

Interviewee: Susan Sabelli

Interviewers: Shannon Howard and Alicia Osborne

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Overseen By: Drs. Linda Ammons and Leslie Choquette, Assumption College

Abstract: Susan Sabelli was born in 1952 and grew up in Connecticut. She came to Worcester in 1976 in order to attend graduate school at Assumption College and since graduating with her master's she has worked at Assumption as a lecturer in Human Services and Rehabilitation Studies and as the Clinical Coordinator of Undergraduate Program in Human Services and Rehabilitation Studies and Graduate Program Rehabilitation Counseling. In this interview, Susan discusses the importance of education and the balance that she was able to have in her life between being a mother and a human services professional. Susan also touches on changes that she has seen in Worcester throughout the time that she has lived and worked in the area.

SH: We are completing a city-wide oral history of the life 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, politics and community involvement. Thank you for your help with this important project today. Do we have your permission to record your oral history today, March 23, 2009?

SS: Yes

SH: If you don't mind disclosing, when were you born?

SS: March 24, 1952.

SH: Oh, happy birthday tomorrow.

SS: Thank you.

SH: Where exactly were you born?

SS: Hartford, Connecticut.

SH: And what is your family's cultural or ethnic background?

SS: My father was Italian, 100%. My mother was a mixed bag: she had English in her, some French, and a couple of other nationalities, so I would consider myself half Italian and half a bunch of other ethnic groups, but Caucasian.

SH: Were they born in the states, or...

SS: Yes, both of them were.

SH: Ok. If you don't mind, can you please tell me about your parents? Such as how they met?

SS: Well, my father was twelve years older than my mother and she was probably just getting out of high school, maybe seventeen or eighteen, so he was a little older than her and he had gone to the seminary to become a priest but World War II came, and he was supposed to go to Rome and because he didn't go to Rome, he stayed in the country. He went to Baltimore and I guess he hated it, so he left, went to World War II, and at the end of it he was a medic, went to Japan and so he was back home. Now he was probably about 35... No a little bit younger than that, a little younger than that. And both of them hated parades and it was Memorial Day weekend and they both were at a local beach and mutual friends introduced them cuz they both lived in the same town but he was that much older than her that they had never socially met. But actually, he had known of her family because my uncle was always in trouble and my father had at one point been a juvenile probation officer and it was my mother's older brother that was always in trouble, and so he had seen my mother and she was only...he was like in his late twenties and maybe she was like only fifteen or sixteen, and had seen her at that point but did not know her per se until later when they met in life, later on.

SH: Okay, and what did their educations consist of?

SS: My father had his master's degree in social work and my mother completed high school.

SH: What was your childhood like because of them? How was it?

SS: Growing up in Simsbury, Connecticut, was pretty nice. I mean, it was a normal kind of involvement. We went to parochial school for the first six years and then left and went to the public school, but it was normal. I mean, we had five kids in the family and so at that point, my mother wasn't working. She didn't start working until I got my license so I could drive and do whatever. So she was at home, she was a stay at home mom, so I only, you know she was home pretty much all through my childhood, you know, but she had a lot of little kids. So we just did normal stuff in the neighborhood. It was great, a nice residential area and got involved in traditional things people do- Girl Scouts, and whatever. But my father worked in Hartford, so he was gone during the day, come back after, so it was just normal.

SH: Do you think your parents shaped you to become the person that you are today?

SS: Oh, definitely because, actually my father worked in rehabilitation. He was a disability termination specialist later on and had told me when I went to Merrimack, I went for a psychology degree, and he kept saying to me "well you should go into rehab" and I kept saying "I don't want to go in to rehab, I want to do something else", but I did do some community service work at Merrimack that allowed me to get involved with people with developmental disabilities and then I decided about a year after I graduated that I would come to Assumption to go get my master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and I just never left, I stayed here.

SH: Are your parents still living? If so, where?

SS: My father is dead; he died in '62. And my mother is alive; she's 80 and, she just turned 80, she lives in Simsbury still, same house.

SH: Are you still close with her?

SS: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, we were just, actually my son was home for spring break and we just went down to visit her on Friday because he didn't come down for her birthday because of school.

SH: Do you have any siblings?

