

Interviewee: Sherri Glenn
Interviewer: Kaitlyn Akers and Caroline Kenney
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Abstract: Sherrie Glenn was born in Rhode Island, but has lived in Worcester, Massachusetts for about 20 years. At 43, she currently works as a court officer at the Worcester District Court. In this interview, she shares many stories from her past, touching on her struggles with coming out as a lesbian, working her way through the criminal justice system, finding love, and having children. She is a determined role model with a tough exterior, but discusses very emotional stories of her experiences with her own parents. She emphasizes the bond with her children, and explains how being a mother has changed her life for the better. Sherri uses her own struggles as a way to reach out to others. She tries her best not to be judgmental, and she reflects upon moments where this quality has been especially useful in her attempt to make a difference in someone else's life.

KA: I don't know if it's recording. Oh it's recording. I'm going to put it here so it's relatively close.

SG: Okay.

KA: Do I have permission to record your oral history, Sherri Glenn?

SG: You do.

KA: Perfect.

KA: What is your full name including your maiden name and married name?

SG: My name is Sherri Glenn, and my married name is the same, Sherri Glenn.

KA: And where were you born?

SG: Warwick, Rhode Island.

KA: Are you married?

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SG: I am married, currently.

KA: What is the name of your wife?

SG: Merriam Kissin.

KA: Do you have any children?

SG: Yeah, I have twin boys that are four.

KA: What cultures or ethnicity do you identify with for your family background?

SG: I am Irish-Catholic and French, I guess. Usually I identify as an Irish person, so...

KA: Can you talk about your parents?

SG: What do you want to know, educational history or just general – general information?

KA: Probably both.

SG: My parents were 17 and 19. [oven alarm goes off] Sorry that is my potatoes. Can you pause it?

KA: Yeah, we can pause it.

CK: Maybe we should test it.

[recording paused]

KA: I think it's recording, maybe we have to talk, like, a little louder, but Liam might think that Merriam's home.

SG: That's fine. Where were we?

KA: Your parents.

SG: Okay. My parents were married at—my mom was 17 and my dad was 19. Neither one of them graduated high school. They both went to work. They had my older brother, their first son, two years after being married, and I'm the youngest of four. They divorced after 53 years of marriage.

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KA: Wow.

SG: So, they're on their own right now, each in their own apartment, and they're doing well. My mom is French Canadian, and my dad is first-generation American, and my grandparents are from Ireland.

KA: So you lived in Warwick and then moved to Worcester after college?

SG: No, I actually grew up in Coventry, Rhode Island.

KA: Oh, okay.

SG: I was born in Warwick. Coventry is a small town and didn't have a hospital. [laughs] I lived there up until 2000. And I moved up here to be with someone, and then pretty much I stayed here ever since. Job opportunities were up here.

KA: Where did you go to college?

SG: I had a scholarship to URI [University of Rhode Island], kind of blew that scholarship. I didn't keep my grades up. I ended up going to a junior college, and then from there, I took night classes and had to get a job and things just kind of slowed down for me. So I have like 1,000 credits, not literally, but I never got my degree, so I can say that I have my high school diploma, with many credits. I have a lot of life skills. I have many things in my life.

KA: So, where do you work, currently?

SG: I'm a court officer at Worcester Court House.

KA: Okay, how did you come across that?

SG: I've always wanted to be in law enforcement my whole life. I went about it the hard way. If I had just finished my college, it would have been a lot easier. I took a job in a federal prison. I put myself through a police academy. I just—I never gave up, and when I kept getting different letters from different departments in Rhode Island civil service, that I wasn't getting the job, I just decided to try the court system. And it took about three years of constantly not—just being persistent, and I finally got a couple of interviews, and they gave me the job.

KA: So, what made you decide to stick in Worcester?

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SG: Well, I was with someone, and we broke up, and I could've went home because that's—I have no one here. But I didn't, and with my kind of personality I didn't want to put my tail between my legs and run home, so I got a studio apartment. I got a couple jobs and just worked my butt off. I took the job at the court house working the front door, which was a huge pay cut, but I took the chance of getting my foot in the door, and I knew once I got in there they would see my integrity and what a good worker I was. Hopefully, I would've—I gave myself a two-year mark. If I didn't get promoted in two years, I would have to do something else. I got promoted in 14 months.

KA: When did you meet Merriam?

SG: She was the clinician at the court house, didn't know her. I wouldn't let her in the building because she didn't have an ID.

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: She was walking up, trying to avoid the metal detector, and I asked—you know, politely—I asked, “Do you work here?” And she said, “Yes, I'm the doctor,” and I said, “Well, do you have an ID?” And she said, “No,” and I said, “Well, you have to go through the metal detector,” and she basically said, “Well, other people let me go through.” And I said, “Well, I'm not other people. I don't know you, and you don't know me, so you have to go through the metal detectors.” And basically that's how I met her. It wasn't as—it wasn't rude. It was kind of funny, actually. She ended up knowing my ex. [laughs]

KA: Naturally...

SG: The one—no, it's not one of those circle things. The woman I moved to Mass. for, we were together for about five and a half years, and of course, in the typical woman way, left me for a friend. [laughs] So, when—trying to kind of back up, that was my only interaction with Merriam, and then later on that day, I was walking around the courthouse at lunchtime, and I heard someone running up behind me, and I got out of the way, and she stopped, and she said, “Hey, I know somebody that knows you.” And when she told me who it was, my first thought was, “What is the matter with you?” because she knew her.

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: But it wasn't like that. We just started talking, and we became friends, so I have to say that through my worst experience of my life, I met the best experience of my life. Not that my last relationship was all bad, just the ending was, of course. You know, there's never a good ending, so basically just sticking around here, my life just fell into place. It was a lot—it was lonely, you know?

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KA: So, what was it like?

SG: [rubbing her eye] Sorry...

KA: No, it's okay my contact moves all the time. So, when did you realize you were a lesbian?

SG: When I knew I was, I was in college, you know? And then once you realize what's going on, you think back to all of those times in your life, like, "Oh my God. I had—that's why!" [laughs]. I had all these questions as to why I felt different because I grew up in a [pause]—I should say very sheltered life. Great family life. Parents would do anything for you. My biggest worry was, "Am I going to win the next game," or "Is my friend going to call me on the phone?" I never really had worries as a kid. So, I didn't really know much about the gay community like today. It wasn't anything like on TV. The only time someone mentioned it was if they were calling someone a fag, or I don't think I even heard the word "dyke" until like college, you know? So, no one really—it just—no one talked about it. Families—kids in my hometown married kids who went to the same high school. It's just a real small town. Everyone knew my family; everyone knew me. I hid it. I knew something was going on, and the more I felt it, the more I tried to be feminine. I mean—no, obviously, look at me now.

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: No, you know, my best friend was the prom queen, and, you know, I was in that crowd, and it was crazy how uncomfortable I always felt. Never felt comfortable. I can see where a lot of kids hurt themselves, try to kill themselves, or drink, or become drug addicts. If it wasn't for me being so stubborn, to want to succeed in life, I could have fallen down any one of those paths. I mean, it was extremely lonely back then. Now, it's a lot different, not that it was 100 years ago, but it was really hard, and then on top of it, I was in special education, so I had a learning disability, and it was—it was just—I had so much pressure in my life. I had no one to talk to. I didn't know what was going on with myself, and then when I hit college, I never would've made the first move. Someone made the first move on me, and I was like, "Oh my God, that's what's wrong with me." And I thought, "That's what's wrong with me," that's exactly what I said. And I remember praying to God, "Take my legs. Make me normal." Like, it was horrible. And I had no one to talk to. I was afraid if I talked to a psychologist, I wouldn't be allowed to be a police officer because it was written down, so I was paying out of pocket, at like 20 years old, to talk to a therapist, you know, not even a doctor. It was just—it was hard. But I'm just so determined in life. Like, I don't, I don't even know. I mean, my whole life could have been totally different. With education, if I didn't play sports, I would probably be pumping gas, not that it's a bad job, but I would never be where I was, so I put a lot into my sports to get my mind off things. And then eventually when I was—I think I was 23—I never lied to my parents. I was so sick of lying. I went out to the clubs in Providence. I was going to the gay bars, and my parents would ask,

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“Where are you going? And, “Oh, I’m going out. I’m going to this bar.” What if something happened to me? I thought, well, how would my parents feel? So, I went—I was dating someone. It wasn’t serious and we broke up, and I was like I need to tell someone. Huge storm. I had an apartment in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, which is terrible. I drove all the way home. My dad was at a pitch tournament because, of course, Irish pitch is Saturday, you know?”

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: In winter, he played pitch. I walked in the door and my mom, my mom is great. She just looked at me and said, “I know what this is about. Sit down.” I was crying. Like, I was bawling, and I don’t do that, not that crying is a bad thing but—

KA: It’s not your personality

SG: No, I’ll bawl over a movie. People will be like, “You crying?” And I’m like, “Yeah.” The Lion King – I was bawling on my knees.

