Interviewee: Susan Elizabeth Sweeney
Interviewers: Audra Blankenship, Amelia Hanlan, and Meagan Simplicio
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Abstract: Susan Elizabeth Sweeney was born in 1958 in Hagerstown, Maryland. She attended Mount Holyoke College and earned an MFA in poetry and a Ph.D in American Literature from Brown University. Susan lived in North Brookfield for a short time and moved to Worcester to have the opportunity to become an active member of the community. She is a former president of the Worcester County Poetry Association and was on the marketing committee for the Worcester Women's History Project and the dedicated editor of their newsletter. She teaches American literature and creative writing at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts.

AH: If you could just start us off by telling us your full name and where you were born.

SS: Okay, Susan Elizabeth Sweeny, Hagerstown Maryland.

AH: Were you ever married, or currently married?

SS: Yes, I am currently married. I married my husband in 1983 and we're still married.

AB: Do you have any children?

SS: No

MS: What cultures or ethnicities do you identify with?

SS: I am white.

MS: And could you tell us about your family?

SS: In what sense? Like sort of…

MS: Your parents.

SS: Like who they were? What they did for a living?

MS: Just a little bit of the background.

SS: Let's see, well my mother grew up in a very small town in Pennsylvania. Her father was a salesman; her mother was younger than her father. Her father died her freshman year of college during the Depression. My mother was the third of five children. The oldest child had died before my mother was born and my grandmother—I'm trying to think how old she must have been when her husband died, but I imagine she was probably in her late twenties. I'm not quite sure what she lived on, maybe he had a pension, so the rest of my grandmother's life she was a widow.

My mother was attending a small women's college in Pennsylvania when her father died and in order to stay in college she had to—I'm trying to remember what her major was, it might have been classics or something like that, but whatever it was she had to declare a major, I think in classics and she had to study Greek, Latin and Hebrew in order to have a scholarship, so she could stay in college. One of the things I remember is that my mother does not know Greek, or Latin, or Hebrew. [laughs] Whatever it was it didn't take.

So she grew up in this little town in Pennsylvania, a very, very small town. If you have even been to one of the Brookfields in Massachusetts, a little bit west of Worcester, about the size of one of those towns. And there's a prep school in that town called Rosesburg Academy, the town is named Rosesburg. And my father's—I'm trying to remember—my father's grandfather had taught math there and at any rate my father's grandparents lived in my mother's hometown. And so somehow they met and married fairly late I think for both of them. My mother might have been as old as 29 or even 30 which is relatively old at that point to get married. It was at the beginning of World War II.

My mother worked as a school teacher until she married. She worked as a school teacher in the same little town where she had grown up, in the same schools that she has attended. And my father, it's always sort of a big mystery growing up, but my father I think he went to Colgate and majored in history and then he went to Harvard Law School, but he never practiced law and it was always a mystery in my family sort of growing up why my father didn't practice law. He was an insurance adjuster. I've heard various things that because he was Irish Catholic he couldn't get a job or that he didn't want to practice law. In a way that kind of set up a little bit the dynamic in my family as I experienced it.

My mother was very much a school teacher; she was very cheerful, very optimistic, very charismatic, and my father was depressed and had a lot of social anxiety. The way their relationship worked was that my mother stayed at home and my father worked outside the home. And even when I was little it seemed wrong to me, because my mother had sort of like too much

energy and she poured all of it into her children. And my father you know he, he was sort of painfully shy, even I remember as a child, he was very loving, but he couldn't say I love you, he couldn't kiss you. He just wasn't able to do those things, whereas my mother was very warm, very demonstrative. I have two sisters, two older sisters, they were thirteen years and eleven years older than I was. They were very important to me. I think a lot of my good fortune is because I had older sisters.

AB: So, you said your mom was a school teacher and then when she got married, she stopped teaching to stay at home?

SS: Yes

AB: Was that a choice you think she made because she wanted to, or is that just like…

SS: I don't think she really made the choice, I think this would have been in 1942, 1943.