SS: Yes, I have two brothers and two sisters and they're all younger than me. They're all two years apart. My brother is 54, then my other sister is 52, my other sister is turning 50 this year, and I have a brother that is five years younger than her, so he is gonna be 45 this year.

SH: Are they around the area?

SS: My sister...everyone is pretty much in Connecticut. I was the only one that had gone further away by coming up here and staying up here in Massachusetts except for my other sister who,

my sister, the middle one, who's down in Florida now. She moved down there when her son was ready to go to college and they wanted to go down there. So they're still down there, he's finished with college, but that's where they are, down in Florida. Everybody else is right near my mother, within a ten-minute radius.

SH: You mentioned your son, do you have any other children?

SS: Yeah I have a daughter, who's a sophomore over at Merrimack.

SH: And your son is a...

SS: Freshman.

SH: At Merrimack too?

SS: Yeah.

SH: Oh that's nice.

SS: Yeah, they're both there. Even though my husband and I both met there too, but that was not what we told them to do, they just decided to go there themselves.

SH: So, you just said you met your husband at school, can you tell me more about him?

SS: At Merrimack, we met and he was involved with a group- when I went to Merrimack it was 80 percent commuters and 20 percent residents. I was a resident. He was a commuter. And somehow in our sophomore year we sort of met, had the same group of friends, get together for different things and then that's how we got hooked up. We stayed- we were together, and then we graduated and he was gonna go on for his master's right away and I didn't know what I wanted to do yet, so he waited til I made a choice, and then when I decided I was going to come here, he applied here and came here for his master's. He has his master's in special education from here and so we just stayed in the area, we never...we thought we would go to the north shore, he's from the north shore, I'm from Connecticut, we thought we would go in either direction, but we found our jobs and our houses here and just stayed.

SH: So you're currently living in Worcester?

SS: Northborough.

SH: Northborough. Where else have you lived during your life? You were born in Simsbury, Connecticut...

SS: Well, I was born in Hartford, lived in Simsbury, and then we lived in Holden while we were going to school here and bought a house there in 1980 and lived in that house until 1994 and then we bought the house in Northborough. So, just really two places. Well, I actually lived up in Haverhill. That's where I lived for a year after I graduated, up in Haverhill, Ma.

SH: You talked a little about growing up in Simsbury and Hartford. What was it like?

SS: Well, Simsbury, at that point was, and still is, a very residential community. It's sort of, there was one industry- they actually make blasting caps- and that's where my father, my father's family actually worked in that and that was one of the reasons he got out, they didn't want him to work in that so he went on for the sem, and was able to go for training that way to get his education, but the rest of his family all worked in that factory. And my mother's family, actually were sort of like the administrators, so as far as class structure, it was sort of interesting because she was in the group that sort of ran the business, ran the factory, my mother was administrator there, and my then father's family worked in the factory itself. So there was a little bit of contention when they first hooked up because they were sort of like two different social classes. But, my father had an education, so that sort of put him at an edge in relation to that, but Simsbury is just a typical bedroom town. People most of the time worked in Hartford and would travel into Hartford so it was just one of those kinds of communities where very relaxed...at that point, more, well they do have some agricultural areas in it still, but one of the big industries, which is what I did, and everybody did it, but I was the last one in my family to do it, as far as my brothers and sisters, we all worked in tobacco in the summer. We would go out and- my mother did it, my father did it- they had tobacco fields where they make the big broad-leaf tobacco, and I remember that being really, 14 years old and working out in the community like that, it was really interesting. That was one summer, I didn't want to do it after that. It was a little too much. It was grimy and dirty plus it wasn't the kind of job where, you really had to perform in the sheds doing this particular kind of sewing thing. I'm left handed, which was one of the reasons why I left parochial school. The nuns were trying to change me to make me right handed and my father went in and said "don't change her" and they were like okay, but then everyone behind me, my brother, my other brother, and my two sisters, they were all left handed, my last brother is right-handed, so my parents said, "oh forget it, I'm taking you all out" because they were having a hard time with us all being left-handed so we went to public schools but you also had to be really right-handed for this particular job so I actually worked in the library after that, just got a job but tobacco was fun, I mean, that was interesting. That was what a lot of people did, kids in the summer, fourteen when you have your first job, if you weren't going to babysit.