KA: Well...

SG: I’m just saying that I’m a very emotional person, and that’s what I mean. In my job, I have to be a certain way, but I’m extremely emotional. Like, it’s crazy how you can put that on and just do your job. But, anyways, I’m trying to make a long story short.

KA: No, talk, we don’t mind.

CK: Yeah.

SG: So, my mother calls my father home from the pitch tournament, and he thinks something is really bad because he’s never been called like never in like—they’ve lived in the same house for, like, 49 years. We’d been there like 30 at the time. He was like, “What is going on?” My father was all nervous, and, we sit down, and I grew up in a raised ranch, but we had an all-seasons room off it, and it’s all sliding doors—sliding glass doors—and we’re sitting there. And my mother, my mother goes, “Tell him.” And I’m like, “I can’t.” He’s like, “What? What’s wrong?” And I remember my father’s face, and I’m just like, I’m crying, and he’s like, “Oh my God! Are you okay? Are you sick?” And I’m like, “No.” And I couldn’t talk, and my mother says, “She needs to move home.” And he’s like, “So, what? She can move home anytime she wants.” You know, my mother opened up with that, and my mom was like, “Tell him.” He’s like, “If somebody doesn’t tell me what’s going on.” He was really—my father was getting scared. And I couldn’t say it, and my mother—and I hated the word, and I’m still not happy with the word—but my mother goes, “Your daughter is a lesbian.” And I look at my mom, like, “Oh my God!” To hear those words.

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[Liam calls from upstairs]

LK: Mom?

SG: Yes, honey?

LK: Is mommy here yet?

SG: No, go night nights. She will give you kisses when she comes home.

LK: Who are you talking to?

SG: I'm talking on the phone...

LK: you are?

SG: yes honey....

LK: Why?

SG: Oh my God, I'm lying to my kid. [To Liam] Honey go night nights, okay? He's always like, "Why? Why? Why?"

LK: Mom...

SG: Go night nights, hon.

[long pause]

LK: What did you say?

SG: I didn't – I didn't say anything. [laughs] Night, night honey.

LK: What'd you say?

SG: Can you leave that running?

KA: Yeah that's fine. Okay, the boys are sleeping? I didn't say anything.

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SG: Oh, yeah. No, so... my mother says it for me, and it was just in slow motion, you know? And then it's kind of like a memory burned into your brain. You know how you have certain memories? So, my father, when he gets nervous, he lifts up his baseball hat. He lifts up his baseball hat, and I'm like, "Uh-oh."

[The recorder is shifted and moved closer to Sherri.]

SG: So, my father lifts up his baseball hat and gives me that look, and he says to me, "I don't care if you're orange, green, black, or blue. You're my daughter, and I love you. This has to be the most difficult thing you've ever had to do in your life, and you've been through a lot of things." And then he said to me, "It must've been horrible for you, holding that in all these years." And I just—we just all started bawling. And he squeezed me so hard he hurt me.

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: Nah, he didn't. And it kind of just went from there, and they're very old-school, uneducated, very caring people, but I don't know if they thought it was a phase for a little bit because at one point, I was single for a while, and then I brought someone home for Christmas. Like, just doing the normal thing you would do with any partner, and then my father had a moment where—he's not good at speaking, talking out his feelings. He would just get like angry sometimes. I'm like, "You're not mad at me because I—I don't know—parked my car sideways. What is really going on?" So that's basically how you have to push my father. Kind of like four year olds.

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: You're not angry at that, but... So, he was angry at me about something, and I said, "Well, you know what, dad..." He mentioned something about—he goes, "Well, I didn't think..." I guess just because he saw me with someone, and it's not like we're all over each other. We didn't even hold hands in front of my parents or anything. I don't know what went through his mind. So, basically the conversation ended. He came into my room, he sat down on the bed, and I was just laying on the bed. I was crying, and I said to him, I said, "The only way I can make you understand is that it's extremely hard being gay." I said, "There are people out there that hate you because you're gay, and they don't know you. It's scary. You feel alone. You don't feel like you're a part of anything." And I said, "I told you guys because I needed to share it with someone and not feel so alone." And I said, "But if you can't handle it, then you are going to lose me as a daughter, because I don't want to live that way anymore." And it had hit him, and [pause] he started to cry, and he said, "I didn't realize it." And after that, there was never ever a question about anything. He supported everything, loved anyone I brought home, anyone who I was with seriously—which was basically the person I moved to Mass. I didn't date a lot of people—treated them like a daughter, called them their daughter, sent them birthday cards that said, "Love, mom and dad." You know, they never – that's pretty cool for people who have been

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together since they were, you know, 17, 18. And my mom, her one difficult thing was—she’s old school, you know. “Who is going to take care of you? What about AIDS?” Because that was all being blown up, back then. You know, legitimate questions...

KA: AIDS?

SG: [laughs] I know, huh? And I was like, “Well, you know, mom, just to make you feel better, I’m in the least category to get it. I’m kind of safe actually.” Just, you know, mom questions, I guess. And I reassured her of different things. I don’t sleep around, you know. And then, she felt okay. I had to make them feel okay. And I said, “Mom, no one has to take care of me. I can take care of myself.” And, “What about a family?” I said, “You know, maybe someday,” but I said, “Right now, no. I would love to have kids, but I don’t think it’s going to happen with my lifestyle.” And I said, “It sucks. I’ll never have kids.” So I, I kind of left it at that. You never thought of having kids unless you dated someone who had a kid. It was going to happen with, I want to say, my generation of growing up, you know? And then, everything changed. And I still can’t believe I’m a mom, sometimes. Like, “You’re calling *me* mom?”

[Oven alarm beeping]

SG: [muttering]

KA: [laughs] We have that on recording.

SG: The potatoes need like 5 more minutes. I’m making lunch for tomorrow.

KA: I know, they’re - they’re picky lunch-eaters.

SG: Liam is the worst. [pause] So, anyways, yeah. So, I guess when you just feel love for the first time and have butterflies in your stomach. It was crazy. I was so much older. I was probably 19 or 18, and most kids feel that, like, in high school, so there was a lot of catching up to do. Yeah, no, I went a little crazy, and I didn’t go to class, and that’s basically how I flunked out. So, yeah. I was just out partying, and I didn’t do any drugs or anything, just stayed out all night dancing. I never did any of that, just drinking and having a relationship. I mean, I waited forever, you know, to be in one. It was all hidden, though, of course. We each had boyfriends—poor guys. We didn’t sleep with them. You probably think I’m a big ho.

KA: No!

SG: No, they were actually nice guys, and I did feel bad, but yeah. So, then in the meantime, I just kept trying police departments, and, I just, I don’t know, I just never gave up because I knew—I spent my whole educational career working my ass off trying to hide my disability. It

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was so much work. Because there wasn't services. There wasn't—I could go to a guidance counselor and say I need an extra hour for a test, and they had to give it to you. But there was no one to help you. No one could, you know, so not only feeling out of place [pause] in my lifestyle, I guess, I felt out of place education wise. And it was just—it was a lot, and I look back at it now, and I'm like, "Holy shit, that was a long road, you know?" And then, it took a long time to make peace with myself. I was really, really hard on myself. I just did everything the long and hard way. It's funny, I joke with Merriam all the time, and I'm like, "Thank God you gave birth, because I wouldn't want one of my kids to have the the learning disability that I have." I mean they could, and I would have to deal with it because there is so much more out there now, but the bell used to ring in high school to go to class, and I would wait until everyone was in their classroom, so I could sneak in my little classroom. Like, one of the small classrooms, I had. All my friends on the team were picking between Providence College, or two of them went to Yale. So, yeah, they weren't dumb jocks; I was.

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: [laughing] I filled the quota. So, yeah. So, it was a long battle, and I think it really laid down the foundation for who I am now, as far as integrity, work ethic and a lot of things in life just make me compassionate towards the people that come into my job now. If I have to be tough, I can. And there is different kinds of tough. There's, obviously, the physical kind, and then there's the "I'm stern." And sometimes that gets people to open up. I listen, and—you're a priest, you're mom, a counselor, you're everything working as a court officer, or basically any kind of officer, I should say. I'm glad to be a court officer and not a police officer, today, looking back. Because when I wanted to be a police officer, I was going to be the one to help the cat out of the tree or the old lady cross the street, you know? That was your vision. I wouldn't want to be a police officer, today. It's just horrible. I can't see myself chasing kids now at 47 years old, not that that's old, but being out in all kinds of weather, it's just—and they're the bad guys, right now, and I feel bad for them. With my job, I feel like I'm actually helping some of the kids that come in, or even some of the adults that come in. You don't know who they are. Some of the females that come in—a good example—most of them are drug addicts working the streets. I know they didn't say, "You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to go work the street so that I can shoot up some heroin." That's not who they wanted to be. Something happened in their lives. It could be me, it could be someone in my family, it could be one of my best friends, it could be—it could be anybody. It's horrible, and people get treated terribly. I treat people with respect, and when that doesn't work, and they're not treating *me* with respect, I let them know.