AB: So it was just how it was then..

SS: Yeah. My mother did work a little bit much later but she didn't really work even then, so I'm thinking this might have been around the time I was in college and probably my mother would have been in her early 60s and she took like the smallest little job imaginable, which was sort of—especially because she always—she sort of had the personality of a teacher.

So she took a job taking care of a little girl, whom actually I had babysat for and she took care her and maybe for four hours a day something like that, but I remember at the time it was a big deal. Then she told me my father had never wanted her to work and that she had decided that she was going to work, but you know it was like she was just working for—she essentially, well she was doing more than babysitting because she was teaching the little girl, she sort of just couldn't help it, but I think…

One of the ways in which I personally made sense of the relationships between men and women is that at least in my mind, in my family and in other relationships I've seen, I've just often seen women who are very strong protect men by trying to hide their strength or sort of create this sort of illusion that the man is stronger, he knows better, he's more important. In my own family, you know, the illusion was that my father was the head of the family, but really—I mean he was the breadwinner, but partly because he was depressed my mother really was the head. But I sort of feel when I analyze how I think things should be, I think it was very characteristic of my mother and my father in which the situation they grew up, that my mother protected my father by not working, so that I think she thought it would be threatening to him, or maybe a cause even for

shame for him if his wife worked because it would mean that his wife had to work because he wasn't earning enough or something like that.

AB: What kind of influence, seeing you own family like that, do you think that had an influence on who you are today?

SS: Oh definitely, yeah very definitely. I mean for better or worse you know I mean we each had our own biases and we kind of perceive things through our own experiences. I think I generally assume that men who are in positions of authority are not necessarily strong and women who are in subservient positions are not necessarily weak. And I think not only is this the sort of thing that I believe, I'd like to think it does affect my relationships. I think I just usually assume that all men are a little like my father and that they are partly there because women wanted to protect them from the realization that they weren't as strong as they wanted to be and that many women on the other hand, I think sabotaged themselves by not letting themselves be as strong as they could be because they think it might hurt a man somehow.

AH: And you said you were married, do you think that it's the opposite of how your family was raised you know, is your husband the breadwinner or do you consider yourself to be equal in that sense?

SS: No, in that sense it's not equal at all. I am the breadwinner. It's interesting you know, I'm not sure how much my experiences are a response and how much are a continuation, but when I married, or when I met my husband I guess. I met my husband in 1981 and I had three very good friends growing up, we are still very good friends.

I was aware at the time that well one of us never married, one of us did marry someone who was older than she was, but I had another one of my friends; we both married men who were younger than we were and my best friend who was my college roommate whom I met later also married someone younger than she was. I feel like at least at that time you know, it may have been a sort of illusion of some kind of cultural shift, but I was just aware of a lot of my friends were marrying men who were younger.

The man that I married was three years younger than I was and I know it actually bothered my mother when—my birthday is in March and my husband's birthday is in April and when we married we married in Baltimore, where I grew up and I think, let me see we got married in July and that spring I was at home visiting my mother and sort of getting ready for the wedding and I went to get the marriage license and I got the marriage license during the time when, you know, my husband's recorded birth date was three years younger than mine. And my mother said,"Why

didn't you wait a month? If you would have waited a month it would have been like he was only two years younger."

My husband was an only child and his father died when he was five; his mother was a physician and was very successful when I met him. I remember—and it's not like that's why I married him but, I was sort of aware I was marrying someone, I was marrying a man who was younger than I was and whose mother had an extremely successful career and had kept her own name. I think I was very consciously trying not to replicate the kind of family situation I had been involved in, but you know for better or worse. Like my whole life or throughout my marriage, I've always earned more than my husband, significantly more. I've always been the breadwinner. My husband, he's retired now, he's had some medical issues and I think throughout most of my marriage I've been the one who has sort of worked more and earned more. I know there are moments in my marriage when I was also sort of like you know, trying to sort of store that imbalance or caring about how it might make my husband feel. In a way I don't think I would have at all, if I were the man or if he were the man and well he is the man, if he were earning more than I was I don't think it would bother him. I don't think he would think am I earning too much more than her, does it make her feel bad that she's not earning as much. I thought that that was a good question.

