you never know. Someday you ladies will be old, and you'll be in the opera and you'll think back and say that she told us and we never thought we would be here, but here we are

ALL: [laughs]

SA: Going back to WISE. Can you explain what it is?

ST: Sure, WISE offers short courses. They're all five weeks long and they are an hour and a half once a week. And they may be things that people are interested in, but maybe didn't have time to take when they were in college. Like I'm sure you know you can't fit everything into your schedule. You have to at some point specialize and they're a lot of things people are interested in, and they just never had the time to take. So, we offer classes in literature, in music, in art in science, and I'm taking one now on climate change and the need for energy and how much energy the world uses and how we are going to meet that without burning ourselves up. Let's see, what else we have: classes in politics, classes in religion, all kinds of religions. So, we have an outing that we do...

EC: Mhm.

ST: ...in October, so there are all these opportunities for learning things that you were always interested in but never had the time to do in your career. And so for 265 dollars we run 80 classes a year. You can take as many as you can fit into for that 265 bucks, so it's the real deal.

EC: Yeah, why isn't college like that?

ST: [laughs]

EC: If you want to learn something, just wait and go to WISE. [laughs]

ST: But all of the people that run the program, except for Susan and Jill, are volunteers. So, the people that schedule the classes, go through the class proposal and pick out which ones we are going to offer, all done by volunteers.

EC: Wow.

SA: Wow.

ST: So, it's it's a really good group of people.

EC: Mhm.

ST: They are all interested in education. Many of them are exceedingly well educated. I went to a class once on James Joyce and the instructor said, "Now we all remember that the Greek god of poetry was and you know half the class yells out, "Pegasus," and I'm like I didn't know that. [laughs]

EC: I wouldn't have known that.

ST: All people had very good classical educations. I'm amazed sometimes at how well educated my compatriots are in the WISE program. So, they're interested in a lot of different things. We have a study group on the Supreme Court that meets whenever the Supreme Court does something interesting. One that's just getting started on climate change...

EC: Mhm.

ST: ... one on writers which I'm going to join and I'm hoping to write up one of my ancestors that was the first minister in Littleton, Massachusetts, and an interesting life. He had the witch scandal when he was the minister and then finally got booted out for drinking too much. And presumably I can read through the lines on this committee they put together to figure out what to do with him. When he drank too much, he talked too much and he said insulting things. So anyhow I think it will be interesting. I have 19 pages of information on him...

EC: Wow.

ST: ...that I want to write up and that so my family can read through it. So, there's a lot going on at WISE.

SA: What led you to the WISE program?

ST: A good friend of mine, we had a spiritual book club that... I go to the Presbyterian Church. We started it and we were looking for people from all different religions to contribute to this.

EC: Mhm.

ST: And so one of the WISE members came, and she just retired, and she was talking about how wonderful WISE was. So, she was...It's kind of word of mouth how it gets around, but she

brought me in, and I've been grateful to her ever since, although she did die a year and a half ago of brain cancer. I was sorry to see her go, she was a lovely lady.

EC: How long have you been with the WISE program?

ST: Five years now.

EC: Five Wow.

SA: What's your favorite part about it?

ST: Favorite part about WISE?

SA: Like courses, like your like, what did you get out of it that makes you feel good?

ST: I'm a person who loves to learn things.

EC: Mhm.

ST: And I'm taking this Impressionist art class right now and I never knew it before but there's this huge Impressionist art collection in Shelburne Vermont in the museum up there. Well, I've been all over New England since I retired, going to all these little museums that the colleges and universities have. Smith College has a fabulous collection and Williams [College] and some of these other places and I did not know about Shelburne, so I'm going to do a road trip up there. [laughs]

EC: That would be cool, I love Vermont.

ST: Yeah! It's a nice place.

[pause]

EC: [Laughs]

ST: Okay ladies you've done my life.

EC: I know. How long has this been going, just wondering? Oh 50 minutes, whatever.

SA What do you think about everything that's going on politically?

ST: Oh, don't even ask.

SA: [laughs]

ST: It's so depressing.

EC: Very.

ST: It really is. Number one, I cannot believe that we hired somebody that seems to be delusional....

EC: Mhm.

ST: ...to be the president! [laughs] It's like how did this happen? And instead of being you know the uniter that he promised us he would be in his inaugural address, he's the great divider.

SA: Mhm.

EC: That's his whole plan pretty much.

ST: Yes, yep so I just I don't even know what to uh say. I just I know America is strong enough to get through this, but it seems to be a scary time.

EC: For us, too.

ST: Yeah, I feel badly for you guys watching little Greta running around the world and talk about having people have to get up off their duffs and do something about climate change. And I just hope she's successful because it does seem like if we don't do something very quickly, the world that you and your children inherit is going to be not a pleasant place to live.

EC: Yep nope.

ST: We could end up looking like Venus which apparently is in the same kind of area where it could be another earth.

EC: Yeah, I heard something like that.

ST: But it's got all of its atmosphere is methane, so it doesn't have the protection that we have from our atmosphere, so it's like 800 degrees on the surface of Venus.

EC: Yeah.

ST: I'm thinking, "Oh no we don't want to be that." [laughs]

EC: No. [pause] Do you want to end like there? But I like have a question.

All: [laugh]

EC: How do you get through tough times and like what kind of thoughts keep you going?

ST: Well, I think somewhere in my 30s, and this was early 30s like maybe 31 or 32, I remember this clearly. I'm sitting at my desk and I thought, "You know, there isn't going to be anything in life that comes up that I can't handle." And all of the sudden, I had this great feeling of confidence and nothing particular happens to me to give me that. And I think it was just growing

older and realizing that you know whatever comes my way you're going to be able to get through it. You are going be able to handle it.

EC: Mhm.

ST: And that will come to you at some point.

EC: I was going say hopefully sooner than later.

ALL: [Laughs]

ST: Well, I have to say it was a long hall to the thirties.

SA: [laughs]

EC: Ten more years.

SA: Umm what was your greatest success in your life?

ST: I really think my work with Nichols was the thing I'm proudest of the most. We made it onto the cover of Business Officer Magazine which I know you never heard of. But business officers in higher education have a group called NACUBO which is the National Association of College and University Business Officers, and they have a magazine and they did an article on our turn around and we were on the cover.

EC: That's awesome.

ST: Ahh [laughs] I was like, "Ah this is cool."

SA: [laughs]

EC: That is awesome.

SA: What advice would you give to young women, or someone like us, or like any women who is struggling in life who like needs a little push to like believe in themselves?

EC: She just gave it to us.

ST: Yeah, you can do it. Life isn't going to throw anything at you that you can't handle [laughs]. Trust me on this.

EC: Even though I always say things happen for a reason.

ST: Yes, that too, yes and sometimes that reason is you know you need some personal growth, which might be painful.

EC: Mhm.

SA: Yeah.

ST: But nevertheless when you get through to the other side of it, you can look back and say, “Yeah I really grew during that phase of my life and I didn't realize it when I was suffering, but now I see the point of it.”

EC: Right [Pause] I think that's it.

ST: [laughs]

EC: Unless you want to say anything else.

ST: Nope.