

Interviewee: Sr. Carol Skehan
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Abstract: Sr. Carol Skehan was born in Fitchburg, MA, in 1940. Upon entering Venerini Academy at the age of 14, and then the convent to become a nun, she witnessed one of the most historical changes in the modern Catholic Church- Vatican II. As a young nun pushing and advocating change within the strict rules of the Church, she found solace in the art of teaching. Sr. Carol taught first and second grades and kindergarten and was trained in the Montessori method. As the oldest of three girls, Sr. Carol, was the only child in her family to receive higher education and hold a job. In this interview she discusses her love of nature and teaching young children, how she experienced two times in her life when she questioned whether she should remain a nun, and her interests in computers, motorcycles, and photography.

LT: So, can you tell me about your childhood?

SC: Well, my childhood, I lived in the country. I lived in Lunenburg and we had fields and things, that's how I became a nature lover and an explorer, I'm....I...I just found out things from the earth by observation and appreciated things which is very lacking in today's children, they don't have that experience.

LT: With nature?

SC: With nature.

LT: That's true

SC: And I feel badly about that because it's so beautiful and I find that nature, energizes me, you know, renews my batteries when I'm down...at this age now I don't even need to go out on vacation, I don't even care about going away, I sit in my backyard...which I, I live in Rutland,

LT: Oh yeah?

SC: I have a beautiful backyard with a huge field and birds and my dog by my side and I'm happy.

LT: Aw, that sounds...great.

SC: It is great. I go on the deck and have my...one day I, I sat on the, I'm on the deck, I got my breakfast and I'm reading the newspaper like this [does hand motions like she reads the paper] and I look up and there's a turkey at the bottom of the deck. [laughs]. I said, "Oh! Hi Tommy!" [laughs] He came everyday for a week.

LT: Oh wow.

SC: And then I didn't see him anymore he must have been interested in the sunflower seeds the birds dropped from my feeder. And then, then I saw him weeks later. It was a hot, hot day, and he was over under a tree, he had dug a hole, they dig the hole because it, to cool themselves, but that was the last time I saw him. But we get turkeys frequently like twenty, thirty of them at a time.

LT: Oh wow, we get turkeys at Assumption.

SC: Oh I know, I've seen them over there. You get a lot of things at Assumption. I have seen green heron, in the pond, and I had never seen a green heron anywhere except that little pond. I used to see a lot of things, the blue heron, every year he used to --on his migration -- stop there cuz I lived right next door to Assumption.

LT: Oh really?

SC: Yeah, for about 7 years I think.

LT: Hmmm

SC: That brown house, the two-decker,

LT: Oh!

SC: Right? I lived there 7 years.

LT: Oh wow

SC: How's that?

LT: How was living in the city compared to...

SC: Well, I lived here at the Academy for 18 years and that was very, restraining. Your senses are dulled. I mean, I hated it.

LT: Really?

SC: But I didn't, I wasn't aware of it,

LT: Oh

SC: I mean I knew I hated something but I didn't know what it was and then I moved next door and then I didn't like the institutional living. And then I went to Salisbury Street, and...and we had a nice yard and uh, I had a bear. A black bear.

LT: A bear?

SC: A black bear, it was around and round Assumption. This was several years ago, I had a picture of it too. It was a cub... at my birdfeeders,

LT: Wow

SC: And it was cute as anything. I, I like the bear. Then I went to Indian Hill Road. Which was very nice, we had a duplex there, it was very nice there. And then we went to Rutland and I had a huge black bear in my yard.

LT: And you weren't scared?

SC: No, they're not dangerous. I mean I didn't go up and pat it, [laughs] but I was trying to take pictures [makes a camera noise] but it was too dark. It had stolen my seeds again. But both my poles, which was metal, a heavy metal, right to the ground, bent it, right to the ground. So, now I take my feeders off in October and November cuz they'll come back. I have feeders up but they're not sunflower seeds.

LT: Oh wow

SC: So I got off the track about my childhood

LT: Oh no, that's alright

SC: Well anyway seeing as how I love nature, and how...

LT: Oh yeah I know, it's great

SC: ...so that's where it stems from, my childhood in Lunenburg. And I was the oldest of three girls. My father was an oil burner mechanic. My father is Irish and he made sure we appreciated the Irish heritage.

Lt: Oh yeah?

SC: And I do to this day. And my mother was French-Canadian, of course American. And my grandmother came from Ireland so she has a brogue and I loved her. She was, she wasn't a touchy feely kind of grandmother.