AB: So you said that you don't have any children? Is it ok if I ask if that was a choice or did you choose not to have children?

SS: No, that's an important question for me actually because—I'm trying to mentally...

AB: No, no that's fine, take your time.

SS: I am happy to answer. It will take me a little thought because it is an important part of my story. When I was sixteen, or by the age of sixteen I had not had a period and my older sisters had both been kind of late bloomers, but it's very odd not to have your period by age sixteen and so my mother took me to her gynecologist. I don't think I had seen a gynecologist before, which also, I mean now it seems a little odd. I don't know when you guys first saw a gynecologist, but at any rate they discovered that my ovaries had never developed beyond a certain stage like when before I was born. And so at sixteen my ovaries were removed.

AB: Oh wow

SS: Yeah, It was a very strange thing to experience because I was, I was very—I think I was a very good little girl because by the age sixteen I was still a little bit of a little girl and the

realization that I couldn't have children kind of came out of nowhere and it took me a while to sort of deal with that.

My senior year in college I saw a therapist because I was—I don't know what year you guys are but my senior year in college I was worrying about what was going to happen next. I wasn't sleeping and so I saw a therapist to talk about my anxiety. Actually, as I remember, I think when she said is there anything you want to talk about I felt like I wanted to be able to handle my anger better, which meant to be able to express it. I think we talked about my experiences when I was sixteen and I remember that she was very shocked that I didn't see a therapist or anything like that. I had been at Johns Hopkins Hospital and I remember my therapist saying to me a big fancy hospital like Johns Hopkins tells a sixteen year old girl she can't have children and they don't even ask if she wants to see anyone.

So, but in a way the question or the question you asked, my answer is complicated because at the very beginning just about, I guess I had gone on some dates maybe, but by age sixteen I can't remember, but certainly from the first time I ever had sex I already knew that I couldn't have children and in a way that kind of shaped a lot of those experiences for me. When my husband and I decided to get married he knew that I couldn't have children. He was an only child, his mother very much wanted grandchildren and it was sort of an issue from the beginning that her son was choosing to marry someone that couldn't have children. You know, so biologically I couldn't have children but there are other ways to have children. I went through in vitro fertilization—when would this have been, in the early 1990s—and it didn't succeed and it actually was for me, it was a terrible experience. We talked about adoption; my husband wasn't very eager to adopt and I'm not sure why. I was. And at some point it sort of did become a choice you know. I became aware that if I really wanted to have children it was up to me to do something to make it happen and that if I didn't act on it by say the age of forty it would be too late and then at some point it was something that I just accepted that it wasn't going to happen. But it was difficult I think because I had grown up in a very traditional family and I'd always been given a lot of−well I found−I found working with children very satisfying. I'd done a lot of babysitting and things like that and I'd always just assumed that I was going to have children and going to have a ….

AB: Mhhm.

SS: …and in fact, at one point when I was a little girl, I had this fantasy of having an orphanage that I would sort of like run an orphanage and there would be all these children, who would be unhappy and I would sort of like, you know. So it's like I had this whole fantasy of being a

mother. I just sort of assumed always that that's what I would do. And there were times, you know, there have been various times in my adult life that I would be hosting a baby shower or something like that or someone would say to me, "You would have been a really good mother." And of course it's always meant as a compliment.

AB: Yeah.

SS: It always was a little bit like I'd rather not think about how I would have been a good mother. Besides, I'm a teacher so…

AB: So you say you always had this image in your head, like, you just assumed that you would have kids when you were younger.

SS: Definitely, yeah.

AB: I think most people do do that, but do you think that from that point on when you stopped assuming that, do you think that sort of changed how you went about life and relationships?