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: You know, "Hey, I've been nothing but respectful," give them a little speech like that, and it usually fixes that. I've come across, oh God, it could be a doctor or anyone in the psychology field, and you just come in and sit in the court room, and you will see everything. And we have

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anyone from people with mental disabilities, people who are delusional, people who are angry, violent, rude, disrespectful, scared and [pause] abandoned. Drug addicts, alcoholics. You know, you also see—I'm not talking about the people who are rapists and child molesters, things like that, but I mean the general people, people who come in where I work, they are at their worst. If you look at it that way, and if you expect people to be different than the way they are, you shouldn't have this job and you burn out quickly. I always tell myself, "If I walk in one day, and say I hate my job, it's time for me to leave." I love what I do. I've always wanted to do something like this, and I got lucky to have this job because I mean, I feel, I feel like I hit the lottery like education wise. I have my high school diploma and that doesn't cut it. I have a ton of experience, you know, working in the prison, working DYS [Department of Youth Services], but still, I'm doing what I wanted to do, and not a lot of people get to do that, and I enjoy my job, and I've had people—anyone that I've had to bundle, or whatever you want to call it, have always apologized to me. People that you think nothing of it, coming in—I had this one gentleman come in, he was homeless, came into the courthouse. He wore overalls. He had something in every pocket. He had a jean jacket—he had a jean jacket with pockets—everything had pockets. Everything he owned was on him. He had a beard down to here, a walking stick. No hygiene, you know, he lived on the street. It was raining; it was wet. He smelled. You know, it was just horrible. And the people I work with, some of the people were just like, "Oh, I can't take this. I can't do it." Like, right in front of the person. And this is a human being. First of all, it's embarrassing, and I remember I took the wand, and I was like, "Sir, come over here," and I said, "Let me see your jacket." I was going through his jacket. He had like rail spikes...

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: You know, I'm going through all this stuff, and this is what he owned. It's nothing to us, but this is what he owned—his possessions—and it meant stuff to him. So, I took it, and I put it in a little box, and I told him, "I'm putting everything in here. Here is a ticket for it." Because we always give tickets for things you give back, and I said, "I promise you will get this back." And I didn't make a big deal out of it. I wanted him. He wasn't the greatest smelling person, you know what I mean? But you don't—he goes and does his whatever he had to do in court and about an hour later, he leaves. I give him his box and things. He comes back the next day, and I'm like, "Oh," and first thing I think is, "My God, I have to go through this all that again."

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: You know, but I mean the pockets. He was just coming in. Here's this homeless guy, was living on the street, like not near the courthouse, I don't know where it was in Worcester. He walked all the way back that day just to thank me for treating him like a human being. And I was like, why wouldn't I? And I think the reason why I'm like this is because when I had to come out, I felt different, and it sucks when you're treated a different way. I would never treat someone like that, you know? It's just amazing how something so small, you know? So, I was

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like wow, I didn't make a difference in the guy's life, but I did good in a day and made him feel like a human being. That's pretty good. So, I think I'm doing what I'm supposed to do. Now, I work with kids...

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: And I always say I hate kids, but I don't, you know? I don't even know how I deal with kids. I don't even know how to explain it to you. I grew up, like I said, in a small town in Rhode Island, whitest girl on earth, whitest town on earth, and these are kids mainly from South Worcester. I didn't even know any Spanish kids growing up. I didn't know slang. When I worked at DYS, I was like, "What does that mean?" And when I worked in prison, people would say things, and I'm like, "I don't know what that means," and they're like "It's just slang." You know, things I've never heard before. So, it was funny; I kind of laughed at myself, and I found that no matter who the kid is, if he has a mental disability, you can get through to them. If you just talk to them and not down to them, and you listen and you talk, no matter who they are, they are going to listen to you when you're in front of the judge. It's crazy how you can talk someone down, and you can do that with adults, friends, college students, anyone that is having—and I don't even know how you develop these skills, and it's funny, we could be walking in New York City, and nobody talks in New York. Merriam is from New York, and people will stop and ask me a question. Merriam's like, "You just have that face." And I'm like, "What face?" "The face that that you'll talk to everyone!"

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: I'm like, "Well, I don't look at my feet when I walk." But, anyways, I think it's just that all of my life experiences that I went through, being where I am now, I try to put myself in people's situations, that old saying, I'm not going to walk 10 miles in your shoes, but that's not what I mean, but I mean, it has made me [pauses] understand a lot of things. So, you kind of just—you do a lot of extra work. A couple weeks ago, I went across the street to get my lunch. I'm walking in with my lunch in my hand, and someone says one of the—she's the DCF [Department of Children and Families] Liaison, and this kid was going to go into DCF custody, and he was walking around the building. You know we can't stop them from that because there's no criminal case, but she's like, "Sherri stop him!" And I'm like, "Why, what's going on?" And I'm like, "Honey, what's the matter? Come here." And he was just angry, just so angry, like his face when he had tears coming out of his eyes, and his ball hat is down, and he's like, "I don't want to talk," and he's pulling his arms away, and I'm just like, [thudding sound as she pats her shoulder] "Come on," and I put my hand on his shoulder, and I'm like, "Come over here, and talk to me for a few minutes, will you? Obviously, that's your mom over there, and she's freaking out. Can you just come talk to me?" I spent my whole lunch hour in a meeting room with his mom, and him, and his probation officer, which, they get them if—it doesn't have to be criminal—they can get one if they file a CRA, a child requiring an assistance, basically they're just stubborn. And the

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mother was like he's running away and not coming home, getting trouble in school, not doing your homework. Like, the parents are seeing a downfall, and a concerned parent will come in and file one. And what happens is, the judge puts—the judge puts court orders on them, like you have to follow the rules at home, you have to go to school every day on time, things like that and so they find a probation officer, and they check in on them. So, I'm sitting in there and my heart just broke for this kid. There is something going on, and he was just so angry. To be, like, 13, and be that angry. So, I just talked to him, and he was doing well, and he came back. He's not doing well, right now, but he's back, and they're trying to get him some services, but you know, you can't save people, you can't save everybody, but it—it's everything. I'm babbling, but I think what I'm saying is my life experiences of feeling different, of feeling out of place, even though I acted as if I wasn't. I mean, I hung out [pause] and I had friends and did stupid things. High school, you know like *The Breakfast Club*, I was the popular jocks, you know, whatever, and I hung out with all the popular kids, I guess, and they didn't want to date me. But I don't know. I always felt out of place in a way, in the way until, until I had kids. And now, I didn't care if you didn't like me. I used to get upset, and "Oh my God, they don't like me because I'm gay." I don't care anymore what you think about me. If I went to a restaurant, and, believe it or not, if I got food I didn't like, I wouldn't send it back. I didn't like being the center of attention, unless I was sports because then I did.

[Everyone laughs.]

KA: Well...

SG: I would go to parties and sit there and joke with people, and I didn't like being the center of any kind of attention, so when I first had the kids, you get this weird kind of attention, and I wouldn't know what to do with it. I would be out at the store, and they would be like, "Oh my God, you have kids." These people—and it was very uncomfortable for me because I'm very quiet, believe it or not, and we were at a restaurant, I always liked to go to a quiet restaurant, and having a drink, I wasn't in that loud party corner. My kids are the loudest kids on earth. Everyone is paying attention, you know? And I don't even care anymore. Like they have made me—as I got older, I felt okay that I was gay, and my family accepted me. I told people at my last job because it wasn't obvious, but now it is.

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: Didn't have to tell anyone at the courthouse. But, I felt, I mean I still was always like, "You're gay. Your head is going to get bashed in or something." You know, I always had that fear. I don't—I'm not ashamed. I don't feel out of place. I don't know how to describe it. And, it's weird, you know? The only thing I worry about is that people might tease them because they have two moms, that would kill me, but I know it's going to happen. All kids get teased. I'm just glad they don't go to a school like that.

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KA: I was going to say, have you ever experienced anything like that at the Worcester Jewish Community Center? Like with...

SG: No! No, oh my God, no. Matter of fact, I wanted to become Jewish because everyone was so cool. My mom, very religious, but I mean, she's not like a—you know, she's just religious, and say we'd have to go to a wedding or church or something, and I walk in one time, and I'm like [looks around at the ceiling]. She's like, "What are you doing?" Sorry I'm whispering. She says to me, "What are you doing?" We're in the church, and I say, "Just making sure the roof doesn't cave in on me."