LT: yeah

SC: And neither am I, I'm not demonstrative. But we knew she loved us,

LT: Aww

SC: So, so I just loved her. And so that's, I went to school in Lunenburg, then we went to the city, and then I moved back to Lunenburg, then we went back to Fitchburg; I say city, 43,000 people, but not like this...

LT: But not like the country

SC: [Laughs] that's right, that's right. Okay, so you want me to go on?

LT: Go wherever you like.

SC: So we moved to -- in Fitchburg, in back of a school, it was an Italian school-- the Venerini Sisters

Lt: mmhmm

SC: And I was from St. Bernard's and I was at a public school. I was at public school -- I forgot the name of it, it was affiliated with Fitchburg State College.

LT: okay

SC: I don't remember the name of it

LT: And were you teaching?

SC: No no, I was 13 years old.

LT: Oh ok

SC: Then we, we walked home and I had a friend, an Italian friend, we must have been going to catechism or I don't know, I don't remember but we used to help the nuns carry their school bags up the hill, now this was a big hill,

LT: [laughs]

SC: You go up a hill, then a flat then back up a hill

LT: Oo

SC: But that's how, in those days we used to do those things for the nuns. Oh, when I think about it. And then the nuns, the Italian nuns, I lived in back of them and my friend said "Oh I have to see one of the sisters." She was Italian. And I went with her and one of the nuns was Irish.

Lt: Oh alright.

SC: Half-Irish. Italian and Irish, she comes from Worcester, she was Mahoney, Maloney...Malone! Her name was Malone. Jean Francis Malone. She had, she left the convent after but she was a very personable lady. So I used to go and help her after school and that's how I got to know the Venerinis. And from there, the sisters invited me to the Novitiate. It was... which was in Fitchburg and I think, I don't really know what, they asked me if I wanted to go the Academy, we had a high school.

LT: uh huh

SC: And I said yes, and I think my cousin, Father Scan, had something to do with it. I don't think he asked, but I think the sisters saw him and went to visit there one time and I think they said "hmm this must be good stock -- a cousin a Jesuit." [laughs] Well, well after, in those days they used to take girls, 14 -15 years old in the convent. Well, you weren't in the convent, you were called an associate.

LT: Mhm

SC: So I came to the Academy, which was in '54, September '54 and I've been here ever since.

LT: Wow

SC: Well, I've been in other places like, so I came to the academy here and then right from here, and, and then as a senior I entered the convent.

Lt: A senior in high school?

SC: Yes, yeah

LT: Wow.

SC: Yup.

LT: Did your dad who was so Irish have a problem with you going into an Italian...

SC: No, he had a problem with me entering the convent. Tried...

LT: really?

SC: ...and he had a friend come and tell me how awful it is. And I was not and you know, what an awful life I'd have all this, I entered anyway and he was wrong. It is not awful. Ha-ha.

LT: Good!

SC: My father didn't want me to enter.

LT: Did he ever come to terms with it?

SC: Who? My father? Oh yeah.

LT: That's good

SC: He had much worse to come to terms with in his later life. HA! Let me just tell you that. [laughter] This was just a minor thing -- hooking up with Italians. [Laughter]

LT: That is really, is interesting, what...it's so funny because I have no, like I went to Catholic school my whole life, but I don't really... I could never see myself going into the convent, so I'm still interested -- like what made you, as a senior in high school realize you wanted to be in it?

SC: Oh, well it was before that I wanted in, that's why I went to the Academy as an associate, it was for girls who wanted to become nuns.

LT: Were you about 13-14?

SC: I was 14. Yeah. I came here I had just turned 14. And you know, you're filled with enthusiasm and you want to serve God and you're, and it was before the sixties - well in the sixties I was, in 1960 I was 20 years old, so I was full of this enthusiasm. It was just, and it so, that's what made me decide to go in the convent, to serve God and his people. That's what I did [laughing a little] and let me tell you, the Novitiate was like boot camp. I am sure that any of us could have gone in the Marines with no trouble.

LT: Really?

SC: Oh yes!

LT: What was it like?

SC: It was very tough.

LT: Academically? Or...

SC: Not academically, it was tough emotionally, the rules, the discipline; the discipline of the Novitiate was, we could see our families the first year of Novitiate and it was an intense, an intense indoctrination.

LT: Wow.

SC: Now in [those]days, they'd even call it, what they call it...you know when kids follow the Moonies and all this stuff, I can't remember, I mean it was a very intense kind of indoctrination.

LT: Was it...

SC: Very disciplined

LT: Disciplined in the sense that you had to pray "x" amount of hours a day?

SC: Oh yeah! Oh yea, get up early in the morning...

LT: And I'm assuming you had to read a lot of the scriptures.

