

Interviewee: Sara Swillo Muckian
Interviewers: Colleen Birkmeyer and Julie Carpino
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Transcribers: Colleen Birkmeyer and Julie Carpino



Overseen by Dr. Carl Robert Keyes, Assumption College

Abstract: Sara Swillo Muckian was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1983. She was raised in the city and takes pride in residing there her entire life. In 2005, she graduated from her favorite college, Holy Cross. She then started a career at Assumption College, where she developed an interest in helping others by working in Student Affairs. Currently, Sara is the Associate Director of the Holy Cross Fund. Recently, she and her husband welcomed a daughter, who is now one year old, into the world. Sara remains driven and positive while working, caring for her family, and learning the stages of motherhood. In this interview, Sara expresses her love for the city of Worcester. It is out of this love that her dedication to help others and give back to the community emerged. Sara volunteers in several different organizations, especially LLS [Leukemia Lymphoma Society]. She ran five Boston Marathons to help raise money for this cause, and also directed other fundraising for the organization. By being involved with LLS and many other organizations, Sara makes even more connections to Worcester and its people. She asserts that helping others is highly rewarding and continues to fulfill her roles as a college administrator, wife, and mother.

CB: We are completing a citywide oral history of the lives of Worcester women, aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences. 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/community involvement. We want to focus today on your experiences with the city of Worcester. Thank you for your help with this important project!

CB: Are you ready to record?

SSM: Yes.

JC: So we will start off with some basic questions. What is your full name including both maiden name and married name if applicable?

SSM: Sure. My full name is Sara Swillo Muckian. My maiden name was Sara Swillo. I got a double last name after I was married.

JC: And you said you were born in Worcester?

SSM: I was.

JC: So you are obviously married. Do you have any children?

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SSM: Yes. I have a nine and a half month old daughter. Her name is Delaney Grace.

JC: What a beautiful name!

CB: How pretty.

JC: What cultures/ethnicities do you identify with?

SSM: I identify with white-Caucasian. I am also in terms of my background, half Polish and half Italian.

JC: I am also Italian!

CB: So tell me about your parents.

SSM: Sure, so I am an only child and my mom and dad are Rosanna Palladino Swillo and Randolph Swillo. My mom is the Italian and she grew up off of Shrewsbury Street which is the Italian area of Worcester. She was one of three. She later moved to the Greendale area because when she went to go to kindergarten, she spoke not a word of English, she only spoke Italian. So her parents up and moved to an Irish Catholic neighborhood so they could all learn English. My dad, who is the Polish side was born and raised in Worcester. His family grew up in the Webster Square area which is where a lot of Lithuanians and Polish people lived. My dad was also one of three. My parents met when my aunt invite my mom on a ski trip. My dad happened to be there and after that they started dating.

CB: You mentioned that your mom went to school not knowing a word of English. Are you bilingual by any chance?

SSM: I am not bilingual. I wish I was! I think my mom, after moving to an Irish Catholic neighborhood, I think she understands Italian, and I think I do too. Growing up I was very close to my Nana, so I think I am pretty good at understanding Italian, but if you asked me to say something in Italian, I would have no clue. That is kind of sad, because it is something that is passed down from generation to generation and I really appreciate my friends who are bilingual.

JC: So you said you were born in Worcester as well?

SSM: Yes, that is correct. I was born in Hahnemann Hospital, which is no longer a hospital is more of an outpatient center. Their claim to fame is that the brothers from New Kids on The Block were born there too. When I was born we lived on Lansing Ave. which is in the Greendale area of Worcester. When I was about three years old, my parents moved me literally up the street to a new house. It was bigger and it was what they could afford. My mom still lives there although my dad passed away. The house is literally behind Assumption College.

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JC: So you liked the neighborhood?