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: It was just a joke, but I felt so bad. I never felt comfortable in church. Oh my God, I felt so uncomfortable at church, and nobody knew. It was just all me, playing games with myself, but yeah, I worry about that, but I'm hoping that—I think that's why I have to feel okay, because if they hear any kind of doubt, that would make it not okay. And they're okay. And that's why I moved to Holden. Can't raise them in—what's a public town? We lived in a bad area of Worcester. It was an awesome loft, but didn't plan on having kids there, and we had to get out of there. They would have to go to Canterbury Street School. We wouldn't have sent them there. We would have sent them to private school, but instead of spending a ton of money on private school, we just moved to a town that has a really good public school. And, you know, hopefully, they'll go to college. They better go to college. [laughs]. And I know all the tricks, so yeah. They make me feel normal—my normal. So, it's kind of cool. So, I was 43 when they were born, and I was scared to death. Scared to death. I think because I was older. You think of all the things, like, "Oh my God." When you're younger, you have kids, and you just—you're not tired, but you're struggling in different ways. Career, money, but we're all struggling for money, but I mean, at 43, I have no patience. I'm settled in my career.

[Oven alarm goes off.]

SG: They should be done. [pause] Twenty years ago, somebody asked me, "What's going on," but I've never sat down and looked at my life, ever, you know? I mean, I'm not going chronologically, but I just feel like, looking back on my life, you know? What I went through: my break up—oh my God, you have your heart broken for the first time. We all go through it. Of course, when I did, it was my first love, and I was over the moon. You know when you hit high school, that broken heart crush thing. Oh, I was wrecked. I was like, "This sucks!" I just remember saying, "Oh my God, I was so better off not coming out."

[Everyone laughs.]

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SG: It was horrible. Yeah, it was just, you know, kind of like the army, I guess, or the military. They break you down. I was broken, and like I said, I wasn't going to go home. And everybody wanted me to come home. My buddies were like, "Come home with me. No, come home with me." And I'm like, "I'm not going home. I'm not putting my tail between my legs. I'm going to—I need to become an adult." [laughs]. Even though I was, like, 27. It was in my thirties when it happened, sorry, but yeah, no, I'm a late bloomer in everything: career, education, family, you know, everything, late bloomer. And it really made me put myself first, for the first time in my life. Like think about who I am. Not as in being gay or anything, but holy shit. You know, everything has just been—like, with school, struggling with school, struggling with the job, you're in a relationship, and everything is fine, and then everything is just wiped out from under you. This happens to everybody, you know? But I was like, I don't know. I was like, "I've got too much of this shit in my life." You know? Like, "This isn't going to break me." So, I said, "That's it. I'm going to take care of myself. I'm going to figure life out." And that was it. So, I guess I hit my low. I said enough's enough, and...

[CK coughs.]

SG: Do you want some water?

CK: No, I'm okay. Thank you.

SG: I went to a therapist and didn't care if it was on paper or not. I wanted my insurance to pay for it this time. She made me go like twice a week, and then, I remember at one point, I wrote down a whole bunch of goals, did every one of them. And she said to me, "You know, you don't have to come anymore." I was like, "What are you talking about? Did I graduate?"

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: She goes, "No. I mean I don't feel right to keep seeing you. I don't think there is anything more I can do for you. If you ever need a new therapist, that's fine, but..." I remember joking around; I was like, "Can you put this in writing? That I'm okay? So if anybody ever questions me, I can be like, 'I've been checked.'"

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: No, you know, I used to—it was like I had—I was the youngest so, my family used to treat me like I'm the baby. They would always try to protect me. My mom's in the hospital, and after she comes home, it's like nothing big, you know? They were always protecting me from everything. And I was like, I'm starting my life, and I did. And plus, it was another hard road, you know? And, here I am. Merriam was just out of the blue. We had the same, I hate to use this word, but core values, and we clicked, and now I sound like a therapist. And we had twins, and it

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was crazy. It was crazy. It was the first time I felt vulnerable, that was a new feeling for me. I never felt vulnerable—everything that I’ve been through. It made me a mess. You know, you get threats every once in a while in the field that I’m in. It’s like whatever. But this guy, he was dead serious. He’d just done 20 years. I didn’t know this at the time. There was a mother and a father there, and the care protection services had just taken their kid away. DCF just took the kid away, so they’re allowed to have a hearing. And the boyfriend of the mother, who was like 20 years older than her—I didn’t know, I thought it was her father. He came into the courthouse to beat the kid up, the father of the child. So, he followed him into the bathroom, and the attorney came running to get me. I called for a male officer to go into the bathroom because we didn’t hear anything yet. They came walking out, and I didn’t even fathom that it was this older gentleman – the attorney came over and blah, blah, blah. Long story short, pointed him out, and I was like, “Sir, you need to stay away from him.” He told me to go eff myself. And I said, “Okay, do you have a case, here, today?” And he said, “I don’t need to tell you a thing.” And I said, “Yes, you do.” I said, “You need to stay away from that gentleman right there.” He told me, “I don’t have to effing do what you effing say. I can do whatever the eff I want.” I said, “Okay, sir, now, you’re leaving the building.” So, we’re walking down the stairs, and he’s a couple steps ahead of me. I had him like this, and I was like, “You need to leave. You need to leave. Either you need to leave, or I’m taking you that way.” [into custody]. “Your choice.” So, we started to walk down the stairs, and he turned back at me—he’s a few steps in front of me—and he said to me, “You think you’re tough, huh?” I said, “Sir, you need to leave the building.” Because I don’t want to engage in that. And he kept walking. Then, he stopped again, and he turned back at me, and he said, “We’ll see what happens to you after work, and you’re going to like it.” And I went, “Okay, you need to leave the building.” And he says, “We’ll see how tough you are.” And I go, “That’s right, I am tough, and if you don’t keep walking, I’m going to drag you out.” And that’s the only thing I said to him and went to call for back up because he basically—I never had anyone—it was just very strange, like to say that to me. Basically, I took it as you’re going to grab me and rape me or something, you know? It was so threatening in the way he said it, and I kind of like it enrages you because you think you can—as a woman, you think you can just say that to me? Like I will beat your f---ing a--.

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: And then, the first thing, you’re at work so you can’t, but you have all these things, and you feel like you’re crazy because you have all this crap running through your head: he’s threatening me, I’m throwing him out, I’m going to stay calm and professional, I’m not going to engage. But I’ve never had anyone threaten me before. I’ve been called—I’ve been in this field 17 years, and I’ve only been called the “c-word” twice. So, that’s pretty good.

[Everyone laughs.]

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SG: But I've never been threatened like that. I went, "Holy shit. You know what, that's fine." I went to call on the radio, and one of the guys had heard him say it to me, and he was really loud and one of the court officers came out of his courtroom because he could hear him yelling at me, and I'm just like, "Keep walking. The door is right there. Keep walking." You know, you get very, you get very into it. I went to call on my radio, and a friend of mine, another court officer, comes up behind me and was like, "I'm right behind you Sherri," and I said, "Can you finish walking him out?" Because I'm not going to keep myself in this situation. And I stopped where I could see him, and he kept walking, and I told security he can't come back in. It was this winter, it was like six below zero that day, and he stayed in front of the courthouse for like three hours. I didn't know he was out there. Someone called me and said. "That guy is still out there. Does he have a case?" I was like, "No..." He was legitimately waiting for me. And I'm like I have to get my kids at the JCC [Jewish Community Center]. What if he follows me home? I was thinking I would go out there and arrest him, or I'm going to bring everybody with me out there and have them arrest him, you know because he is still on property. But I didn't think of that. I didn't think, "I'm going to grab this asshole, and I'm going to put him in custody." And other people went to look for him because they were going, too. He was told to leave the property, and he didn't, so it's trespassing, an arrestable offense. And normally, I would have thought, "This guy wants to wait for me? Okay, he's going to wait for me, alright." You know? I freaked. I called my chief, and I was like, "I need to talk to you upstairs." He was like, "That guy is waiting outside, and the attorney had to go out another door for lunch, somebody walked her out the back." And they go out there and go, "Oh my God, I can't find him." He's like, "He might be waiting in a car, and I don't know what kind of car." And all I kept thinking is "My kids, my kids, my kids." And I was so scared, not that he would hurt me, you can try, I don't care, but not my kids. That's my family, and I felt so vulnerable, and I started to cry, you know. I went to the locker room crying. My friend, Lynn, came in, you met Lynn today, and she was like, "What's wrong?" And I'm like... And she said, "Sherri, we will walk outside together." And I'm like, "No, I want him to jump me now. Don't f--- with me." She was like, "You're crazy." And I'm like, "No, I want him to do something crazy here. I'm not going out a back door, so he can find me in my car. I'm going out the front door, and I'm just going to walk slowly and see if anyone is following me." And I had other people go with me, and I remember going to the JCC and looking behind me. I went in a different way, I went home a different way, drove around for a while, got the kids McDonalds, went down all the back roads. And I hated it. I hated feeling vulnerable. A few days later, the guy is having a heart attack, having chest pains, and I'm in lock-up, and I went to go help in the elevator because I'm a first responder and a CPR [cardiopulmonary resuscitation] instructor, and he's bent over and holding his chest and has his coat on. I don't know who the guy is, I'm just on lock-up, and he's an overnight arrest, so

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someone goes, gets him a chair, and, you know, they call the ambulance anyone know his name? Anyone? And the desk worker said his name, and it was him. But I found out who he was, did a ton of research, and found out his nickname, where he may live, talked to the police. They called the gang unit, they—that's not why he got arrested. He got arrested on a threat. I didn't even file a complaint. They pull up a mug shot, and I'm like, "That's him." And I just remember having that picture, so I went up to the chief and I'm like, "Chief, this is him, the guy that's having a heart attack." He goes, "I know him. He just did 20 years. He's a bad dude," and I'm like, "No kidding."