SC: Yes.

LT: And learn about...

SC: We had lessons every day, every day we had lessons on the, on the Bible and, but also there were other things by the Jesuits...the foundations, we were founded with the help of Jesuits, so

there were a lot of Jesuit things, I forgot the name of them now, that's how it got into my head [laughs]... that I don't ever remember what the name of it was.

Lt: [laughs] because you said it was really tough...

SC: Intense.

LT: Intense and difficult and very disciplined, was there at any point you were like, this isn't for me, I can't do this?

SC: No, that came later.

LT: Really?

SC: Yes, but I was ready, we were just so, those of us that entered we were young, we were crazy, we had ...There was a lot of camaraderie between us, and support, so you didn't, no I didn't have that at that time.

LT: Wow

SC: So then I was put back in Fitchburg. I was in the time of the old habit.

LT: Oh really?

SC: Oh yeah, I wore the old habit.

LT: What do you think about the change in religious garb from the old habit to now?

SC: Oh! I was ones that went for it!

LT: Oh yea?

SC: Oh yeah! It was in the, it was in the sixties! And we, we were reading this book, we were sneaking around this book...Cardinal...I forgot his name, Cardinal....I forgot the name, he wrote a book that was pre-Vatican but it was, and we were sneaking around we were forbidden to read it, but we read it anyway. We passed it from nun to nun. I'll find the name of it; I can ask some of the others, I forgot what the name of it was. But anyway it was a book and it was at the time of the changes, just before Vatican II. So it was my generation that brought these changes that we fought for them.

LT: Wow.

SC: Some became very -- there were many, many that it went too slow for and they left the convent.

LT: Oh wow.

SC: Many, many left the convent, but I stuck in there. And I just felt it would come and it did. I was the first one out of the habit in my house!

LT: That's so cool.

SC: My sister was just 16 years old and she was very clever, she had a learning disability, she had trouble learning in school but she was very creative. So I said Kathy, I need to make, I need some skirts. So we made these skirts and I must have bought blouses, I don't remember, and I thought I was such hot stuff, but...[laughter], so I was the first one in my house to go into the skirt and then gradually everybody did...

LT: Wow

SC: In my congregation none of us wear the old habits.

LT: Wow... what other changes came about, aside from the habit to regular dress?

SC: Oh it loosened up...let me think about it....it wasn't so rigid, you could talk more, I mean before you couldn't talk in between prayers and things, but it became less rigid, must less rigid-- you could do see your family.

LT: Oh wow.

SC: In fact, I was stationed in Fitchburg for six years and I remember my mother died while I was there, and my father coming in, I taught first grade there, and my father coming in, "I'm so worried, I'm so worried" pacing back and forth and my sister was married and she was pregnant and she was bleeding so my father is pacing back and forth, "I don't know what to do!!" and I said, "Dad, call the doctor." And he said, "Oh I don't know what I'd do without you!" He and the husband didn't have enough sense to call. I couldn't believe it! I couldn't believe it, that men could be that, forgive me, stupid. That was just one incident, but before that my father wouldn't have been allowed in to see me.

LT: Ohh?

SC: So it got much less; he was always around, you know...he used to come visit me all the time.

LT: That must have been nice?

SC: To get help. I was the oldest. And the oldest in an Irish family is taught to be very responsible

LT: Mhm, so you were close with your Dad?

SC: Eh , well I was closer with my mother.

LT: Oh

SC: And I, when my mother died, I was closer to him but much closer with my mother. So, very bonded with my mother. I was devastated when she died. She was 45 when she died...

LT: She was young...

SC: She had a heart problem caused by a disease she had when she was younger. Rheumatic fever.

Lt: Oh wow.

SC: Yeah, that was the most devastating thing in my life. And I feel nothing would ever be that difficult except may be if you lost a child.

LT: Right.

SC: That was the most devastating.

LT: That's very sad.

SC: My father lived until 86.

LT: Oh, he lived a good, long life.

SC: He was a character. We road motorcycles together. He bought me a scooter. I was here [teaching at Venerini Academy] he bought me a scooter, but I hated scooters because they go 32 miles per hour or 27 miles per hour and people would get mad -- you were going too slow. So then he got me a big scooter. Well, the first one was a moped, I hated the moped! Then the small scooter, then I saw a bigger scooter and I rode all over. We rode, my nephew and niece too, there were four of us: my father, my niece and nephew, and myself. We'd go to New Hampshire to flea markets; we went mostly to flea markets here and there. But you can't buy much when you're on a motorcycle.

LT: Right! But it's still so fun...