SH: So you worked in the town library?

SS: I worked at the town library, yeah. I did that for the rest of my high school years. And I often thought that I was going to go and become a librarian. That was my original thought, I thought I would go to Southern Connecticut and become a librarian, but once I did the experience at Merrimack, in community service when I was working with mentally retarded adults, that's

when I decided I didn't want to do that, I wanted to work with people with disabilities and that's when my father said, "well, I told you that". I said "I know, but I didn't want to follow in your footsteps, I figured I'd do my own thing", but I ended up doing it anyway.

SH: Now that you're in the Worcester area, can you describe your connection to it? Obviously, you're here at Assumption...

SS: Well, when I finished up here, my husband had another year before he was going to finish because he was already working, he had found a job working- he was doing his job working here and getting his degree part-time. I was going to school full-time. So he had another year. So in the meantime, I was offered a position here-I'm sorry, not this job, I was offered a different position, just as an administrative assistant, that we have in our department here for communication, and I did that for a year, and at that point my husband graduated and he got his first job here and so we're like okay, and that's when Dr. Elias, who was the director of the Institute at that time, offered me a job and said would I like to do this, and at that time we were still saying "well, we're not going to stay here for very long, you know we're probably only going to be here for like two or three years and then, we don't know where the jobs are going to take us..." Thirty years later, I'm still here. And I've found my place and I just haven't left. My husband, in the meantime, got his doctorate and was going to UMass to get in education administration, he's a principal. So he's a principal up in Winchester, so he commutes from, that's why we moved from Holden. When he got the position as the principal he was working as a first-grade teacher and as an assistant principal in Sterling and then when he got the principal's position, he tried commuting, but it was too far from Holden, almost an hour and a half, everyday, so after a year of that we started looking for a house and within two years we found the house in Northborough, which was less than an hour. But then we just, it was one of those situations where we ended up staying; we never thought we would, but we ended up staying and found ourselves very much happy in the community and plus it gave us equidistance between our two families.

SH: so, you say you're happy in Worcester, do you see any challenges that the city faces or do you have any ideas on how you would change them?

SS: Well, I think, when I was going to school here, downtown was a very active place; I mean you really had a lot going on downtown. Over the years it died out, it became, what happened was, when the malls that came in on the other ends of the city came in, Auburn Mall, Greendale Mall, Solomon Pond Mall, all of the businesses and all of the people coming into the city all the time to go shopping, didn't anymore. And it became just like a ghost town. They tried with the Galleria to develop so many things and to keep people coming in to the city, 'cause it was a very active city and you did all your shopping here, people coming from all over the place to go there and do stuff and then it just started dying out. So I know revitalizing downtown would really give the city a lot of opportunities and I think the Hanover Theater coming in has been a big, big boost to the city and I think that's really going to give the city a lot of oomph as far as that's

concerned and I think the Galleria right now, which is sort of the Centrum, where the businesses are, they sort of, it's so dead in there, I mean there's only a few businesses and people in the high tower in business itself. But, hopefully some of the other stuff they are planning for downtown will keep things moving. The colleges have always been a primary area of involvement for the city and the surrounding areas and so I think the colleges themselves have always played a role in what's keeping the city alive.

[Phone rings]

SS: But I think the city would really need to work on trying to do something to get the city really going again. Just the downtown area, make it a place people would want to go and be a part of. People used to come all the time downtown and they don't anymore.

SH: Do you see any other changes, aside from the activity that you've been mentioning?

SS: That the city should do?

SH: Or have you seen any other changes from the 30 years...

SS: 30 years... [laughs] Not that much. Where I'm involved with all the human service agencies, I think those are always there, they have always been a major part of the community too and the community has been a very supportive group of people. There are places that have closed down, schools have closed down, churches have closed down, so I think the city keeps going through areas of issues because people do move out of the city, and one of the things they try to do is to keep, hopefully, students to stay in the city and create a group of people that will stay in the city. But I'm trying to think of other things, what has happened in the past, let me think. I mean, there are certain areas I myself just don't get involved in as far as doing different things here, I tend to stay outside the city too. I come in to work, but I don't really stay in the city for a lot of things. I come in for some stuff, but not a lot.