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: So, anyways, that's the most I've ever because of my children, and I'm like, "This guy was really going to follow me home." I'm like, you know, it was a fast change in my life, the good and the bad. But nothing ever came of it. He got arrested for—they did a drug sting, and he happened to be in there, and he was on probation, and he was held on a 100,000 dollar bail – that's how much drugs he had, but I had no idea. He was held without bail for another case, so this guy, his lawyers were arguing. I saw him beating up some guy, so whatever, it was nothing to us, but it was forever for him. It was jail. You have kids when you're ready. Anyways, I'm babbling. What do you guys want to know?

KA: How did you choose between you and Sherri who would carry?

SG: Me and Merriam?

KA: Yeah, you and Merriam. [laughs] You're Sherri.

SG: She's younger. [pause].

KA: Did you guys anticipate twins, or was it like a...?

SG: No, no it was IVF [In-Vitro Fertilization]. It was a huge chance, they told us. And we were like, well if we only had one, we would try and freeze my eggs and have her carry because I also had—from all the sports I used to do—I *had* a bad back; it's been fixed. I had an artificial disc put in, and it was screwed into my spine, and I feel great. I just had it done two months before they were born, so I haven't been able to run again. But no, between having three prior surgeries on my back, which I don't have any back pain, but I think carrying would have been horrible, and I was 43—no I was 42. She was 39 when she was pregnant, and they called it a geriatric pregnancy. It was the funniest thing in the world.

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KA: That is so rude. That's so insensitive.

SG: That's exactly what she said. I was laughing. [laughs and pauses]. And then she turned 40. They were born in August; she turned 40 in November. I was 43 when they were born. So yeah I just I don't know if I would have and I can't picture myself pregnant, never. And I knew I was going to have kids, but I didn't know how, even way back then. And then when I knew I was gay I was like, I'm never going to have kids. But I always thought of having kids, but never *having* the kids. It was funny thinking like they would physically be my kids, but not have the kid; it was crazy. But yeah I would have been a terrible pregnant person. I would have whined and complained. I'm tough in a lot of ways, but that's hell. I don't think they tell people the truth in a lot of ways. It's not—it's hard! I mean I have so much respect for anyone that has given birth or is pregnant. It's hard. I think it's just amazing. It's crazy. There's nothing that's really great about it. And ours was a horrible experience. Of course, being older, we took twin classes, child first aid, child safety, birthing classes and I'm like "Oh my God, another class?" [laughs] And we were like the oldest people there. It was hysterical. They make you get up, sit on the floor, get up on a chair and Merriam's like, "Can I just stay on the floor?" [laughs]. Because the others are coming in at like 22 years old and she's still got her shoes on, like carrying twins. It was pretty funny. But it was a horrible experience. Nothing went the way it was supposed to go. The kids came early. And Merriam, her kidneys were failing.

KA: Oh my God!

SG: Yeah so that's why they were here early. It was—it's crazy. You ever see the movies where you're standing still and everything is just spinning around you? That's what it felt like for me because I got to see a really cool... [pause]. I was in the role or the position that most men are. You know, the person you love is giving birth, and most women don't get that aspect of it. They don't treat you any different. They treat you just like you're the husband, I guess. But it was—they were—I mean I always have the bad thought going in, as my past creeps in a little bit. What are these people going to think? I'm a woman, but my wife is giving birth. Are they going to treat me different in the delivery room? Or are they going to treat me because they have to treat me? And little things like that creep in, but then they just go away once you give people a chance, you know? It was amazing. It was horrifying. It was, I don't know, people talk about their kids being born, but it's not the best thing you've ever seen. [laughs] It's not like "Oh my God, so interesting." I mean people are lying. I was horrified. It's just, it's scary, and they're not the cutest thing when they come out.

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: Liam looked like Benjamin Button. That's what we called him. He looked like a little old man, because he had no fat, and he was wrinkly, and he would scream. And he was all hairy, like a monkey. They both looked like monkeys. As a matter of fact, that was Merriam's first words to

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her sons. I was standing there and they put them into my arms, and I'm like "Can someone help me, here?" They put both of them in my arms. I'm just, I'm like, "Look!" And someone came over to help me and we're holding them, their heads are this big – in the palm of my hand. You can't see on the video, their heads were the size of the palm of my hand. And they were hairy as hell. Their little nostrils flaring, they're crying. And she's lying there like Jesus on a board, all cut open. She looks at them, she's shaking, strapped out to a board. She looks at them, she goes, "They look like monkeys."

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: So everyone starts laughing. And I look at her, and I'm like, "Those are your first words?" And everything was just crazy. And they did—they were so hairy because they came out early, so they had like hair everywhere. I called them Wolverine for the longest time. Liam still has a little hairline on his back. We'll take care of it. We're lesbians, we won't let the guy be hairy.

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: But yeah. And Aiden comes out all mellow, crying with his little soft cry. Day one that was their personalities. My kids, Liam is just very outgoing, and Aiden is kind of a little more reserved. I mean they're both outgoing and crazy and funny, but Aiden and then Liam, they were in the NICU [Neonatal Intensive Care Unit], and Liam pulled his IV [intravenous] out of his arm. You ever have anxiety in your life? They used to just call me Nervous Nellie so I guess I've had it my whole life, but not like—I guess it was sports induced anxiety, I guess. But you just kind of get used to the butterflies when you're getting ready for a big game. But Liam pulled his IV out, and he was so small that they use an elastic, a regular elastic, to put around his arm to put the needle in. They couldn't find a vein so they brought in a couple people, and he's screaming and screaming and screaming and screaming. And I'm like... [pause]. Merriam was on a certain medication where she wasn't allowed to move for 24 hours so she didn't get to see them right away. And I was up there for 24 hours, and it was the 24 hour mark and she's, "Bring me upstairs!" in a wheelchair. So she had just come up, and he had just pulled out his IV and is screaming. She's holding Aiden, and is like, "What's going on over there?" And I'm like, "He's fine, they're trying to put the needle back in him," and inside I'm freaking out! In my brain, I'm freaking out. And I have those moments at work, or because I also took firefighting out in York Technical College in North Carolina. I had my level A hazmat, like I can do firefighting if I want. So you have like—I have had—I've seen someone hit a car with a moose, a car turned into a convertible, saved. I've done a lot of crazy things in my life, but this was different. And I'm inside going "OH MY GOD," but outside I'm like, "He's okay. He's alright." But inside. I'm like...I didn't...It was... [???]. I don't know how to describe it. I'm not good with words. And they brought—they called a specialist up to put the IV in his head, but he was screaming so loud he went into like a weird—he was in an isolette, which looks worse, but it's actually better. He can regulate his body heat, so he was in like the Bubble Boy thing, an isolette. And I went,

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what's with these stupid things, you know a hole? [imitating trying to put her hands through the holes]. And he was so little, he could barely hold my pinky. And he just wrapped his whole little—this was my—I was afraid I wasn't going to bond with them because I wasn't biologically the parent, the mom. You know I was worried about things like that. And he grabbed my pinky with his hand, and he went into this weird trance, and he stopped screaming. And I remember just going, [undecipherable] as if I carried, or I was a mom. Like you just feel very, I don't know, like nothing else matters but that. And it was funny, I started like freaking out inside like, "You're going to be okay, you're going to be okay." And that went away, and I took care of Merriam. And I went home. I had been up I don't know how many days. I was working and going there, and I came home and I flopped on my bed and I balled. I was freaking out. I couldn't breathe. My neighbor knocked on the door. He didn't hear me or anything. My neighbor knocked on my door. He wanted to know if I wanted my dog walked. And I was like, "Yeah, that'd be nice." I was still freaking out inside. I remember just letting it all out. I just cried myself to sleep. That was an anxiety moment, and then I'd sporadically get it. It was crazy. I'm like, "Why can't I breathe? Why am I having trouble breathing?" And then I was freaking out. "Why am I having anxiety?" Then thinking I had anxiety made me have anxiety. It was crazy. So yeah. I've always been a protective person. [pause] This was just... Like again, I think because I never thought I'd have kids. For two women, it took a lot for us to get children. There was a lot of failures, I guess. A lot of tries. A lot of—it was an emotional roller coaster. And at one point, we stopped trying for a little while, to get through the holidays and stuff. And then we tried again, and that's when it happened. But [pause] I remember [pause] we had these little babies. And I'm like who the f-- [laughs]. Oh, sorry. I don't even swear in front of my kids. I don't even swear or anything at work I'm like... I'm like who gave me permission to have kids, here? It was pretty funny. I'm like what makes me a good parent? How am I going to be a good parent? Are these instincts going to come out? Because, you know, when you biologically carry or you are part of giving birth to a baby, it's supposed to naturally just click. I was like [pause] what – how – how am I going to become a mom? And it was funny, and then, you know, I thought about it when they were in the NICU, like once or twice in those moments, but then I never thought about it again. And then people tell me I'm a good parent, and I'm like, "No, I'm not."

