

Interviewee: Susan Navarre  
Interviewers: Christiana Benoit, Laura McGrail, and Angela Petrella  
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**Abstract:** Susan Navarre was born in Wyandotte, Michigan in 1959 and recently moved to Worcester County in 2013. She grew up in a small town where she was able to walk to school and enjoyed playing with her neighborhood friends. She stood out academically as she was a bright student and spoke out in class when women were not expected to do so. She is very career driven and has lived all over the country as well as traveling to Europe several times. Susan attended Bryn Mawr College and also went to college in Germany at Goethe Institute and then went on to pursue her graduate degree in art history at Boston University. She is married to her husband, Tim Olevsky, with whom she explores the city of Worcester and discovers what the city has to offer. She finds enjoyment in attending various art museums and events involving the arts. When asked to give advice to women today she stated, “I think it’s important, there are things you have to push yourself on. You know, working around your weaknesses, but in a lot of ways ‘to thine own self be true.’ Figure out what gives you—what inspires you, what’s interesting so that you can keep going back to that well of the inspiration.” In this interview, Susan discusses growing up as a woman in America, her different life experiences, and various jobs she held including her current position as executive director of the Fitchburg Historical Society.

**CB:** We are completing a citywide oral history of the lives of Worcester women, aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences. Based on the goals of the 1850 National Women’s Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on the areas of women’s education, health, work, and politics/community involvement. We want to focus today on your experiences with education. Thank you for your help with this important project! So now we would like to ask for your permission if you are ready to record.

**SN:** Yeah, sure.

**CB:** Yes okay... So what is your full name including both maiden name and married name if applicable?

**SN:** My full name is Susan Louise Navarre. I kept my maiden name when I got married.

**CB:** Alright, when were you born?

**SN:** 1959.

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**CB:** So you said that you were married... So what is the name of your husband?

**SN:** His name is Tim Olevsky.

**CB:** Do you have children?

**SN:** No.

**CB:** What cultures or ethnicities do you identify with?

**SN:** Quite a few. I always say that I am an American mutt because I'm mainly and sort of evenly French, Welsh, Irish, Swedish, which I learned more recently was actually Swedes that were living in Finland so a little bit Finnish—what did I say Welsh, Irish. A little bit of Native American, but that's like when the French came to this country. And those are the main ones.

**CB:** Okay, so can you tell me about your parents, basically the relationship between your parents and the relationship you had with your parents?

**SN:** Sure, sure. So my parents met in college and actually my mother's brother was my dad's roommate at the fraternity. And so they met through that and they fell in love pretty quickly. My mom ended up dropping out of college I think when they got married so then she finished her degree later. So they got married when they were both—when my dad had just graduated from college I think and my mom dropped out and then went to school later. I was born pretty quickly and they got divorced pretty quickly too. They were divorced by the time I was four I think so I haven't heard too many of the stories from—because it was so difficult for the both of them. I lived with my mom at that time. I was actually very afraid that I heard stories that when I was a little kid that when other kids found out that my parents were divorced, which was very unusual at that time and in that neighborhood, they had all seen like TV shows like divorce court and they thought that I was going to have to go to court and say in front of a judge which parent I wanted to live with and they were always trying to scare me that I was going to have to do that, but it never came up [laughs]. I just lived with my mom and saw my dad every weekend. For Saturdays and Sundays I think we would always go over to my grandmother's house and so I ended up being really close to my dad's extended family. Actually I was pretty close to extended family on both sides. My mom's extended family used to get together a lot and spend a long time like when we have dinner we spend like three hours talking after dinner so you got to know all the different cousins. So that's pretty much it. I moved when I went to college. I was considering a school right in—right nearby. I was going to go to University of Michigan and then I got recruited by some other schools and I realized wait a minute I could either be 20 minutes—I used to always say 20 minutes away from my parents up the road or I could be where they had to take a plane to come see me and so I picked the second [laughs]. So I went to school in Philadelphia. So I ended up after that, after living in my youth always in one house essentially which I thought was pretty boring, I started traveling around trying out a lot of different places after I graduated from college.

**CB:** Cool!

**SN:** So I am still—I have never lived the same town as my parents since then so I go to see them. And my dad passed away two years ago and my mom is very healthy living on her own in the south in Missouri right now. So I call and talk together and we talk about her tennis class her Tai Chi class or her gardening [laughs].