SH: You mention colleges being a huge thing in Worcester, is there anything else that you think makes the city...

SS: ...the way it is?

SH: Yeah

SS: I think the fact that, even as a small city, people that point to, you're gonna talk about ethnicity, people that point to different ethnic areas, even old-timers, people that, I'm not saying old-timers, people in the last 50 years, you have your Swedish section, and I think people sort of identify with that Swedish, and Finnish, and Norwegian. You have your Italian section, you have your French section. So those are the three areas that sort of defined the city for a long time.

Those are the areas that people would more gravitate to and then you know, in the last 20 or 30 years, the huge influx of Latinos, and other ethnic groups, and Middle Eastern groups, and certainly Vietnamese populations and stuff. So for a long time though, those three areas though were, that's where....and I would sort of equate that to what's happening in Simsbury when I think about it because it was the manufacturing that drew those people here, Norton Company, Wyman-Gorman, and so you had those different ethnic pockets. So if you go to those areas of town, you can still see examples of that, but it sort of no longer has that sort of strict alignment ethnically but I think that if you were to look at the history of the city, that would be part of the reason why it's defined very clearly, in a way that may be different from other cities, because those were the three big groups for a long time.

SH: Do you have any thoughts on women's experiences in Worcester?

SS: Well I know that we've had our own share of suffragettes and I think that, I think because of the human service area, and the college area, I think you find a lot of women who are in professional positions, probably more so than maybe other areas, where in the manufacturing area, I don't think you'd find, I mean you will find some women, but I think because those two industries tend to draw, human services and colleges, tend to draw a large female population and I think that as far as women professionally, I think that's one of the reasons you find so many of us in the city because those are the two areas that we would be a part of and attracted to.

SH: Moving on to talking about education for a little while, you mentioned that you attended Merrimack, as your college, what degree did you obtain?

SS: A B.A. in Psychology

SH: Ok, what did you find your challenges to be in education throughout...you said about the handwriting...

SS: Well, handwriting for sure and I find that I, myself, really like to deal with something that is... one of the reasons, I remember I had a psych professor at Merrimack, who clearly said to me "you want to go in to something where you can apply yourself, where you can be helping people. You're not the kind of person that's just gonna go into straight research...you're not gonna do research...that's just not your thing. And I'm like "yeah I know." And then he said so you know you wanna find a program. So If I pursue a masters degree or a doctorate in psychology was just not the area I was gonna go. I wanted to go somewhere I could be involved and just be more applied um so I think that that would probably be why I chose the direction I did. And so some of the more, you know, I had a harder time with some of the more theoretical areas and uh, stuff like that I mean I didn't want to be in a philosophy class because that was just not my area.

SH: After graduating from Merrimack what did you see as your options as it went with your people skills?