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: You know what I mean? Like, I'm kidding myself. And I'm so hard on myself: if I process something different, and [pause] I'd beat the crap out of myself at night, you know? I would say to myself maybe I could have handled it differently. [???]. I took care of them a lot by myself because Merriam worked another job, and she worked Saturdays. And I was like... First of all, I sat there like this on the couch. And I had one on a burpee there, one on either side of me, and they're sleeping, and every two hours I'm feeding them, you know, breast milk in the thing like this. I hadn't showered, I'm like, "Did I brush my teeth?" I heated my coffee like six times. I'm doing laundry. I'm like, "When the f-- did I become a housewife?"

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[Everyone laughs.]

SG: Everything I didn't want to be. [laughs]. And I'm like, "What the hell?" It was—and I started laughing, and I started texting some of my friends in Rhode Island. I don't want to say "back home." It makes me sound like cross-country. And they're all laughing, "Well, we can't believe you're a parent. Are they still alive?"

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: I'm like, "Yes, they are." I was very irresponsible. I was out traveling, doing a lot of shit up until I was older. And [pause] and it's hard, but it's great. I'm doing everything with my children my parents not that didn't do with me, they didn't have the opportunity to do with me. You know, my dad was a laborer, my mom was a stay at home mom. Yeah, one income, four kids. We had everything, though: a house, a car, anything I wanted. I went to basketball camps. My siblings did whatever. Yeah, they worked their asses off. [cough] Didn't see my dad much but he was my coach, so any sport I did, he was my coach. My mom—stay at home mom, so we didn't go on vacations. You know, that's—like now it's the norm, but back then, it wasn't. Your father took a week off in the summer, and you cooked out on the hibachi. [laughs] Or you went to the local beach in Rhode Island and brought the hibachi to the beach and you just stay there all day, so that was you vacation as far as growing up in like a blue-collar family. And he worked an electric boat, which they build submarines, and my dad ran a rig, like a big crane. And I used to be embarrassed of my family. When I got older, like in high school, I'd be like [pause] "All these kids' parents graduated college, and their mother works, and my mom stays at home. And [pause] why don't I have a Twinkie, why do I have a homemade cake every day? Why do I have homemade pie? Why do I have my laundry folded on my bed?" This is—how sad is that?

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: Yeah, "Why do I have a motorcycle at like 10?" My mom gave me 75 cents to go fill the tank up. I know that's pretty sad. I'll tell you something, when she hasn't worked she's scraping money. The ice cream man comes: "Mom?" "Yeah, alright, hang on." You know, "Why doesn't she have a job, mom? Why can't you help me with my eleventh grade math homework, mom?" And then, and then you become a mom. [pause] And I—this Christmas, they were—no it was [pause]... Yeah, it was this Christmas Eve. I went, drove home to Rhode Island to get my mom to bring her so she could be here Christmas morning, and I didn't know what it was, but I walked in the door, I started balling. Mom's like, "What's the matter with you?" I'm trying to talk and I couldn't talk. I'm like, "It's so hard, how did you do it?"

[Everyone laughs.]

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SG: I mean emotionally. You know, like you're—if they get hurt, it hurts you a 100 times more. If they're upset, it kills you. It gets so hard, because you have no control of it. You're vulnerable. You're protective. You're stern. You're [pause] authoritative. [laughs] You know what I mean? It's crazy. And I remember just having another moment in my life, where I'm just like, "Holy shit, my parents, my mother and father were awesome." Like, my mom was awesome. Like she, you know how hard it is to stay home with four kids? I go to work with prisoners. A guy was screaming, "White power" in a padded cell, banging on the door and it didn't bother me. I'm like whatever.

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: My job starts when I get out of here. Because it's more, it's emotional. I have so much more respect for women of the older generations where they say that they were weak. They are the strongest women of any of us: your generation, my generation. They are the strongest women. They stayed in—my mother should have left my father. He had a drinking problem as he got old. She should have left him years ago. She stayed with him because it was the right thing to do in their generation. She didn't graduate high school. She didn't—she drove, but then she didn't have a car, you know, for a while. She took care of us four kids. We didn't go without. She did everything and anything. I get home from work, and I just have a couple hours to try and get them in bed by eight o'clock. Bathe them, shower them, feed them. I can't even fathom how one of us didn't like disappear or run away because you couldn't keep track of us. Like, working is so much easier, even if I'm doing it in a ditch, than it is to be a stay at home mom. And it sucks that in our generation, in our society, that you can't have someone stay home with our, our kids because I think twice since they were born—I never do this—I called out because I needed a break. I needed a "me" day. I didn't even tell Merriam. I was just, "You know what? I'm just—I'm going to go sit in my car listen to nothing. Maybe walk around like a zombie. I don't know. And I came home and I had like an extra couple hours, and I made like a real dinner: chicken, and mashed—real mashed potatoes. Not that we don't do that now, but we do everything at night. It's, what, 10 o'clock tonight? And I'm cooking sweet potatoes so they can have it tomorrow for dinner. Like, but it felt so good to get everything organized and sit down and give my kids a good meal. And not have to deal with the time and this and that. It was so much more work, but, because it's emotional and stressful, it's rewarding at the same time. I mean, my kids will snuggle with me at the end of the day no matter what. And you just go, "Alright, it was worth it!" It's worth getting no sleep and staying up until 12 o'clock doing everything. But, I have so much more respect for women, where me, my generation, I was angry that there wasn't stronger women out there. You know? Or a role model, but you know, I did have a role model. It's just—it's mind blowing. I don't think I would have survived if I had to stay home.

[Everyone laughs.]

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SG: No, I would have. I'm just kidding around, you know? But it's just [pause]. I don't know, but I'm also glad that we can get good jobs.

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: And that I can be in the role that I'm in, where women—this last funny story I'll give you, unless you have another question?

KA: Mine was just more about, like, a woman being like, working in the criminal justice system.

SG: Okay, here's one.

KA: Okay.

SG: Being a female, if I had longer hair and I talked a little different, I could probably get away with people not thinking I'm gay, but obviously, look at me now. And I'm wearing my uniform, everyone goes, "Sir—I'm sorry, Ma'am." Like, I get that a lot.

[KA laughs.]

SG: I get a lot of—I get a lot of people from different countries—I'm not going to say where it's mostly happened. [laughs] Females even shouldn't talk—you shouldn't even talk to me. And now I'm sitting there with a uniform telling you what to do, and I'm a female on top of it, and they probably know I'm gay just by looking at me, so I'm like the trifecta of hell for these people: law enforcement, lesbian, woman. [pause] Just very defensive right off the bat. They have a disgusted look on themselves. They talk to you with disgust. And I have to say, it makes me smile inside when I have to yell at them. I kind of get off on it a little bit. [laughs] I love it. I absolutely love it.

KA: That's going to be me one day. [laughs]

SG: But I'm very professional. We had this one gentleman, hated the federal government, hated prison. He was just like... I don't even understand it. Like, I just don't understand it. He was sending—he was putting his face on Hitler's body and sending death threats, sending threats to one of the high schools—I'm not going to say what—to the principal and the vice principal. His poor daughter in all of this is getting mixed into all of this. [pause] We had a female judge, a female clerk, female ADA [assistant district attorney], female probation officer, [laughs] and me. This guy's worst nightmare: he's in court, and it's all females. He comes in, and he's reading some—I wish I could remember the name of the book. You'd get a kick out of it. It's something like, anti-something, like... And he's dressed in a suit, and he speaks very well, he's educated. He's just an—just an asshole, okay? That's what I'm going to say, just a complete asshole from

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the second he walked in. And I was warned because the principal and the vice principal told me they had a restraining order against this guy. You know, they gave me a heads up, so I'm like, "Okay." So I stand not even inside. I stand outside the bar where they are so I'm in the middle of the two of them. And the judge we have is awesome, plus she's a fellow Rhode Islander, so we're cool. So, he keeps interrupting her, so—actually, wait no. I start out on the other side of the room, because I'm not going to be all over this guy right away. Don't want to make it too obvious that I'm going to jump on him at any minute because I want to.