SS: I don't know, I mean probably, I'm not really sure though. I don't know. I mean for me it's partly, even though I talked about very honestly about thinking that women are stronger than they think they are, I know that in my relationships with I've… [Pause] Well, I don't know if you've encountered this or maybe it's sort of generational thing. I've often been told I'm nice and niceness is sort of like it cuts both ways.

AB: Mhhm.

SS: But I know that in my relationships with almost everyone either people I went out with or my students, or my colleagues at work, I'm just a nice person and I'm—in my work place for example, I'm not very good with politics, but I'm sort of very good at maintaining good relationships with everyone. So in some ways, I mean I don't think I'm a maternal person exactly but I think I know my relationships with my female students, or with my male and female students, are different than my male colleagues have with their students. So I'm not sure if I have, I don't know if I've changed my conception or not.

AB: Okay.

SS: I think I do think about other people and how they feel and what is best for them. You know probably in that same way of trying to protect other people and take care of them, not necessarily think of what's best for me. Which, I mean, I think that's sort of like the woman's problem. How to stop taking care of other people and take care of herself.

MS: Well, I know you talked about your profession, but I just want to get a little more background information of your work history?

SS: Sure.

MS: Yeah, so what was your first job?

SS: Oh my first job, of any kind or…

MS: Yeah.

SS: Well I think−I'm sure my first job was babysitting. I did a lot of babysitting. I really liked to babysit. I really liked−I think there too I did assume I would have children. And I liked interacting with children and I liked feeling like I was, it sounds really silly, but making their lives better. And I babysat a lot for one family with two children; it was a very wealthy family and the children I felt were sort of neglected and I very consciously tried to raise their self-esteem. I think I sort of almost thought of it in sort of those terms like I was going to raise their self-esteem and so I remember like sort of like devising little things they were to do or I was going to ask them to do and then when they did them, made a big deal out of it and so forth.

Later I was a waitress in the summers when I was in college. After college I went to graduate school immediately. And I did−I had a lot of sort of part time jobs and jobs in the summer. And before I finished my graduate work, which was in English at Brown University, I got an MFA [Master of Fine Arts] in writing, creative writing, in 1985 and I got a Ph.D [Doctor of Philosophy] in English in 1989, but in 1987 I started teaching in [College of the] Holy Cross. And so I've taught at Holy Cross ever since then so I'm not−I haven't−so really teaching at Holy Cross has been my only job.

AH: So you're currently teaching at Holy Cross in what course…

SS: Um…

AH: …are you teaching?

SS: At the moment I'm mostly teaching English and creative writing. I have taught women's studies. I was the director of Women's Studies there a long time ago. I think in the early 1970s and I've taught the Introductory Women. It's now called Women and Gender course maybe three or four times there. But probably not for the last decade or so. Yeah…

AB: So it seems like you did have a lot of like options and you got to go to college and stuff so…

SS: I did, yeah.

AB: That's really nice.

SS: Yeah, I think my sisters had a lot to do with that. My two older sisters, whom I mentioned and I can talk a little bit about my relationship with them a little as well.

AB: Mhhm.

SS: But they actually grew up in a little town in Pennsylvania that I mentioned and when I was three, we moved to Baltimore. By that point my oldest sister, I think she might have been a senior in high school. I think my next sister might have been a sophomore in high school. I grew up in a city with different advantages than my sisters had and my sisters, I don't know, I've heard like various stories from the oldest sister and I'm not quite sure−like her version of my family is slightly different than mine. She had different experiences, but I know that by the time I went to−well by the time I was in high school, there was no question that I was going to go to college. And then after I went to college, I would go to graduate school and I would have a professional career. That was sort of assumed. I think for my oldest sister, the story she tells is that she−it was thought that maybe she would have a more traditional job as a secretary or something like that. I don't know, if it's true or not, and she ended up−I have a lot of scientists in my family, a lot of astrophysicists and computer scientists for some reason. And she ended up being an astrophysicist…

AB: Wow.