SS: Eell I worked for a year at Merrimack I actually...no actually, back up...once I first got out of Merrimack knowing I had worked with people I thought where can I find a job. Well I found a job working at a head hunter place out of Boston and I would commute in from Haverhill everyday and this kind of place where I worked was with secretaries who were being hired through this head hunter business and going out to the community. And I remember clearly this also helped define why I chose rehab counseling directing as my final profession. I had a woman come in one day and she said to me, "I'm looking for a secretarial job," and I said , "okay well we wanna see your history," and the history that she had. And I said, "well why this two year gap in your history?" What were you doing? Because I knew those were the kind of things you'd have to explain to employers. She said, "well I dunno if I should say this." I said well you gotta tell me cuz I'm gonna have to help a future employer understand what your issues are. She said to me well I was hospitalized because I had a nervous breakdown. So I said oh well why'd you have a nervous break down. I wasn't trained at that point you know in what I was doing but I said why and she said well my husband had left me and I was so shocked by it I just had a nervous break down. So I went to the hospital for a couple years. And I said oh well how are you doing now. She said well oh I'm fine my doctor said I could work and I said oh so she said that's why I came back and I said well what is it you want to do? She had very poor typing skills. So I said what is an interesting position She said well I am an artist. I'd love to be involved in art but I don't think I could get a job in that right now and I said well who knows what could happen let me go talk to my supervisor because we had to go out and talk to our supervisor at any time. So I went out to talk to my supervisor and she said to me oh forget it we can't work with this person this person had a mental illness we can't, we can't talk to employers about that. I'm like okay well maybe we could help her some other way because she sounds like shed be a great person for some other things. No no no get her out of your office get her out of your office. I'm like okay. This is one of those places where the employer paid you, the company, for bring this person to them. So I went to her and I said well I'm really sorry I don't think I can work with you, I said, but you know something you really have to share what you did for those two years cuz you know, someone's gonna find out, and you've gotta let them know. She says okay. So about two weeks later, three weeks actually, I get a phone call and I had seen so many people by then I couldn't remember her name. But she goes on and I say oh okay and she says I just wanted to tell you I got a job and I said really you did find a job what'd you find she goes I am working in an art gallery as the receptionist, with hopefully, the opportunity, to start doing some other things. and I said oh wow that's fabulous and she said, well I took your advice and I told them exactly what had happened and why I had the two year gap in my work history and they were like, well, that's no problem...so that's how I got my job. And I was like okay. So a few weeks later...this was the summer after I graduated, and I actually had another woman come in and this woman had very low skills. She had some cognitive disabilities. And I said well maybe she could do filing or something. So again I went to my supervisor and said we have this person we could probably put for some filing or something like that but my supervisor again so no get her out of your office. So I went back to her and I said gee I'm really sorry I can't work with you at this time but here's some suggestions...and it was about that time I decided, you know, I don't like

this job. And I got a call from Merrimack, the woman I worked with, the director of alumni, was going out on medical leave and she needed someone to run the office for the year, or no, six months. And she wanted to know if I wanted to come in, since I'd already run the office before as a student. I said yeah, I'll do that. So, that's what I did. So I went back in the fall, worked until January, and then I was like, at that point, I gotta do something. And at that point my boyfriend, my husband was saying well what are you gonna do, I wanna make my choices and I can't until you make your choices. So that's when I decided that I applied here, and I applied to Springfield College, and got in here, so I decided to come. And that's how we got here. So those are the things are Merrimack that defined why I chose rehab counseling, why I came here. And it was funny cuz I told the people at Springfield I would have come to Springfield but you didn't offer me enough money, so I came to Assumption.

SH: And...what does this work mean to you, here?

SS: Well...when I work with the students, I mean I myself thought that I would be working with people with disabilities and it didn't work out that way. There may be some students with disabilities but not the same context. But I feel like what I've learned has been what I can now use to help students choose what they're now looking for. I think those kind of knowledge/skills that I've learned with working with students to help them define and find what their thoughts and interests are and their skills and interests has been so exciting and even working with the two of you...just watching you evolve and kind of seeing the kind of people that you are going to be...becoming mature and responsible and moving out of the collegiate base and into this one is just sort of so exciting. It makes it fun to be here. I really enjoy watching the things that the students do, and how they develop, and what they get exposed to and it's been great. I've always enjoyed it. I've never not enjoyed it which has been great because 30 years has been a long time but every year feels like a different year when I work with a different group of students.

SH: Alright moving on to your home life...what would you say your primary responsibilities in terms of house work are? Do you share it or ...

SS: Everything. My husband's not much of a house keeper. So...he does most of the stuff outdoors though because I don't touch the stuff outdoors I mean I'll go out and rake and stuff but I won't use the lawn mower, snow blower. He does that sort of stuff. But only around a holiday when I am sort of kind of stressed and I need some help I'll ask him, but when I need to do housework and clean I'll do it. And when my kids are home they'll help. I just do it whenever I do it...I probably don't stress about it as much as people do. I'm the only one who does the housework.

SH: And how do you manage taking care of your house...and your career...

SS: Well, there are things that don't get done that other people probably do. Some things I'll just say well, washing windows...they don't look too bad. I don't need to wash the windows. I mean everything is clean and sanitary, bathrooms and things like that but I am not the kind of person

who is gonna vacuum or dust everyday. I feel happy about my work everyday. When you work a full day you have to have your priorities. With children growing up you clean up what you have to clean up, and you can't stress about toys not being put away every night. You'd be up until midnight if you did that.