SC: So, I always felt like I was tag a long although scooters can go fast, I was behind them. So I had an opportunity to get a motorcycle from someone who -- that works, that was a dealer here with machines and he had a motorcycle for 300 dollars. It had only 300 miles on it.

LT: Wow, quite a deal.

SC: He charged 300 dollars, I was scared stiff. I had never driven shift, so I went to safety class and had this guy Mario, Dario! As an instructor and he screamed his head off at us and it was so stressful! But I did it anyway. We had a lot of fun. I miss it. I sold it a few years ago but I missed it.

LT: That's fun! What was the reaction when it was like "you're a nun and you ride a motorcycle?"

SC: Well I didn't tell people I was. But every so often my father would say "Oh you know she's a nun, because he felt so proud" I had a fit when he said it. I just wanted to go and enjoy it and not worry about scandalizing people.

LT: I don't think it was scandalizing people...?

SC: Well it would be to older generations. Some of the older nuns, they never said anything, but I know they complained. I heard them one time in the kitchen complaining about it. But see you're from a different generation that would not be scandalized, but to older people it was.

LT: So you're one of the first ones to really break out?

SC: Yes, well I never took to rules that well. It's amazing I entered the convent. Let me tell you, it's a miracle. I live on the edge of the rules.

LT: That's the best way to live

SC: They call me a Maverick, I'm like McCain-- but I'm not a Republican.

LT: [Laughs] That's awesome. I remember in kindergarten, well, we were older but you were still teaching kindergarten, you said that you rode a motorcycle because it was the best way to make chocolate milk.

SC: [Laughs] What did I mean by that?

LT: I don't know, you said you put it in the back of the motorcycle and by time you stopped it was all mixed up.

SC: [Laughs] Oh really! I don't remember that.

LT: That's the only thing I really remember...Just thinking, Sr. Carol is SO COOL!

SC: [Laughs] Yeah wow!

LT: What do you think now; like if you were born in my generation do you think you still would have taken the same path into the convent?

SC: Oh, probably not, because this generation doesn't, it isn't as religious as generation. They, they have a different way of expressing it. The whole world is different, you know, things are so different. When I was little, just to show you how different was, we couldn't wear slacks downtown.

LT: Oh wow

SC: Women had to wear a skirt. That's how rigid. And you couldn't -- I had a neighbor that was Finnish, and we loved her! She was my father's secretary, so you couldn't go to the churches! Now they were having a Christmas party and we couldn't tell my grandmother that I was going to the Protestant church for a Christmas party. It was just a different world at that time and the Irish had many, many priests and religious cuz it was just glorified. It was valued. So now those things aren't valued as much. It's just a different world. But I'm sure this time, my thinking would be different. Everything would be different. And so, we are just from a different generation.

LT: Hmm, when was your time spent being a nun? So from when you turned, when you were a senior in high school to now, was there at one point, some time you were ready to give it up?

SC: Oh twice.

LT: Really?

SC: Yeah, yes, yes.

LT: What made you stay?

SC: [slight pause] Well, I evaluated, I evaluated everything and then I weighed it, one was after my mother died, I became... I got...I went into depression which I didn't even realize it. I didn't even know what it was but, I weighed it and the big thing was, not having children. That was the

big thing, I didn't care about the husband that never was an issue. It was not having kids. And I weighed it and weighed it and then I said, what guarantee do I have that I'll have kids. So that's made me, so I just doted on my niece and nephew and the kids in school, and because I just, I just said I wasn't going to be guaranteed that I would have children.

LT: mhm

SC: And then another time in my forties, and that too was on children. And when you go through menopause you don't even realize it that all of a sudden now you can't have children, but it isn't conscious.

LT: mhm

SC: So after I became more aware of what was going on, it was on the children again. So you almost have to mourn that and say you know what, I've never had kids, life will go on and, yeah I had two crises.

LT: Do you regret still not having kids, sometimes, now?

SC: No, no I don't. I don't regret it but I'm sure that I would have loved being a mother, but I have children all around me. So I can compensate for that.

LT: mhm

SC: And know that deeper nurturing and a higher nurturing energy and I have used that with kids and animals. Now I have, I don't teach, but that's not a conscious thing either, I got the dog because I was spending more time alone; Sr. Pauline's mother's was, she is quite elderly, and she spends a lot of time taking care of her, so I said "Jees, I want a dog around here for safety" but that is also nurturing, a dog a cat,

LT: right...

SC: You find healthy ways to compensate what you feel is lacking.

LT: Wow.

SC: So there are healthy ways to compensate.

LT: That's good, that's really nice

SC: And that's good for all these kids. You as a student know, I love kids!

LT: Oh yeah!