SS: …and has had a very interesting life because she's very male identified in a sense. She's−I don't think she's ever worn make-up in her life. In graduate school, she was called by her last name. She's in an occupation; where there are very few women and she's been very successful but she's very−I mean there are isn't anything girly about her at all. She's like as far from being girly as possible. She and my other sister about whom I'd like to say something as well. I think they−they really helped me feel that−I don't think I had to fight very much to, especially to think of having options as you've said…

AB: Mhhm.

SS: But my other sister, I sort of want to talk about her partly because she−her story is very much a part of my story. Actually both of my sisters inherited my father's tendency toward depression and a lot of this—I didn't know at the time because I was so much younger but it seems that they both first experienced severe depression as postpartum depression.

My younger, my middle sister, was always the one I was closest to; she and I were very, very close. She was a wonderful older sister. She was very imaginative and generous and I remember that when she married−she graduated college in 1969 and she married two months after she graduated, which at that time was fairly common. We all went to the same women's college [Mount Holyoke College]. I don't know if that's relevant or not, but I think it probably is. But I think for her, it was−there were a lot of women in her graduating class, who were going to get married immediately and that was sort of like−like they were graduating from college, but they were getting married. And−and she took her husband's name. My older sister, the physicist, kept her own name and I remember my middle sister, whose name was DJ, Dorothy Jean, but she called herself, DJ, maybe a year or so after she married, so this would have been at the very beginning of the third wave of the women's movement like in the early 1970s, she sent me this article about keeping your own name when you were married and you know, I'm not sure how or maybe it was like−it must have been a little later than that, maybe it was as late as1972. But she married a man who he was a perfectly nice guy, but he was very rigid and domineering in his personality.

I think he was−he loved her a lot and was a wonderful father and a wonderful husband in many ways, but he had the kind of personality, where he needed to have the last word and he needed to feel that he was right and my sister had always been excessively generous and self-sacrificing. She would always−she just never wanted to be the person who took anything from anyone, so she always gave and it made for a sort of unbalanced relationship. And so both of my sisters struggled with depression but my middle sister killed herself. But she did it relatively late−it was really terrible and I don't want to depress you by talking about it, but it was very much like a part, sort of like part of my story. Partly because I was younger than my sisters and I think my sisters were born really late too so my parents died in early 1990s when I was still fairly young.

I think my father died in1992 and my mother died in 1994. And my sister killed herself in 1996 and I don't know, but I think she partly waited until my parents died−I don't know if this is true of not. But it just seems like the kind of thing she would do, that she would know how much it would hurt my parents. And you know, I guess, so I guess part of my sort of making sense of my life is not only the loss of this sister, who in some ways was the person really that I loved most−she and I were very close, but also not only were we really close but partly because my older sister−when I was growing up, I really did consciously think about what she might do. So it was like 'What Would Jesus Do?" only in my mind it was like, "What would she do?" because she was just so—she was beautiful. She was the beauty of the family and she was just so creative and imaginative. She had just sort of this zest and sense of humor. Which doesn't sound like someone who would suffer from depression. She gave the most wonderful presents.

She majored in math and she had a job working for the American Math Society, helping to−they have a kind of like journal called *Mathematical Reviews* and she helped to produce it. And mostly what she did was sort of like managed−she was a manager, so there were maybe like

twelve or fifteen people working under her. And after she died, they produced a little book of memories of her and reading their memories of her in this little book. They understood her so much the way I did and they valued some of the things that she would do. It was like she cared about everyone in the office and there was someone−there was a piano in the office and she always kept the piano in tune because there was someone in the office who liked to play the piano. And they had all these stories about her, specific things she'd done for each of them. For each one of them, when they needed something and when they needed something very specific that they didn't know themselves that they needed.