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: You let it go a little bit, because the judge handles some of it. You know when to step in. It's a common sense thing. So you can't really teach that. Like, people just don't get it sometimes. She's like, "Sir, you need to direct your comments to me, and talk to me, not to the other party." He can't help it. He does it again. "Sir, I'm going to tell you..." so, that was her. And I know my job, so as she warns him once, I move over towards the table, a little closer to him. She warns him again. Now, I'm standing at the swing door that they come in at the bar. So, now I'm in between them. He's getting antsy. He's looking at me. And he's standing up while the school is trying to talk, and he goes to say something. I go, "Sit down!" Just like that. I go, "The judge has already told you twice." And then he said something to them. So, I went from standing beside him to directly in front of him with a bar in between us. And I said, "The judge is not telling you, now. I'm telling you to sit down. I'm telling you: sit down. I'm not telling you again." Just like that, and inside I'm like [excited sound].

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: And I'm not normally like that, you know, but it was just—it was just kind of like taking it personal, but you're not supposed to, but professionally I'm not, I'm doing what I'm supposed to do. But inside, I'm not professional in my brain. So, he sits down right away. Like, sits down. So the school is talking, talking, talking. The attorney for the daughter is talking, talking, talking. And then, the judge goes to talk to him, and whenever a judge talks to you, you stand up. So, now, I like got the game face on. Oh, I came off mean: got the game face on, my arms crossed, and I'm just watching him. And Judge Kinny goes, "Sir, can you stand up?" Because he's talking to her. He goes, "I'm afraid to stand up!"

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: I went—I looked down at him—I almost, I almost died cracking up. I just looked at the judge and went, "Sir, you need to stand up when you address the judge, and *then* you sit down."

[Everyone laughs.]

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SG: I'm like [shakes her head]. So the principal—the vice principal's a lesbian too, so it was like horrible for this guy. And, she looks at me like [makes a wide-eyed expression]. And I'm like... And it was just... So anyways, I deal with people who hate women, I deal with people who hate gay people, I deal with people that are just—you can't—just being a female—not that you don't like females, but you don't tell a man what to do. Like, men that are just, “Who do you think you are?” Like this one guy, [I told him] “You just threatened the case worker, the judge is ordering you to leave the building. You need to leave.” He was so set back that I told him he needed to leave the building, he went and put a complaint in with my chief. That if I did not apologize to him, that he was going to call Boston. And he's like, “Hey did you just threaten to throw somebody out?” I go, “Yeah, I had to walk a case worker out. He's threatening the case worker.” He goes, “Wow. Did...” I said, “I told him to leave.” He goes, “Well, he's saying...” what I just told you guys. I said, “You know what, if I was wrong and out of place, you know I'm the first one to apologize.” I said, “I am a big enough person, and I am a proud enough person that I will apologize. I will put my tail between my legs, I will run down there, and I will apologize. But I will *never* apologize for doing my job and doing it right. So, no, let him call Boston. I am not apologizing for doing *my job*.” He goes, “Okay,” and then he left. And the judge heard the conversation and she goes, “Can I take a brief recess?” This is another judge; she's a first justice. She gets off the bench. She goes...[pause]. She goes, “I need to clear the courtroom.” We were getting close to break anyways. [pause]. She had the clerk burn the disc, because everything is recorded in the courtroom, and she wrote a letter, and she goes, “Here you go. You were under *my* orders to throw him out.”

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: [Continuing speaking for the judge] “So if he calls Boston you have this.” And I'm like, “Thank you.”

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: I just stood there. The guy he was just—he was—probably could have brought charges against him, but, you know, I'm not going to grab everybody. So he was just upset that a female told him to leave. Like, just because I'm a female he can—it just pisses me off. [Laughs]

CK: Understandably.

SG: It's 2015. You know, and so, yeah. Things like that bother me because, now, the guy's getting—he was actually getting aggressive with me, so that—I'm not—like in that kind of smirking on the inside when that happens. That's a different situation. That can get volatile very, very quickly. And I have to handle myself a lot differently. I have to stay very firm. I have to be fair about it and basically consistent in what I'm saying. Just saying, “You need to leave.” And not—and it sucks because I'm not going to raise my voice at him. I'm not going to talk down at

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him because, you know, because I wouldn't want that done to me, but especially in that situation because it'll just set him off more, and it's not worth it. You know, I just have to go, "Well, you know, some people, that's just who they are, you know, and they're miserable in their life." So, I don't know, you know. So, being a female, I don't know... Is that what you asked me? [laughs]

KA: [laughs] Yeah.

SG: In my position, it can bring a lot of negativity, but then on the flip side, it can bring—it makes my job easier, and it brings a lot of positive things to my job. For example, there was a guy in Superior Court. Young, he was about 19. He was on trial for murder. He came in every day for like two weeks.

CK: My gosh.

SG: Big kid, about 6'2. Big, big kid. Grew up on the streets, you know. He had co-defendants, and they were separated at the jail, so when they're kept separate at the jail, if they asked to be kept away from someone, then we have to be kept away at the courthouse. So, they were put in different cells. So, I was in lockup on the desk where I assign cells, and I make sure they go up and down, and I make sure they get released ones blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. They get to know the system, they get to know what you're doing. He's like, "Can you put me in the cell with my co-de?" [laughs] That's how they say it all the time. I'm like, "No, you need to change your status at the jail, you know how this works, and then it'll change in here. But right now, you're going in that cell; he's going in that cell." This went on for a couple days, and then I wasn't on desk in lockup. Somebody else was, and for some reason, that person just put them in the cell together, and then one of the attorneys found out, and they said, "They can't be together." And I was a runner, which means I'm not on the desk, but I'm responsible for bringing all the bodies up and down to the courtroom, releasing them, processing them, pat-searching, you know, getting them processed. And I'm like, "Are you kidding me? I'm the only one here, and I have to go pull them out of the cell?" So I asked another officer to come with me. But I handled it. He was just there. I said his name, you know, go by last name. He goes, "What?" I go, "You know what." I looked at him, go, "Seriously, you know what's going on right now." I go, "Let's go. Like, you know." I'm talking to him like he's a little kid. I'm like, "Seriously, you know you just got away with this. You know you're not supposed to be in this cell. Let's go." So, he comes out, no problem, but then he starts talking all street. You know, "Effing this, and effing that." And I'm just like, "You know I'm doing my job." And we have to do an escort position because they're shackled, and they're cuffed, and if they fall, they can smash their face. So, you just hold them by the elbow, and you can even just hold them just lightly, you're not steering, you're not making him go anywhere. And all I did was just touch him, and he pulls his arm away: "Don't effing touch me." And I said, "You know..." and I'm a female – negative part – can't back down no matter what you do because then that [looks like] I shouldn't have the job. I need to do what they can do. I'm like, "You know this is my job. This is how you get walked back and forth all

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the time.” I put my hands right back on him, and he pulls away harder, and my hands come right off him because he’s strong as hell. I grab him again. He squares up toe to toe with me. I’m like looking at his chest. [laughs]. I looked up at him. He goes, “I’m going to punch you right in the effing face.” I’m like, “You know what?” I said, “I’m escorting you down. It’s my job, and if you want to punch me in the face, then you go right ahead.” I go, “But two things are going to happen. One, you may take a chance at getting your ass kicked by a female, and you’re going to get ridiculed and made fun of your entire time in lock up. Two, in about three seconds, you’re going to have about 30 guys on top of you. Or three, you can just walk with me and act like a grown adult, and man up and do what you’re supposed to do.” And as I’m talking to him, I never called anyone on the radio. They saw him facing me, and one of the officer comes up behind him, and another guy I work with goes, “Come on, just walk!” And he pushed him. Pushed him forward, not like hard, just gave him a nudge to make him walk, which is fine because he was toe to toe with me, like, just kind of—and that set him off. And then there was a big thing anyways, but I was in there, and then I got pushed away by one of the guys I work with, who was huge. He pushed me—like wham, Jesus.

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: But it was a *big* thing. So, now, he’s a gangbanger. But as a female, what’s the worst that could happen? He might kick the shit out of me for a second. I’m going to heal. He has no weapons on him. *But* if I go [weakly and submissively] “Oh okay, just walk with me?” I lost all credibility to something so simple like that. It’s a whole different moment. I’d lose credibility, and I would never have any authority even walking to a cell, telling guys to knock it off like little kids, like “Knock it off! Stop doing that!” They do it. Something that small could have made my career, for the next couple years, *so* difficult. Because it’s [mimics whispering]. All, like it’s wildfire. You can’t, as they say, “punk out.”

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: I’m doing my job, and I’m going to do my job. Positive thing that came out of that is he came in—I didn’t see him for a week, and he came back in, and I’m like, “Oh my God.” Inside you’re like, “Jesus [muttering].” I’m not going to run away from him. I’m not going to go process someone else. I’m going to do the same thing, get right in there. And as he’s coming off the van, he goes, “There’s my girl!” I’ve got street cred!