SC: And I enjoy them. I had fun teaching!

LT: And I think your students saw that.

SC: Yeah, well by playing every day. You're lost in another world. They're innocent and they're joyful most of the time, and if a kid isn't, you put more energy in that child because they need it.

LT: mhm

SC: So actually it was like an innocent kind of life with children. They aren't complicated. They say things that are. And I strive in that kind of environment. I took the right path for work. Teaching -- it was the best thing I could have ever done.

LT: Wow, so you don't regret, you don't regret it at all?

SC: No, I don't

LT: that's amazing

SC: I know. And the teaching I would do all over again.

LT: Oh yeah?

SC: Yeah.

LT: So you think even if you were never, could never be a nun, you would be a teacher?

SC: I don't think I would have had the opportunities, in fact, that's why my mother let me enter so young. I asked her one time, she said, "for the education."

LT: Oh.

SC: Because I lived here and with the borders and things, she allowed me to do that because she knew she couldn't give it to me.

LT: Wow...what about your other two sisters, did they take the same route?

SC: No, one of my sisters, well neither one of them went onto college. One married a soldier, he died and she's in California. She was involved with animals, she worked in an animal hospital I

think. She wasn't a veterinarian. I don't know exactly. The other one had three children also. And she's not that healthy actually -- fibromyalgia. But she's doing ok.

LT: Ohh that's good.

SC: So we went different paths and I was educated where they weren't.

LT: Then with that education did you think you lived a more fulfilling life?

SC: I think each person can be totally fulfilled in other ways. I think my sisters have fulfilled in a different way, but for me it was fulfilling and like I said, and nature taught me to search and observe and in education that's what you do. You just study. I mean I hated exams. I do much better just observing and learning.

LT: yeah.

SC: But I love taking classes. I hate taking exams and...

LT: mhm

SC: The internet is my teacher now.

LT: Oh yeah.

SC: Oh [slight pause] I've been with computers, since before it was w-w-w dot.

LT: Oh yeah?

SC: It had graphics on it and it had different browsers Archie and Mosaics and, then I got... I was the first one here, when no one cared about them!

LT: Yup...I remember that. Why computers?

SC: I loved things with buttons.

LT & SC: [Laughter]

SC: I think it's the idea of being able to search and I just have that desire or thing, I just keep searching and knowledge just helps, you know, I just like to learn.

LT: That's so great.

SC: It's an easy way to learn

LT: And its fun.

SC: Although it wasn't easy learning computers. It really wasn't. I mean when I started they didn't even have classes in it.

LT: Mhm, so just a lot of pressing the buttons?

SC: Yes! A lot of pressing of buttons! Then we did, Sr. Pauline and I took a course. There was no software so you used to buy magazines and type in the little games and if you made one mistake the whole thing wouldn't work!

LT: Oh?

SC: These are pages and pages and pages! I used to do it, so it was fun, but that's where we started, way at the beginning.

LT: That's so cool! To see the evolution of something like that.

SC: Yeah. I saw it right from the beginning and moved with it where a lot of people my age, well a lot of people my age, well a lot of people my age just don't have a clue.

LT: [laughter]

SC: My father could rebuild motors but he couldn't put on a VCR.

LT: [Laughter]

SC: I tell you what I did, I told you I lived on the edges? Well, over the years when the charter first started, cable companies, we had cable on one TV because at that time it was against the law to put more TV's in your house.

LT: Really?

SC: Yeah. Now we had 26 bedrooms, I wired the whole side of my house for TV's.

LT: [laughs]

SC: Going through the heating system with my drill. Everybody on my side has TV. That was illegal but I did it anyway and I didn't tell the nuns you couldn't do it!

LT: Laughter!

SC: Then after we did the whole house, but by then it was legal.

LT: That's so funny! Oh Gosh...

SC: I don't know, I don't think I can get arrested, I hope I won't be arrested for this.... Is this thing on?

LT: Wow! That is so cool! What are some of your other rule breakings?

SC: Oh, I don't remember. Those were the big ones. Well, the other I may go to jail for is copying videotapes. [Laughs].

LT: Wow. What are your -- so now you've been teaching for a while?

SC: I've been teaching about 46 years.

LT: Ooh wow.

SC: Yeah, I don't remember exactly. Let's see....(thinks- slight pause) 47 years! I've been teaching 47 years.

LT: Now, have you always done little kids primarily?

SC: Yes, first, second, and kindergarten.

LT: Aww, the little babies.