SSM: Yes I did. The street I lived on is sort of a cutover street between Salisbury and Grove Street. In terms of a neighborhood, it wasn't a neighborhood where there were tons of kids and you could ride your bike. The street was really busy. A lot of my "neighborhood" friends actually came from my nana and papa's neighborhood. When my grandfather came back from World War II, there was a GI bill called "Stepping Stones to Better Homes." It offered a place for the veterans to come home to after the war. The neighborhood was filled with people's grandchildren and this is how I made a lot of my friends. My husband and I live in that house today. A lot of my friends also came from where I went to school in Worcester, which was Venerini Academy.

CB: Do you have any other family members that lived in the same area?

SSM: Yes, my mother was one of three and her brother lived in Holden and raised his family there. I have a cousin (we are not blood related) she lived on Salisbury Street and we grew up together. At one point, my parents and my grandparents, my uncle and my cousin Erika and I all lived within a square area, close to one another. But right now, in terms of my family, both sets of grandparents have passed away and my mom and dad's brothers in sisters have either passed away or moved. They are all scattered; some are in Cape Cod, some are in Florida.

JC: So when you grew up here did you see any changes in Worcester from what you remember then to where you are now?

SSM: Yes, I vividly remember the year the Greendale Mall opened. Now, when you go to the Greendale Mall, it is like nothing, because now there are so many malls opened. But when that opened it was a huge deal; it had restaurants, and all these places to shop. A big area of Worcester that has changed is the Water Street area. I remember growing up, going there to Widoff's bakery, the Polish bakery. That was big with my Dad's side. We went there a lot around Easter time. But that was about it, you went there, you went to the bakery then you got back in your car. Now there are college bars and restaurants, and many more places to go. That area has really gotten revitalized. Another area that has changed is Shrewsbury Street. As I said, my mom grew up right off of Shrewsbury Street on Adams Street. We had a lot of family that lived there who have now moved to Paxton, so I guess I do have family nearby in Paxton. Shrewsbury Street had a lot of mom and pop shops on it. You wouldn't find Dunkin' Donuts or anything like that, so there weren't any chain restaurants, but there also wasn't the fabulous variety of restaurants that are there now. Now, I happen to work at Holy Cross College and parents are always asking me where to bring their family to eat. I always say, "Shrewsbury Street," because anywhere on Shrewsbury Street, you can get something good to eat. So I think neighborhoods have changed. I also never realized until I started working at one, that there are 12 colleges and universities in Worcester. Between August and May you see a totally different kind of life in Worcester. Although in June and July there are still many students in the area

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living, doing internships but it kind of dies down. It really becomes vibrant, however at the end of August when college starts up again.

JC: Where did you attend school?

SSM: I started at Venerini Academy in Worcester which is K-8. Then I went to Notre Dame Academy which is an all-girls preparatory school on Salisbury Street in Worcester. From there I went to the College of the Holy Cross, which is on the other side of town.

JC: What did you study?

SSM: I was a Sociology major. I went in as a Spanish major; I wanted to be a high school Spanish teacher. Then I took sociology class. I vividly remember being like “Mom, Dad! I want to switch my major to Sociology!” Their response was, “Okay, we’re sure you’ll find a job as a sociology major!”

CB: What made you want to go to college so close to home?

SSM: To be perfectly honest, I applied nowhere else. Neither of my parents went there, they both went to Worcester State, so it wasn’t like a legacy thing with my family. But a lot of my parents had friends that went there, we went to basketball camp there, and I heard so much about it. I remember driving past it as a little kid and calling it “the castle on the hill,” thinking it looked like a big beautiful castle and I wanted to go there. So when it came to junior and senior year in high school, I was like, okay, here is the deal; I am going to apply to Holy Cross early decision. If I don’t get in, I’ll do a post-grad year at Worcester Academy and then I will reapply. There was just something about when I walked on that campus, I just felt connected to it and I felt I could thrive there. I really wanted to be at a small school. My mom convinced me to apply at Assumption as a backup. I remember dropping off my application at Assumption and then going back to school to run track. When I came in from running my coach was standing there with a funny look on her face and asked everyone to leave the room. When I went in, the whole room was filled with purple and white balloons and my parents were there. They said, “You got in! You got in to Holy Cross! The phone call came this morning!” So that is how I found out. I quickly realized that I should call Assumption because I know how much work goes in to processing an application. I told them although I had just dropped off my application that morning, they could throw it out. I also told them that my best friend was applying to Assumption and they should be on the lookout for her application. Now looking back, I realize that I probably should have applied at other schools, but I just couldn’t picture myself anywhere else. It’s a feeling you get as a high school senior that you know you feel at home on that campus.