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: I got street cred. It was just funny. He goes, “You know I never would have punched you.” I said, “No, I don’t know that.” I go, “But you know I was coming back at you.” He goes, “Oh, I know.” And after that I’ve seen him—he got sentenced, and then he had to come back for stuff, and he was like 18 or I think it was 19 because then he kind of filled out, and he became like this

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huge man. He was kind of—he was wiry and long and skinny, and then he just became this monster of a man. He grew a beard, and he walked in. And this is me, because you kind of have to talk at their [pause] communication, how they communicate. “Holy shit, what, have you been eating inmates in there? You’re huge.” Like, kidding around with him. I go, “Oh my God.” I go, “Maybe now you can kick my ass.” That’s what I said to him, and he started cracking up. But, like if I had avoided that small little thing, like something you wouldn’t even think of, just... You know, on the street, obviously, I wouldn’t. I’d be [nervous sounds], and then just drive away. Like, I’m not going to stick around for something like that. I’m talking in my work environment. You know, now that I have kids, or even before I had kids, it’s just not worth it to tell somebody to eff off on the street. But I wouldn’t turn my head away from if I saw something bad happening. It’s just a whole world, and then I come home, I walk in the JCC in the afternoon, and it’s totally different people. It’s such—it’s someone I’m 100 percent not, to [pause] walking into a normal world. It’s like I see both worlds, and it’s crazy because I’m good in the bad world, and I’m not so great in the normal world.

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: I don’t – I don’t know what it is. And I am the last person to understand this stuff. And people—judges will call me if they have a kid ready to go off, and I just go in there, and I just talk to them. You know, like a real—just a hand. Like a kid, today; he was going to go into custody and I see he was getting nervous, and I’m behind you, and I lean in, and I said, “*If* you go into custody, is there anything in your pockets you want me to give your mom?” I go, “*If*.” I go, “Take a deep breath.” I said, “You know it’s possible, you’re 20 years old. I’m just asking you this question.” He’s like, “Oh yeah. I have some stuff.” I turn to the parent. I say, “Can you just wait out there, if he goes in?” Because they all know. It’s not like a surprise. And I said, “I’ll give you his stuff.” And they’re just, “Oh, oh, okay.” And just that thing, I become a real person. I’m not just some person with a badge and cuffs, ready to pounce on you. It’s breaking a barrier, you know. I had a girl—sad, sad situation, today. Highly, highly functional, but she has such PTS [meant PTSD – post traumatic stress disorder], so many issues, she’s violent from zero to 1,000, and she’s so strong and so big, and she just turned 19, but she’s still under DCF because she was on probation. She caught a new charge. She runs. She’s a lesbian. Her mother said in court, “I sent my daughter to DYS [Department of Youth Services], and I got *this* back.” In open court, that’s what she said. That set her off. It took eight of us to—it took eight court officers to hold her down. She’s just—I’m like, I wish I was there, because every time she’s there, me and another female court officer, who is not gay, she’s got like this motherly thing about her, like freaking momish. I had to—it was me and the assistant chief had her, and we had to like [muttering]. The mouth on her is unbelievable.

[Everyone laughs.]

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SG: She's like, "Get your arms off my neck!" And I [pats her shoulder], "Hey," and I'm not going to say her name. I'm like, "If I had my hands on your throat, you think you'd ever talk? Look at me." Like I do with my kids. I go, "Look at me right now." I go, "Every time you come in here, we talk. I have never lied to you. I have been straight up." They like that. "Straight up." I said, "I tell you when you're probably going to go home. I tell you when you're screwed." I said, "I'm not one—we're not one of the bad guys. We're here to help you. I didn't put you in here. You need to relax before it gets worse." [mimicking a muttered reply] She's just still mouthing off, but they just, they comply with what you're doing. The one day I'm not there: eight court officers. And she—men freak her out. Something happened to her or whatever. Bit one. Hit this one. She got maced in the—she got four cops. They maced her. I'm like, not to count she got maced before she came in, and then she got off again and got arrested. So she came in today. She's been on the run. She's been in Georgia. And she comes back, and Deb calls me on the radio: "Sherri, can you step into four?" I'm like, "Yeah." I knew what was going on, so my judge gets off the bench, and I run over there. I walk in, and there's like seven court officers, and I'm like, "That's not good." Off the bat. Because she gets like, "Why are you people here?" and she gets mad. So she's sitting down, and I walk up to her, and if she's on her medication, she's okay, and I walk up to her, and I go, "Where are your ugly shoes?" She starts cracking up. I go, "Where are your *ugly* shoes?" She goes, "You're just jealous because you don't have swagger." I go, "I got swagger; check out my tie." And that just—that was it. She totally calmed down. Like it's just a little, little thing. Because I knew she just feels alone, you know? And then I go, "Are you good? There's like ..." I'm whispering, "There's seven f---ing court officers in here." I go, "Are you good? Do I have to be in here?" She goes, "No, I'm good. Nothing's going to happen." I say, "Promise?" She goes, "Yeah." And I walked out. You know, and that was it. That was it. But everyone was, you know, they just—they don't—they just—I put myself in these people's situations because you fall into... [pause]. You have to follow the rules, you know what I mean? But I understand, and I can approach it differently. I think being a female in my job helps me a lot, because most men aren't going to haul out and punch a girl in the face, even if you look like me.

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: But there's only those few disadvantages, and they seem to be far few and between, now because of how—gay laws, gay rights, gay marriage. It's out there all the time, now. It's become—you hear about it so much, it becomes, it becomes normal the more you hear about it, so it's not that much of a disadvantage as much as it was 15 years ago when I started. And being a female you need—in law enforcement you need to follow the rules. There is no grey area. There's just not. And I tried telling that to a girl when I worked in the federal prison that I worked in. She was in my academy. I said, "You let one of those inmates come in your personal space, just to talk to you, you're done." Like, I'd have a guy talking to me, and I can do it nicely. "Oh, whoa, it's personal space right here. You can talk to me from there. I can hear you. I get what you're saying." [laughs]. They're like, "Alright, alright." Come over, they're leaning on my

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desk: “You tired? Do you need to go lie down? You need a nap? You need to go see a nurse?” Like, joking around. [they say] “Why?” [She says] “You’re leaning on my desk. Can you please stand up, and step over there?” Like, you know, it’s just the way you say it. It’s just me and 65 guys. All by myself. You have to learn how to survive.

KA: Yeah.

SG: Yeah. Anyways. I use it to my advantage. Totally. You know, you have to use what you have, you know what I mean? Just, you can probably joke around and get away with a few things appropriately, but I don’t know. I think I picked the right career for me. I don’t have to sit down and do reports, unless something happens. I’m not on a computer, which is great, but I think my IQ [intelligence quotient] is dropping every year.

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: Which I can’t afford. I tell that to Merriam all the time. I go, “Every year that you’re with me you – you – you’re getting dumber and dumber.” And I turn around and go, “And I’m learning stuff from you.” Yeah because we don’t even use computers or anything, and I’m around inmates all the time, gang members, kids. More than I am with my family, you know. And every once in a while, I have a little slip up. What’d I say? [pause] I said something that was so street to Merriam. I was just trying to talk to her. She goes, “What did you just say?” I go, “What – What? What’d I say? I didn’t say that...”

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: Not a swear, but just the way I was talking. And I find myself... Because of my kids, I only [know] about Wiggles, [laughs] and the Octonauts, [laughs] and JCC. [garage rumbling] Merriam’s home. I only know about that stuff. Like, I don’t know what’s going on in the world, anymore. Every time I try to, I fall asleep. I can’t read a paper; I can’t watch the news. So, like I’m in a bubble. I’m in like this little bubble right now, but I know it’s okay. My life will, it’ll change in another year. It’s already changed this year. It’s great this year. I took them to a field hockey game at Worcester for a little while. I wouldn’t have done that last year. I would have had one kid running that way, and I would have lost another kid.

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: So...But no, my life’s getting better, and I’m going to retire in 13 years.

KA: Woah...Woah. Prospects.

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SG: Tells you how old I am. Yeah, but she's [Merriam] very—she thinks she's the disciplinary, but she's not.

KA: [laughs] No, she's not.

SG: But at her job, she scares me.

KA: Really?

SG: Oh, she's just very. Shh...

CK: What did you say she did?

SG: She's a forensic psychologist.

CK: Oh, cool.

KA: It's funny because when she comes into the JCC, she's all, "Liam, baby, how was your day?"

SG: I know. [imitating her son] "Get away!"

KA: And you're, "Get off the wall!"

[Everyone laughs.]

SG: Well, not right away. If I see them not listening to you, that's when I pull them aside, "Listen to your teachers." I'm always reinforcing it. But, yeah, Liam said to me the other day—he's me. I don't know how he's me, but our families are like, "Ha ha, I don't know how that happened, but he's *you*. You have met your match." I was talking to him and he wasn't listening. I kneeled down, I go, "Look at me. Look at me when I'm talking to you." I said, "You need to knock it off." He goes, "I can't talk to you when you're like this."

[Everyone laughs.]

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