SC: Yeah, I taught first grade 14 years, then I went for, they sent me to New York, sent a few of us, to learn Montessori. So I studied Montessori and got in the process of getting my certificate, and then my grandmother died, so I had to rush back here. Then I picked it up again in Willimantic from the St. Nicholas Training Center and this woman, her name was Margaritte Humphrey, she was trained by Montessori, she was an English lady, she was the most, she was the brightest lady I had ever met, and she knew things about everything! Geometry, she knew things of biology, every kind leaf and stuff, so I was very amazed by this lady. Now, Montessori is very organized, there is a way to pick up the equipment, a way to put it down, a way to teach, so I had to go to her room one time, but to tell, when my grandmother died, I had to tell her I wouldn't be finishing.

LT: mhm

SC: Her room was a mess, A mess! I was so shocked because Montessori was so rigid! But she was a great lady. She let me pick it up in Willimantic so I finished. And that is how I got teaching here in kindergarten. Because I taught first grade two years and then the sister who taught the kindergarten had Montessori and she was good! She was a great teacher but she left the convent and there was nobody to take the place, so Sr. Pauline was the principal at the time, so I said well I'll do it for a year and if I don't like it, I'll go back to first grade. But I loved it! You had a relationship with children because you had a small class, where at that time we had thirty-something in a class, but now we don't, we have twenty in a class. But at that time we probably had 35 students. And there were a lot of materials so I stayed with kindergarten because I had a relationship with these students and that's what I liked about it. And I had crazy Nancy!

LT: Oh Nancy!

SC: I had Nancy for 14 years!

LT: What's your best Nancy story?

SC: Well I have a few. She was fun but the one time that frightened me was when she left a kid outside. [Concealed laughter.] The poor thing thought the kid was missing! She was just very nice to work with, she was very fun! She was just, and she had, well one time, one the kids brought a woopi cushion in and I wouldn't let, and they had enough sense to not use it with me, but they used it with her. And she, but she had a great sense of humor and everybody laughed! Course then they kept wanting to do it, but she was a good sport.

LT: That's cute

SC: Yeah, ha-ha

LT: So, what do you think of kids now? You taught at Venerini in the smaller classes, do you think you could go into the Worcester Public School system?

SC: Never.

LT: Never?

SC: Never. Number one: probably a reason why I like the little kids too, because you can be the boss, I wouldn't be able to tolerate the disrespect. My temper would just flair. I don't get mad very often, rarely I'll get mad with little kids but when my temper starts, I'll tell you, just get out of my way!

LT: An Irish Temper?

SC: An Irish Temper! And the little kids will never see my temper because I never have to. In a public school I wouldn't be able to take it, the disrespect. I'm not used to it and I wouldn't tolerate it.

LT: That's good though, teachers shouldn't have to tolerate it.

SC: I know, but they do. Some of them have too. They've got all kinds of kids that have been taught different moral values. I've heard stories; your mother is there, I'm sure you have stories. We kick them out here! When we have kids like that, they're gone. I had a kid hit me once. But he had serious disabilities. He has three learning disabilities. One of them was oppositional behavior but he was through kindergarten because we were trying to find out what his issues were. So he was being tested. But you can understand that kid had problems. That was why we -- and his mother worked beautifully with us. I called the mother up, you know, that was a unique situation. He was so bright! He locked me out of the computer room one time. I had three Macintosh computers and he was very, very bright, but he couldn't learn in a group setting, so I used to keep him and he loved to fill out forms, so I'd make up forms for him to fill out like this [holds up the Bio sheet] and he'd have to sign his brother's names and so on. That kept him busy while I was teaching. Anyway, he got into the settings [on the computers] and changed the passwords. Three days it took me to get into the computers.

LT: How did you get in it?

SC: I don't remember. But it took me a long time... Three day! But I got him. He was a riot. So then I had to lock him out. [Laughs.]

LT: What would you tell someone my age, who is going to graduate from college about life after education? What would be some advice?

SC: Well, I would say be cautious and use your head and for women, don't take any guff from anybody! I've always been very -- our foundress opened schools up for girls in Italy, and this was a girl's school and I have always been conscious about, through the years with the children I have, to make sure the girls don't dumb down and to be confident. I would tell girls to wait things and don't get married right away; take it easy, go into things and enjoy life a little bit first. Most girls are doing that anyway now.

LT: Yeah. So, when you were, I know how you said you entered the convent and your mom wanted to give you an education? Just the readings that I've done in class, we learned that, that a lot of women who were married or had children couldn't get teaching jobs or they would be denied work. What are your thoughts about that?

SC: Oh you mean years ago?