CB: What was your experience like at Holy Cross? Did you love it?

SSM: I loved my time at Holy Cross. I think I really grew as a person there. When I got there I went in running cross country and was able to go in at preseason and really immerse myself. I was glad to get away from the pettiness of high school. I really did not thrive there. Then I injured myself sophomore year, but then I met my core group of friends which I consider to be my 4 AM in the morning friends. People really need that in college. When a crisis happens in your life later, they are the people you can pick up the phone and call at 4 AM in the morning. The best way I can describe it is like when my dad passed away. We knew it was coming and he was on hospice care and we knew he was dying. The day he died, I vividly remember, I pick up the phone and called one of my girlfriends and one of my guy friends from Holy Cross. In a matter of 24 hours, I had friends driving down from Canada, from New York and other places. That is because of those two people I met, my four-in-the-morning friends and they spread the word. Before I knew it I had so many people on my doorstep who wanted to make sure I was okay, who wanted to make sure my mom was okay. I think in terms of Holy Cross, I found out who I was, my experience determined the person I wanted to be. Holy Cross asks three questions of students: “Who am I?” ”Who do I want to become?” and “Who do I want to be for others? I continually ask myself those questions. I think these are very important questions.

CB: You said you found your core group of friends sophomore year. Was freshman year a lot of highs and lows?

SSM: Freshman year I was on a great hall. We had the only co-ed hall of the whole college; there were half guys and half girls. So I had a core group of friends, some of them I ran with, some of them I just hung out with. Some of them were guys, a few were on the Holy Cross hockey team. It was great for a while. I ended up dating the twin brother of one of the guys on our hall. He went to Syracuse [University]. I started dating him February of my freshman year. The one that went to Holy Cross was his identical twin, whom I was not dating. We dated all summer and we ended up breaking up two weeks into sophomore year. I was devastated. I remember having this core group of friends who encouraged me to go out. They kept pushing me to go out and one night we ended up at an off campus party. That was the night I met my best friend. She and I ended up hanging out until the end of the party and I was thinking that I had to walk all the way up this hill to my residence hall. My friend said she did too and when I asked her where she lived and I found out that she lived on Mulledy [Hall]. A couple of our guy friends offered to walk with us so we weren't walking alone. In our conversation walking home, we discovered that we lived on opposite sides of the same stairwell! We are still very good friends; she was the maid of honor in my wedding. It's not like freshman year was bad, but you jump from group to group, trying to find what works for you. So I ended up hanging out with Dee Dee and a new group of friends and I could totally be myself with them. I could have ugly cries in front of them, I could be goofy if I needed to be. That's when I knew that these people would be my forever friends. However, none of them grew up around here. Dee Dee is from Seattle Washington, my other maid of honor, Maggie is from Illinois. I also have three very close guy friends. One is from Ithaca New York, one is from Ajax, Ontario and the other one is from Dryden Ontario. So, that's my core group. They all live somewhere close now. They are all either in Boston or New York.

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I can tell you one funny thing I can tell you. I had a core group of friends in high school. We literally lost touch freshman year of college, all of college, and then about four years after college. Then all of a sudden—I of course never left Worcester—but then they all moved back. We all started having kids and we all started getting married. All of a sudden I reconnected. So I have this—so you're an adult now (over thirty) and I have reconnected with my high-school friends and even some of my elementary school friends. They are in the same part of the life cycle as me; married, with kids. I think one of the benefits I have is that I went to school in Worcester and I still get to remain very close to my college friends because they come back for reunion. It's nice because they come back to the city, and I am still here.