SH: What are your other interests in your life?

SS: Well...horseback riding. That would be great. I would love to do it again but I fell and hurt myself two years ago so I can't. But it's what I enjoy the most. I have a couple clubs I am involved in though, but when you talk about my love, my daughter and I share riding.

SH: And would you say you have a good balance between your personal life...with your interests, your career?

SS: Well...I think that's one area I would like to do but it's not the time to do it so I'm not concerned with it. And I can't be spending all that money on it with college tuitions to support and stuff. But other than that I have a church club I am very active and a part of. Outside of my work there is only so much I can balance, so I usually do that and I am the president of the state's rehabilitation counseling organization so that takes much time too.

SH: How would you define success in your life?

SS: Well...it certainly wouldn't be monetarily. I never went up in credentials because my children came along, and that was just not something that I could do. So I think success is just being happy and I really feel I am successful because I am happy in what I do and I really feel as though I enjoy it after all these years I've been able to maintain myself in a great job. I enjoy coming here everyday and I enjoy being here and I believe that to me is successful. People living happy, with no regret that they made that choice.

SH: In your choice of career how would you describe your personal and professional costs versus the benefits?

SS: The big benefit is the fact that I enjoy what I do. And that's wonderful. But it has also helped to pay for my kids' education so someone else could say well gee could you have gone to a job that would have paid you more but I'd say well no I don't think so because I really like what I do here anyways so it's sort of a tradeoff. And when the kids were little I had great flexibility with working with my hours, first off under the great mentor of Dr. Elias I really had great support. So I don't think there's anything I've sacrificed anything really.

SH: You mentioned before some organizations...the church...what role has religion played in your life?

SS: Well growing up in my family, because my father had been preparing for the priesthood at one point, we were very much involved there with the community. But my mother, she had a Catholic upbringing but there were so many Protestants in her family that I don't think she was as strong as my father was. And then with going to Merrimack I kept up a lot of the stuff that was going on. And then after my father died it wasn't something that played a part in my mother's life anymore. And so as I've seen it over the years...I am very involved still with my church but my siblings are not. My sister in Florida is a little bit, the other two not at all. But then my youngest brother, his wife, and children are very involved. I think part of it is because we have children. The two that don't have children are not at all actively involved. I don't think they'd consider themselves catholic. I am very active in my church. As the children were younger it was harder but got better to be active as they got older. I enjoy it...the church I'm at is Saint Rose of Lima and actually Fr. Gallagher comes out there and does Mass a lot so it's a very great community church. I enjoy myself there and my work with them a lot.

SH: Do you consider yourself to be politically active?

SS: No.

SH: Not at all?

SS: No.

SH: How have health issues impacted your life? Such as you're your access to health care, and whose health your responsible for?

SS: Well I think my husband and I are both lucky we have access to health coverage through our businesses and we've never had a problem insurance wise.

SH: How do you feel about the choices you've made in your life?

SS: Good. I feel as though all of the choices I've made were ones that I don't regret having made at all. I enjoyed Merrimack; I really, really enjoyed that school. And I enjoyed coming to Assumption and then staying here in the Worcester community. We have a great group of friends in the area that we have known. And we still keep in contact with the friends we knew from Merrimack. I don't have a relationship with anybody back in Simsbury, aside from my family. And our neighborhood is great. Long-standing friendships I have are from undergraduate and graduate schooling.

SH: How do you get through tough times? What kinds of thoughts keep you going?

SS: Why am I here? What do I want to see? What is the end product of my life, of my family's life? Just the fact that hopefully we'll all be successful. There haven't been that many tough

times, aside from stuff that comes with kids growing up. Nothing really though that stands out in my mind.

SH: What words would you like other people to describe you as/what do you think you'd be described as?

SS: I would hope they would say happy, optimistic, caring, supportive.

SH: And basically we are working towards finding a fuller story of the history of women that has been recorded in the past...is there anything else that you would like to share? Or that you think that we should include -- anything we haven't asked or that you would like to share in general?