LT: Yes

SC: Oh yeah! Before my time, women couldn't even get married, (to whom they wanted) but during my -- they couldn't get a teaching job. That's crazy. Women are the best. I'm not saying men aren't, they have their gifts. But you look in a school and women are the nurturers although I think it's a healthy thing for the children to have men around too. We have one male upstairs, I'd like to have more because students need male mentors too. But I think not being able to get a job because you were married is way out of the...But some cultures still do things like that. We have to appreciate. I was thrilled when Hillary Clinton ran!

LT: Me too!

SC: And I loved Sarah Palin, but I would never vote for her. I'm not a Republican and I don't think she was ready to be Vice President but I loved her charisma and her go-getter...she's an individual. I liked her.

LT: Yeah, it was very exciting to see women run in the election! Even a couple years ago, Nancy Pelosi being nominated to the position of Speaker of the House.

SC: Yeah, yeah. She's doing a good job to, in my opinion

LT: Now, what do you think of the radical feminism of the sixties?

SC: Radical feminism- well I was never radical. But I think we need radical people, because radical people make the rest of us think and they do the gutsy things that the rest of us are scared to do. So, I'm grateful that there are radical feminists cuz they made way for the rest of us. In my grandmother's generation, they had to fight for suffrage, for voting rights, and there have been and there are still a lot of radical religious in the Church. A lot of people don't realize but we want to have women priests! And there are a lot of women speaking up and doing things that the bishops don't like and they are suffering for it. There is a woman called Edwina Gately- she's not a nun, she's a lay person, but she is Catholic. She started the first missionary group for lay people and then it was very successful in England. She came to States and she now works with prostitutes. She has a house in Chicago, a retreat house, a safe haven for prostitutes. You might want to look her up on the internet sometime. Edwina Gately. G-A-T-E-L-Y. She was a remarkable woman. And she is one of those feminists, but to a certain degree, she wasn't radical, but too radical to the Church. I'm too radical for the Church! I'd get kicked out if they knew have the things I believed! Laughs.

LT: Well I know you stay with the Church, but you go against these beliefs, do you find that a lot of women around you hold the same beliefs?

SC: Yes! Women in religion. Yes.

LT: They believe these ideas that are so not Catholic?

SC: Or with the Pope? Yes. Because the church, the Church, the hierarchy is at one level of thinking and the other people are someplace else. And the Church moves very slowly, and I stayed with the church because the Catholic Church has a wonderful history and wonderful colleges. It's just in the...I can't think of the word...well the liturgies are just wonderful. And then you have these men that are in sitting in these red clothes making rules for everybody, and to me, they're out of touch.

LT: Yeah.

SC: And the rest of us are keeping the Word going. They probably are to a certain extent but we are the grass roots. We're the soldiers in the field. And there are many women religious who are very remarkable. They are best educated group of women in the world.

LT: Do you find that politically, they hold more liberal or conservative views?

SC: The ones that are more forthright and speak out are more liberal. There are some that are conservative but we don't go around what they say. [Laughs.]

LT: [laughter]

SC: You know, there is a great amount of acceptance in religious life. Because there are many, some in the full habit and you still have acceptance. There is a great deal of acceptance. It's the "You want to believe that, that's fine," you know, those that want to believe otherwise, well the major things we certainly all believe in but there are some other things.

LT: What about the Church versus State issues right now...like gay marriage? I know the hierarchy of the Catholic church is saying no.

SC: Yeah, I don't believe in the...That's one of the things I sway on. I would like to see, you know, I don't necessarily believe in gay marriage but I would like to say a civil marriage.

LT: Right.

SC: Yes, I feel, I don't understand- I'm not gay. I have a niece that is, and that taught me a lot. And then, I got to tell you this story, so it's one thing to have niece that is gay, so I learned to be very open and realize that this thing is not a sickness. They are different.

LT: Right

SC: So you know my cockatiels that I had?

LT: Yeah

SC: Well the female, I had to give the female away. I had a male and a female, Kinder and Garden. I had to give the female away- I had to give Kinder away because the male, in mating season in January went ape. He bit of her toe. They told me that, the bird expert guy told me he would kill her eventually. So I gave her away and got another male because he was always used to company. So I always used to bring these birds home with me, so I got two cages, one was here and one was at my other house. I'd carry them back and forth in a small container. I walked into my kitchen one day and these birds were making out! I was shocked! I did not know it existed in the animal kingdom. So when I saw that it existed in the animal kingdom I said to myself, this is not unnatural. This is part of the human condition- the heart of nature. So when I went into my kitchen and saw the males making out, I was shocked because I did not know this existed in the animal kingdom. I have since found out that's very common. So this is not an unnatural act. So that taught me a very good lesson. It is not against nature. Just many of us don't prefer it. But we don't even have a need for that, but others do.