CB: So you said your first job was here at Assumption?

SSM: Yeah.

CB: What were you again?

JC: [laughs]

CB: Sorry.

SSM: Yeah. No problem. So when I left Holy Cross I went to grad school and I went out to Springfield College. And I got my master's degree in education out there. And it was a two-year program for masters. And after your first year you had to get an internship. I was studying to get my degree in education but it was specialized in student personal administration. So it was to work with college students and I was at a conference during my first year of grad school and all the presentations were horrible. Except for one. And this woman presented at this presentation and I walked out of the room. And I was like, "You know what? I should walk back in and let her know that like she was the only good presentation."

JC: You're the only good one.

SSM: You're the only good one. So I walked back in and said, "Hi. My name is Sara Swillo. And I go to Springfield College. And I just want to let you know. Your presentation was really great. And she was like, "Oh my name's Nancy Crimmin." And I saw her name tag. And it said that she worked at Assumption College. And she said, "Springfield. What do you do there, Sara?" I'm a grad school assistant of Student Activities. And she was like, "Oh. Great! I'm from Worcester." [And I said], "My road is right there from Assumption. You can literally walk to Assumption. It's right there." And Nancy said, "Oh. That's great! What are you doing this summer?" I was like, "Oh. That's funny you should ask. I'm actually looking for an internship." Nancy said, "Oh. Darn! I was actually looking for someone to babysit my kids." She had two boys and she was the Dean of Campus life here at Assumption. And I was like, "Oh. Well I was looking for an internship. Nancy asked, "In what?" "Well, administration is what I would like

but I just need an internship. But I'll take anything. And I want it to be in Worcester". So she said, "Come see me tonight at the closing dinner. I want to introduce you to some people". So it was the closing dinner. I got dressed and went. And she introduced to me Catherine WoodBrooks, who was the Vice President of Student Affairs at Assumption. And they handed me a name. And they said call this guy, Joe. He's the director of Student Involvement. You know he has an internship available for student orientation. So I said great! So I called him. And I set up an interview. And drove out. And when I walked into Charlie's. I walked into my interview. And sitting there in Administration Assist position was this women Leelee and she was the Administration Assist when I was at Holy Cross. And I was like, "Hi Leelee. How're doing? And she said, "Good. Let me tell Joe that you're here". Walked into my interview... handed Joe my resume, handed my cover letter and he said, "Oh okay. What day can you start?" And I was like, "What?" Joe said, "What day can you start?" So I asked, "I thought this was an interview. Joe was like, "Oh. The first Assist Director I ever hired was this women by the name of Brenda Hosen Sullivan who was my mentor in college. Brenda already called me. You got the job. Not a problem. What day do you want to start?" So I said, "How about next week?"

So I started as an intern at the orientation program here at Assumption. And it was the summer of 2006. And in the midst of it the Assist Director of Student Activities left. And I was like "Oh my gosh." This my ideal first job. But I didn't have my master's. And I knew you had to have it. So I asked Joe—I'll never forget it. I think is was in Testa [Science Building]. We were somewhere on campus. And I was like, "Hey Joe. Out of curiosity. Could I apply for the Assist Director of Student Activities? Like I know I don't have the educational background. And he was like, "Well here's the deal. You can apply because I think it would give you good experience in the interview process. But I can't guarantee you anything. And I can't guarantee that it will go beyond me saying I can't guarantee you anything." So I said, "Okay." So I applied for it in March 2006. I came and had my interview. And I wanted to say it was like April of 2006. I got a phone call that I got the job with the stipulation that would have to complete my master's while I was here working.