So she−when I was growing up, in my mind, she was like a model, how you should interact with other people. But as I grew older, especially after her suicide, it seemed like a bad model because if she had been more selfish, I think she would still be alive. Her generosity at some point−her self-sacrificing nature at some point became something that kept her from being able to protect herself. And something else that's kind of relevant is that when she died, she left two children behind and her−she left a son, who was actually like a lot of the other people in my family and a lot of the other men in my family. In particular sort of very, very shy, very, very smart, brilliant, but kind of emotionally rigid, unable to talk about his feelings. He was I think a sophomore; I think he was a sophomore in college and her daughter I think was a sophomore in high school. And it made my−it kind of complicated my own feelings about not having children, knowing that my sister had these two children and had killed herself and left them. Although I know in her mind when she killed herself−in her mind she thought it was the right thing. I mean, I think she thought they were better off, that it would be better for them if she, if she killed herself. Which, of course, is a completely irrational thought to have.

I think of my sister, whom I love so much, as a sort of extreme example of—I don't know, if you guys are familiar with a the Feminine Mystique−the kind of notion of the Feminine Mystique. You know, the problem that doesn't have a name and so forth. My sister−if you ever saw the movie, The Hours, but I remember the first time I saw that movie. I was actually with my three closest friends I mentioned from high school. We were having a little reunion in New York City and we went to see that movie. We were sharing a room together and I stayed up in the bathroom all night long because I couldn't sleep and didn't want to prevent them from sleeping. And I just cried because it was−especially the−I'm trying to remember. Not the Virginia Woolf story, but the only story set in California, I'm trying to remember the name of the actress who plays the mother of the little boy; and so not the story of Virginia Woolf or the Mrs. Dalloway story either, but the other one was so much my sister's story. Sort of like trying to, or often managing to be generous and loving to other people, but not to yourself. I knew I was going to cry.

MS: Thank you so much for sharing

AH: So I know you said you were a writer; I know you do some poetry as well. Do you think that all this, your experiences, have made you become a better writer? Sometimes how it's easier to express yourself with no judgments of other people.

SS: I think so, yeah. It's definitely, I think so. As I said in my family there is a lot of emotional rigidity and even my oldest sister, who I mention the one surviving member of my family, and she is, she must be, well she must be 70. Hard to believe, when I talk to her on the telephone and tell her I love you, as you do sometimes when you talk to a relative as a way of signing off say "I love you", and she will giggle. She can't say it back and I know she loves me, she's been a wonderful older sister. I sort of feel my mother and I were the only two that were emotionally and physically demonstrative. I sort of feel what happened in my poems, I write about hurt, and I wonder maybe—and sadness, especially hurt in my poems—because other people in my family couldn't. I think that's why I write or why I have things to write about because I'm feeling [what] other people are not able to express, but also I'm expressing things for them.

I've written a lot of poems about my sister who died. At one point, it's funny, my husband, it started to bother him at one point he said, "You wrote more about your sister then me." I don't think I said it, but well she died so if you want me to write about you that's what you have to do. I did feel like I've written some poems about him. but I mean not much to say, I love him there's no drama, nothing interesting to write about.

SS: I don't know if I talked that much about volunteering.

AB: I think that's what we wanted to ask you. How did Worcester open up opportunities for you that once you were at Holy Cross were interested in? How did Worcester help you?

SS: Yeah, yeah I have a particular attitude about Worcester in that way. I taught at Holy Cross and moved to Worcester in 1999, and so I lived in Providence when I was in graduate school, then little town in North Brookfield. It's a really nice town. But I lived there because I taught at Holy Cross and my husband went to graduate school at UMass Amherst and North Brookfield was in-between. That was not a good reason to live in North Brookfield partly because it's a small little town and we didn't have any children.

If we did it might have been different, but we lived there for seven years and at the end of seven years we knew, we knew our vet, we knew the florist, and we knew the librarian and we knew our landlord and landlady, but we didn't know anyone else. That was part of the reason I wanted to move to Worcester and I think again I was sort of the major breadwinner so it made sense for me to live closer to Holy Cross. But when I moved to Worcester I think I must have heard something about the Worcester Women's History Project, not sure I think the first I heard was the unveiling of portraits at Mechanics Hall. Have you heard of it?

AB: Yes.