LT: Well, in my experience, even mentioning it to someone in the religious field that lifestyle is very "No! No, no, no!" That was refreshing to hear.

SC: Well I know many women religious, I went to before, before or about the same time I even know about my niece, I was asked to take photographs at a workshop because I'm an amateur photographer. It was a religious group and it was being set up by nuns and ex-nuns. And I loved this one person; Annette Rafferty, she's a remarkable woman in the area of Worcester, she's one of the founders of Abby's House.

LT: Oh really?

SC: Yeah I got stories about that...Well anyway, so they asked me to take pictures and I said oh sure! And I got a brochure and it was on homosexual, lesbians. I was shocked! I said "Oh my gosh!" So I said to an administrator in the congregation at the time I said, "Oh my God! I don't know if I can go to this!" She said, "Oh don't worry, I'll go with you." I said "Oh yeah! That's going to look great!" Laughs! But that workshop taught me a lesson. I heard these women speak their life stories and they're just like you and I. And they had struggles and one of them had gotten married because she thought that's what you need to do in life and she found out that wasn't what she...she was a lesbian, and she had three kids.

LT: Oh wow

SC: So I heard these stories and saw how they suffer and you know they can't help it! It's how they are wired. So that was the very first time I got education on lesbianism. Then my niece, that

was shocking. Then my birds. My birds were the cherry on the cake and convinced me it was not unnatural.

LT: That is a good story. Now, you're an amateur photographer on top of everything else you do?

SC: Yes, I started about 40 years ago because we were attending workshops and it said you should have a hobby, especially as you get older. And, so that's when I started. I used to develop my own prints. I had to work out of a dark room. And I was so busy making candy to support the dark room [laughs] and I thought, this is a vicious cycle. So I loved when digital came out. I'm not great, but I'm good enough. I'm not a great photographer.

LT: What do you like to photograph? Nature?

SC: Everything! Nature and the kids. Oh yeah, I used to put them on Shutterfly and parents would say to me, "Oh can you get me a copy of that." And it got be expensive for me to do everyone kids. So now that I've heard about Shutterfly, I uploaded them and as a parent you could print out to your hearts delight. And then I got free prints in return. I do a lot. I've got thousands and thousands of prints on my home computer.

LT: That's so cool. As far as photography goes would you ever want to do, like an art exhibition?

SC: No, because you know what, to be totally truthful, I'm not that good. I'm okay. I'm a snapshot photographer, sometimes I like to fool around but I'm not really artistic enough to be able to do that. But I have fun doing that. And I said if I ever get senile, put a camera in my hands, to the window and I'll click away and I won't even have to print it out, because I won't know any better. I'll be happy just clicking away!

LT: Back to those buttons!

SC: Yep. I used to do a lot of videos too and put them on CD's for the parents. Maybe I did that for your class? Was there a video of your kindergarten?

LT: I don't remember.

SC: Oh, well I bought the first video the school ever had. And then the VCR, it was 1,000 dollars at the time! And I bought the first one.

LT: Oh.

SC: With my candy money! All the electronic stuff I bought, I paid for with my candy money. I think the school bought the video camera. It was expensive at the time. Now we are talking,

about 25 years ago. Then there was a portable one. That's probably why I have spinal stenosis now, because of all the lugging I did. [Laughs]

LT: Helping those nuns up the hill...

SC: Oh yeah that's part of it! And then carrying all the video equipment. I can't lift them now. So I call the kids to help me, or the janitor.

LT: So anything else, any last -- what is the legacy you want to leave to your former students and the people around you? I mean yeah, with all the memories of Sr. Carol who makes the candy...

SC: And the pirates...I used to make pirate ships out of cardboard. Helen Taddeos' son-in-law is a finished carpenter and made me one out of wood! Awesome!

LT: Wow.

SC: Well you know what, if you can die when you die and it can be said that you lived a good life and you were kind and kids loved me, that's what I'm happy with. And my dog loves me. I'm sure. I've gotten letters from students, one first grader from Pittsfield, found my name on the website and he remembered, he said I was so kind. I don't even remember. So I think if you leave an impact on a child, and yea they are only babies, but you know what, they remember. They remember the kindness and they remember the one time you yelled at them! I took away jewels from one of the boys on the pirate ship and he still remembers that! But if you can be remembered for being kind and loving, that's what I want to be remembered as. Put that on my tomb, well not my plaque. I'm going to be cremated and have my ashes thrown in the woods. I don't even know if that's allowed but that's what I want done. But why shouldn't it be done?

LT: Right...

SC: It's another rule I broke.