SSM: So I would work full time and I would be able to leave work early to drive to Springfield to get my master's. So I started here in I think it was in August 2006. It was either July or August. So I started here as the Assistant Director of Student Activities. And I did that for four years. So I was here until 2010. And at that point I moved from here. There was a job at Holy Cross. I had received a phone call from Brenda, who was my mentor and the one who helped me get my job here at Assumption. She told me there was an opening for an Associate Director of Student Involvement here, "Would you be interested in coming back to Holy Cross?" So I moved from Assumption and went to Holy Cross and I was the Associate Director of Student Involvement for three years there. And then in 2013 I left for the second time in my life from Worcester. So I left for one year of grad school in Springfield. And then I left in 2013. So I got married over the summer with my husband. We moved to Tewksbury, Mass. So I took a job at Endicott College that was in Beverly, Mass. We moved to Tewksbury because it was half way between his job and my job. I went out to Endicott to be the Director of Student Activities. And it was not a good experience. Like it was horrible.

CB: Oh wow.

SSM: It was not what I expected. It really tore at my values and what I believed we should provide for students. Right off the bat, it was a really bad fit. When you sign up for a job, you're like, "What do I do now?" Around March of that year, March of 2014, I was like I need to get back to Worcester. I need to get back to Assumption or Holy Cross or a new job altogether. I didn't know what I going do. I saw that there was a job at Holy Cross but it was in advancement, so fundraising. And so I called the Director of Advancement, who I had known when I was a student at Holy Cross, who I had known when I worked at Holy Cross and who I had known who was in Student Activities for many years before he switching to advancement. So I called to say, "Hey from your standpoint is there transferable skills?" And he said, "Absolutely." So I left Endicott. Came back to Holy Cross. And I became the Associate Director of the Holy Cross Fund in 2014. So I'm in the second year of that. So in my lifetime I've left Worcester twice; one for school and the other for a job. And both times I came..

JC: ...Coming right back.

SSM: ...yeah. I'm coming right back here.

JC: So what was it about Worcester that you just love?

SSM: So for a city, Worcester is a really tiny community. And one of the reasons why I kept my maiden name, the reason I go Sarah Swillo Muckian instead of just Sarah Muckian is because my mom and dad were very active in Worcester. They were very active on many boards. They did volunteerism. They were both born and raised in Worcester. The Swillo name was known. And I thought gosh darn it. I've been a Swillo for thirty-one years of my life. I don't want to get rid of it. So by having that in my name people say, "Oh is your dad Randy or is your mom Rosanna?" So I kept my maiden name. I think what brought me back was that there is a community. This might be a big city but if I bet you the three of us sat here right now and started naming people we know, there's like a sixth degree of separation. At some point you will find some connection that comes around Worcester.

JC: It's so crazy.

CB: Yeah. My mom went to college here. Yeah her family...So it's literally insane

SSM: Yeah. Cause you either grew up in the same neighborhood. Or you played on the same basketball team. Or you played against each other in basketball. You have to look at it at a certain standpoint. Like now I look at it at certain standpoint of having a baby, a daughter. There's great schools around here. There's some not so great schools around here. And I think it's like...I don't know...it's like there's a highway. You can get everywhere quickly. Boston isn't far away. Providence isn't too far away. You have everything you need. You have the stores you need. You have the restaurants you need. You have enough going on and of course. Kind of

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going back to how we were talking about the change over the years. There's culture in Worcester. There's things to do in Worcester. Sometimes you've just got to find them. Like there are things to do. Yeah.

CB: As college student I don't get off campus that often but when I do I do like it here. Whether it's like visiting a school or going out to eat.

SSM: Yeah. Like do they still have the buses here?

CB: They do on Fridays and Saturdays after 5pm. It takes you to Blackstone [Shopping Center].

SSM: There's things to do. If you have a car on campus your whole world will change as to where you can go and what you can do. I remember those days. Being from Worcester, and going to Holy Cross. There would be times where I would be like mom and dad can you bring me my car, just to get off campus.

JC: What was it like having a daughter?