SS: I think that my generation of women are the ones that were able to start looking at themselves as individuals and were not bound by a lot of conventions that our mothers had to deal with. We were products of growing up in the 50s and 60s and that was the time when all types of things were possible to people. We were the ones that had job opportunities opened up. During the 60s and the 70s, it was a really exciting time. Women were not bound by the traditional rules, and were clearly not allowing ourselves to do that. So we flocked to education. And we were the biggest group of women who started coming into education and really sort of changed where we went. Merrimack is a great example. It was primarily a men's school and women started to come in so they had to change the way they defined themselves, Assumption being the same way. So I think my generation of women, with a lot of people from the past who helped us, we were the ones who started taking hold of things and were told to not settle for less. My parents clearly said that education was very important, and that's why they made sure that I could go. My brothers and sisters didn't go, and I think that just had to do with whatever was happening with their lives. They went into jobs, but not education. I would say that for me, the women in my area and time frame, clearly thought of education and careers as what we were going for. It wasn't an expectation not to have a career. I delayed having my family until I was 36, when I had my daughter, and I was 37 when I had my son. So granted there were people who had their kids earlier, there were a lot who wanted education and professions first. If you have the opportunity to make choices for yourself that's great, that's what you want. But at least we were given these options. I was told always by my parents, you can not depend on someone else. You've got to get an education. You have to be able to support yourself. You should be able to define your own person.

SH: Did you see any differences in your siblings or girl friends? With education, careers?

SS: I told you about my siblings for whatever reason they did not get educated, they chose careers. I have plenty of girl friends who have professional careers. But we all did take some time off with our families and children. But we managed also to juggle both at some times. And I do have a lot of women friends who do not have children, who focus on their careers, and that

was their choice. There is a whole group of us who had our kids in our late or mid 30s as opposed to our 20s.

SH: Did your parents push your sisters, as well as you, to get an education?

SS: I don't think so. I don't think they thought academically they were as well off. Both of my sisters had learning difficulties and my brother was very intelligent with no motivation. But they did not get assistance in schools, and by the time my brother was going off my father was already gone so he had no motivation there. His wife is well educated with a career. And my other brother is a supervisor for EMS, while my two sisters work in the insurance business. So they have jobs and stuff, but I was the only one who went for a professional degree. For them it just didn't happen, they didn't go.

AO: You talked about strides made for college-aged women. Do you think when you were younger, like in elementary school, that girls were treated differently in school?

SS: Well I was in a parochial school, so I don't remember feeling any different. We were always very actively involved. So I don't remember feeling like boys had any advantages over girls. And even in high school I don't remember feeling that way. I feel like girls were getting more attention and opportunities presented to us. But I can't clearly articulate feeling differences at any time.

AO: You talked a little bit about your children. How has motherhood impacted your life?

SS: Well...I remember talking to some people and telling them that I didn't really feel like an adult until I had them. I was just sort of living a great life and I didn't really think of myself as an adult until all of a sudden I had children to take care of, and it's been great. They're wonderful. And there's always the issues you deal with kids at the time, but I really wouldn't wanna change it. I'm glad I did it late. I don't know if I would have felt as good about it if I did it earlier. I really enjoyed having them and the connection between us now is close and I don't feel as though there's any problems and I feel that they make their own choices, and I try to do my job. There's aspects I would have changed if I could have, but other than those, not really. Dr. Elias made it possible for me to stay at this job while working part time with my children so I was always able to have the best of both worlds. It was great.

AO: It seems as though Dr. Elias is someone who has definitely made an impact on your life. Do you want to tell us a little more about that?

SS: When I came here in '76 I was into the graduate program, and I think he very clearly made it possible for us as women to be successful here. He never made us feel less qualified versus the men in the department. And he made me feel very comfortable in doing my job, and he just looked at me as an equal. And at that point the department was primarily men. There was only

one other full-time woman worker besides myself for a while, there was only just men for a while. He gave me different opportunities to get involved with licensure for the profession. And traveling to Chicago as commissioner and stuff like that. He gave me more than I could ever ask for. I really, really enjoyed working with him. And we still see each other and keep connected. He really clearly made for me the feeling that I could do what I wanted to, even if I was a woman.

SS: You can just say my name now I don't mind people would be able to tell anyways with the information I've given out.

SH: Okay do you want to just state your full name for us then please?

SS: My full name is Susan Rotondo Sabelli.