SS: Maybe I even went to an event there and there were some women that were neighbors when I moved to Worcester who were, I think, involved in WWHP or they knew people who were active in the WWHP, I think maybe that's why I got an invitation. One of the first things I did when I moved to Worcester I decided that I wanted to be a part of the community and there was a community I could be involved in. I never really felt that in North Brookfield.

I became involved in Women 2000 which was going to celebrate the anniversary of the women's first national women's rights convention. I was on the marketing committee. Linda Rosenlund was on the committee; there was another, Lynne McKenney Lydick and another women who was Linda Rosenlund's next door neighbor we just had a wonderful time. Linda was very organized. Basically gave this mission to promote and advertise Women 2000 with no money, basically, maybe we had money, I don't think we had any money, but basically we were supposed to without any experience promote, with no budget come up with how to promote this event that was still being planned. People were sort of organizing from scratch.

Lynne McKenney Lydick, I don't know if you met her. She is an actress. She's the person, she portrays Abby [Kelley Foster], what is her last name, why can't I think of her last name, but one of the most important woman along with Lucy Stone to come out of central Massachusetts. She was this early abolitionist who was also an advocate for women's rights and Lynne McKenney Lydick portrayed her for the WWHP. So embarrassing I can't remember one of my accomplishments for getting her into the hall of fame. Abby Foster, to get her in the hall of fame in Seneca Falls where she is now. At any rate, Lynne was just so much fun, we had so much fun working together. One thing I remember that there's this slogan that I came up with which is "to remember our past to better shape our future.".And I was very proud to come up with that, we came up with the phrase to put it on a tee shirt. I remember we were talking about the tee shirt and we chose one that would be flattering. It has a v- neck I don't know if it exists, purple with white lettering and then it kind of has a tail so it's not even all around, a tail scoop in the back. It was Lynne who said it's a great slogan but I don't think we want it on the front of the tee shirt across women's breasts, so we put it on the back instead.

So that was a wonderful experience I'm not really that active in WWHP anymore. I'm still a member, I was active for a while on the marketing committee for two years, and I edited the newsletter for a number of years. I poured my heart and soul into it. I made that newsletter as long and detailed as it possibly could, with lots of profiles of women. I had the director of the history museum writing things for us. I did have a student intern, I think I had a couple of student interns at Holy Cross and I had them research on early suffrage in Worcester. I was the clerk sort of, taking notes at the meeting and then at other times I feel like I spent five or six years in this organization and I didn't want to be the president and I felt like it was time for me to move on so I moved to another, the Worcester County Poetry Association. I did become president of the

Poetry Association. I was involved with that and it sort of felt for me it's all or nothing so if I'm involved I'm going to be completely involved in it. And when I'm not completely involved I'll remain as a member but it's hard for me just to be a little involved.

AB: Thank you so much, it was so interesting I feel I do have another question, I really just want to think about it, ok, so throughout everything you just told us you said you're a professor now, so how do you feel that you connect with others, do you think everything you went through you can benefit from?

SS: I think so yes, I think there are in some ways advantages to getting older and I think for a woman it's just so, you know in my late 50s; I'm going to answer two things from your questions. So I'm in my late 50s, I still color my hair and the last time I saw my college roommate and best friend she said to me, she is blonde, I'm not sure if she still does, I think she does, she asked how long will you keep coloring your hair? I said I don't know, I think it sort of looks like me and she said well it doesn't actually look how you look so I think in the last six months I started to move away from wearing markup. When I grew up I wore make up, makeup I didn't need to be wearing. I was in my teens it was for women much older. At least for me I'm aware of and kind of looking forward to be maybe ten years older than I am because then there won't be any point in coloring my hair. I'm old so I can wear purple, I'm looking forward to not having any notion in my mind I'm being judged by my appearance or caring if anyone thinks if I'm attractive. A different way in answering your question: I think I'm able to be more honest, to be more of who I am and then, be able to deal with other people more directly. I think always for me there has been this little factor, there's compassion on the one hand and then wanting people to like you or think you're nice and wanting people to be threatened by you and then I feel like I'm feeling myself move past these things.

MS: Thank you so much for sharing