SSM: You're whole world changes. And I think-I remember, we were very excited that we had gotten pregnant. And it's an amazing experience. It's kind of awkward and weird having a baby in you. And everyone treats you—this is like the weirdest thing. From a women's standpoint you have this baby. Like oh my gosh. It's very exciting. They make sure you don't trip in the snow. They are so kind to you when you are pregnant with the baby, and the baby is completely protected. But the minute you have the baby, all of a sudden it's time to work. It's like, "What do you mean you can't lift these chairs?" You're like, "Wow. I just had a baby." But it is. You see the world in a totally different way. And a lot of the time I'll like talk to Delaney. And people will say oh she's so pretty, she's so cute. And I always say I don't care if she's pretty and I don't care that she's cute. I want her to be kind. As long as she is kind and as long as she's humble like that's what's important. A lot of time, my husband and I will talk to her and be like, "You know you don't have to be a bully. And you want to stand up. You want to know who you are." And of course she's only nine months. And she has no idea what we are saying to her but what it does change the way you start viewing the world. You start interacting, you're teaching how to share. And it's kind of a reminder of what we should do because we sometimes forget. And as we get older like to be kind and to be humble and appreciative of what we are given. And to be appreciative of how much we've worked to get where we are. But when you have this little human being and you're like, "Oh my god. I'm going to set her foundation of what she's believes in." And you start saying to yourself, "Oh." And you do. You do change. If you have a really bad at work, like I came home and her first word was mama and it wasn't dada. And I was really excited. She was like, "Mama." And I was like, "Yes." And your whole world changes to how you want to raise her and I think it goes back to your parents say this to you as mine did to me. I want to give you a better life than what I had. And when you have a little baby all of a sudden you're like I really do want to give you a better life. I want you to not struggle. Although,

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I do want her to struggle. In our struggle is where we find some of our core values but I don't want her to struggle to the point where it's so bad. I want her to struggle enough to figure out what she wants to do.

CB: Maybe to build character?

SSM: Exactly. I want her to build some character. Yes it's a totally different feeling.

CB: How did you come up with the name Delaney?

SSM: So it's really funny. So my husband and I were like okay we are having a boy. We talked about boy names. Were totally not on the same page. I was like, "Nope. We are not naming him that. Nope we're not naming him that." And he was like, "I don't like your names." So it was horrible. So we were like let's pray it will be a girl and not have a boy. So when it came to girls and with the boys too, we were like let's sit down and make a list of our top five names. And out of the top five, my husband and I had four of the same girl names.

JC: Wow.

SSM: And the four girl names were Delaney, Lucy, Agnes and Peyton. And for a long time she was going to be Agnes because I kept thinking Aggie getting on the bus as a kindergarten student as totally cute. But then I thought of poor Agnes in college and being called on the first day of school is Agnes there? Like the first time she goes out to a bar and someone's like, "Hey, I'm Pat, hey I'm Sue and hey I'm Agnus." I just felt so bad for her. But Agnes as old aunt. So Agnes was just thrown off the table. So it was Delany, Lucy or Peyton. And honestly we didn't know what we were going to name her until we saw her.

JC: Those are all good names.

SSM: She came out. And there was this one moment. I was just like [to her husband], "I think I want to name her Delaney. And you get to pick the middle name." And we were like okay. And we picked out a couple of names, and he was like Grace. And it's not a family name. My husband is one of seven though. And he's the youngest. He's the baby. All his other brother and sisters are married. And among his brothers and sisters they had seventeen kids.

JC: Wow.

SSM: Delaney has seventeen cousins. And there is a rule in my husband's family that you cannot reuse a name. So that took away a lot of names we were thinking. But it's kind of funny. We didn't know this until after Delany was born. Delany is my niece Bridget's middle name and Grace is her sister's middle name.

JC: Wow.

SSM: So did you have her named after them? And we were like no. We had no idea. It was just coincidence that Delaney and Grace were the two names we put together.

CB: That's cool.

JC: That's crazy.

SSM: It is.

CB: Would you consider having more kids in the future?

SSM: Yeah. I think we would. We've talked about it. I think right now it's just one of those things. My daughter is watched by my mom. Every morning I drop her off before I go to work. And she's like, "Please don't have a kid right now. I need one to at least be walking or talking or possibly out of diapers before the next one comes around. I'm sixty-two years old and the thought of watching two little ones..." So my husband and I feel like we will definitely have another. And as an only child, and as much as I appreciate being an only child, I think it taught me to grow up quick. I really always wanted siblings. Like I said, my husband is one of seven. So he's like, "We need to have two or three." And I'm like, "Wow. Two is good for me." Like two is a really solid number. My hope is that ideally, he wants a boy and I just want another baby, boy or girl. But I think we want to give Delany another sibling. Yeah.

CB: That's nice

[Pause]

JC: So you said your parents did a lot of volunteering in the community. Do you partake in anything they have done or any new community service?

SSM: The biggest community service or volunteerism thing that I do is that I have run five Boston Marathons.

CB: Wow. That's cool.

JC: Good for you!

SSM: Yeah. Thank you! Thank you. I've run them—so the first one I ran was for Easter Seals. And that was kind of like a fluke. They needed a runner. So I was like yeah I'll fundraise for you. But for other marathons I've ran, I've ran for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society training team. And for them I ran and you raise money. The minimum has gone up, but right now is 5,000 dollars. You raise 5,000 dollars and then you run the Boston marathon. But over my time with LLS or Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, I became a mentor so after my first marathon

with them, I got the names of fifteen people, who were new to fundraising and new to Leukemia and Lymphoma, and I would help them with their fundraising and I would mentor them through the eighteen or nineteen week training period. So I got very involved in that. And that actually came from Joe, the guy who hired him at Assumption, because he ran for LLS and so he got me involved with them. So I did that. And that was just something that took off. I had a professor in college who passed away from lymphoma and he was actual a close family friend. So I raised money for him and as I started raising money, people would come out the woodwork like students who I worked with would say hey I had leukemia at one point or my brother is suffering from it right now. So I did a lot of work with them. In terms of my parents, they were very involved with the Dismas House. It was like a halfway house in Worcester.

JC: I've heard of that.

SSM: Yeah. So growing up my dad was very involved with them so for every Thanksgiving we would go there and serve them dinner and eat with the people in the building. And I've been involved with the Interfaith Home, which is on June Street. It's a bunch of single moms, who have kids and all live together. They're getting job training. But you can go there on the weekends and basically you babysit the kids so they can study. You cook food and actually sit down with them. So I've done that. And my mom was very involved with the Mustard Seed, which feeds the homeless off Main Street. So I think I've done a lot of one time, like let's go to the veteran shelter or let's go to Dismas House. I would say community service wise the biggest ones I've been involved were team training. And then when was here at Assumption I did one of the SEND trips, I went down to Baltimore and did Habitat for Humanities. So I brought down nine students and a colleague of mine with me. And that was a weeklong of building houses in Baltimore.

JC: That's awesome. I've done the Mustard Seed one before. But it was a while ago. And you just feel so good helping everyone else.

SSM: I think one of the things is a lot of the time when people go do volunteer work or feeding the poor or hungry, it's like you go through and cook the food and it's like they think they are a servant and that's what people think they're job is and that's wonderful. But what I think is, what I've come to learn from my mom and dad is that it's not about feeding them. It's like sit down and have a conversation because these people are just down on their luck and in a blink of an eye that can happen to anyone. So my favorite thing was always talking with the people I got to serve it was like, "Okay here's your food, but more importantly tell me about your life. Tell me about your family." I think that goes back to the background that my mom and dad instilled in me. But it's also has to do with probably my time at Holy Cross and that whole question of who am I to others and how can I help serve?

JC: That's so awesome that you take that with you.

SSM: Yeah it is.

JC: Is there any memorable part of your community service that you remember?

SSM: I do. I remember this one vivid—we were at the Dismas House. And I don't even remember how old I might have been. Maybe I was eleven or twelve and we went. My dad would go more often to the Dismas House. And they're all men in the halfway house. My dad knew a lot of the guys because he actually—well when my dad retired he would go to the Dismas House and the prison and he would teach them how to read because that's what he would do. And he was okay we are going there for Thanksgiving. There was this one guy and my dad was like I don't know but his daughter who he hasn't seen in many years is supposed to come. And I remember my dad saying I don't think she will come. But she had been invited as her dad really wanted to reconnect with her. And I remember we were half way through dinner and the daughter walked in. And if you could have seen this man's face who had spent time in prison, who probably hadn't seen his daughter in many years was like—just the pure joy on a man's face seeing his daughter walk in. It took some time to process that at eleven because I was like why hasn't she seen her dad. Why wasn't he not a part of her life? And of course my mom and dad had to explain to me what the house was all about. But I vividly remember seeing her come in and seeing his face and seeing the man was just down on his luck and hopefully—and who knows if that was the last time they saw each other. But it was just the pure moment of joy. I could see his face. So I think that I would be the most memorable.

JC: That's really awesome.

CB: Just showing a little kindness can go a long way.

SSM: Yeah it can. Sometimes all you need to do is smile and wave at someone. Or when you pass someone and ask them how they are doing and actually wait to hear their answer back. It's like, "Hey how are you doing?" and then you just keep walking. But sometimes you just need to stop and really say ...

JC: and actually have a conversion.

SSM: ... really how are you doing? You know?

CB: It's so important to interact with people.

SSM: It is. It is.

JC: I think too often we get just get caught up in our own lives.

CB: Or it's like with social media and we aren't really talking.

SSM: Right. I know. Facebook came out my senior year of college. I just remember it was really great but then it was like all of a sudden like whoever picks up the phone anymore and calls? No one does. Or writes a letter. You know? It's important that sometimes you just got to be reminded of it. Then you do it, and then you just feel so much better.

[Long pause]

CB: Do you consider yourself politically active?

SSM: I'm probably not as much as I should be. Growing up allowed me to stand behind a lot of things. Like I identify myself as more democratic than anything. But I would say I'm more liberal. Like I truly—there are certain things I believe in. You'll never, well I can't say never, but I've never been on a campaign or hear me say [?]. But if there were certain rights that we're going to change—so like my views on LGBT community. My cousin is married to her wife and they have a baby and I think that's wonderful. And if someone said they are not legally married or that's not legally their child then I would probably be a lot more politically active. I think that if the government ever told me that I don't have the right to have decisions about my body, then I think I would be very politically active. Now we live in a society where I'm in the millennial generation where it's kind of like everything is fine and dandy. I'm going to stand up if I see something happening or if I see someone beating someone else I would do something. Or if that ever came up where the government was making a decision that would affect one of my strong beliefs. I think I would become a little more politically active than what I am right now.

CB: You seem like you have a strong belief system.

SSM: I think it comes down to the family I was raised in. And like I said my family is very liberal. You can love who you love. Which is very funny because my husband's side of the family is not that way but he is. He's very much like love who you love. Marry who you want to marry. But I think it also comes down to the education that I received. Holy Cross is a Jesuit institution. Going there I don't think I took what the whole Jesuit stood for very seriously. I was just like I'm in Jesuit school. Like great! We have Irish Catholics and we have really good athletics. But I think working there now and I've taken the mission of the Jesuits, which is, "With men and women, with and for others." And stand by that and say that means you put yourself in people's shoes and you really think about your actions but also the actions of those around you. I think if I was in college and if I saw things going on I probably would say something but I won't be as vocal because I was always worried like I used to think, "Wow what are other people going to think?" But now if I see something going on I would be like, "Excuse me. No. No. That's not going to work." But I also think that comes with knowing who you are, getting older, feeling comfortable and knowing that people are going to back you up. You can't have people who will be like, "My friend is crazy." You have got have to those people who will be like, "That's what she believes." I think one of the best things is that it is okay to find friends who disagree with your viewpoints. I think you should always be able to say, "Okay. We're going agree to disagree on this issue." That's okay as long as you remain civil and respectful that

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your viewpoints are different. I mean I have viewpoints that some of my friends and family or my husband's family [disagree with] as long as you can end the conversation with, "We are not going to agree on this and that's okay."