**CB:** So where have you lived during your life?

**SN:** Oh okay so before, when I was baby before I can remember, I lived in the town I was born in Wyandotte, Michigan which is a Detroit suburb and then my parents moved to Dearborn, Michigan and I lived there from like the age of eighteen months until college in the same house. It was a duplex and first we lived on one side and renting and then my mom bought the other side we moved next door literally to other side of the same house. So then I went to college in Philadelphia at Bryn Mawr so I was living in Bryn Mawr, There was a brother college too that I lived at and during the summers I worked in the Detroit area one summer and then I stayed in Philly [Philadelphia PA] to work and then I took a year off after my junior year. I didn't do a junior year abroad and I sort of regretted that I hadn't so I took a year off and traveled in Europe for a year and a half and I went back to school then I really started moving around after college. I lived in Washington D.C and worked there for a while and then got laid off because it was a very tiny business and it was sort of things had—the market had fallen—fallen out from underneath from what they did. Then my boyfriend had a job opportunity in Wyoming and I liked Wyoming when I visited so I went off to Wyoming and I lived there and he and I broke up but I still really liked Wyoming and he moved away and I stayed for quite a while. And then I got a job in Denver so I moved to Denver and then I decided to go travel in Europe some more so I went to France and ended up—I was thinking it was gonna be a few months and I ended up staying there for fourteen months and then I decided to go graduate school and I moved briefly to Northern California to wait to see what graduate schools I heard from. So that was in Arcata, California or Arcata and Eureka, California way north and then I went to graduate school in Boston. Lived there and now I moved out to Leominster to be close to my new, my current job. Yeah, I really moved a lot. I was like, “What the heck?”

**CB:** Yeah, you've definitely seen a lot. So I know you traveled a lot but can you talk about the neighborhood that you grew up in?

**SN:** Oh sure, yeah. So it was built in the 1930s it was the town that Ford Motor Company is located so these were all houses that were built to house all the factory workers and so it was very, very flat and very, very square roads. All that area in the Midwest is flat so they laid out the roads not like here where they are really early roads so they're all curvy there they are just like looking at graph paper or something like that. So I used to walk to school and we had a little park in this block right next to my block that they actually had kids recreation programs in so I did a lot of those recreation programs. I sort of remember, I have memories of going over to play there at say I don't know, I had a babysitter when my mom was at work and I would go over to

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play at the park maybe starting at 9:30 or 10:00 and the recreation program would come sometime around 11 or noon and we would go back and eat some lunch and then go back out and be there until dinner time and then go and have dinner at home and then go back for their movies and their evening programs and things [laughs]. So yeah, so I spent a lot of time with the other kids that were there. So I walked to school all the way through and I noticed how different that is now by the time I was in high school it was almost two miles away so I got in pretty good shape walking to school and I had friends so we would pick each other up on the way so that we would just talk and talk and talk the whole way to school and then we would get there early and we would sit in one of the hallways and talk some more. And then after school we—well I had activities sometimes so I would walk home, but if I didn't have activities I would walk home with my friends and we would talk and talk [laughs]. I have very strong memories in high school and junior high and high school of standing on a street corner where they were going to go one way and I was going to go the other way and we would just keep talking for half an hour. So I was never one to use the phone, but I had one friend that as soon as she would get home who would call me on the phone and go, "Do you think so and so is cute?" [laughs]. I never liked to do that or talking on the phone as much as I liked hanging out together and talking face to face. So that's the main things that I can think of. So the house had a small yard. I had my own room though of course my mother was very handy with things. I guess she had learned how to build from her father who is from the south and so she like redid the kitchen and installed all this—and she finished the basement into a family room and I always sort of joked about it that I didn't learn how to do any of those things because I would hear her downstairs pounding nails and every once in a while she would hit her thumb and she would start swearing [laughs]. I was like, "I'm not going near her she is in too lousy of a mood [laughs]." But I benefited from the nicely refinished house. So the really only other thing I can think of is—so I had, we had dogs and when I was in third grade I got a dog that was my own puppy and that was sort of a very formative experience because I had her all the way through college I trained her. I was really, you know, responsible for her and so I don't know, it was sort of this early experience of being responsible for somebody else. So it was an important part of my childhood that I had this dog that was always sort of—that I would take with me to some stuff. I think it was sort of early to be responsible for your own dog, but yeah.

**CB:** So I know you talked about how you were traveling and you recently ended up in Worcester County can you maybe mention the year and age you were entered Worcester County?

**SN:** Oh okay yeah so I have to do math to figure out the years [laughs]. So it was 2013. I started working in Fitchburg in 2013 and we started—well I worked for a while still living in Boston with a huge commute, so that we could double check that it was a good match with jobs and it was. So we started looking to buy a home out here because it would be more convenient for my husband's job too. He already had this horrible commute through the city through Boston to get to his job so that's why we started looking to the northwest. So we moved here in early 2014 if I got my numbers right. So my age I would have been 54 [laughs]. I have had to do math to figure out my age when I did something since I was about 30 [laughs].

**CB:** Alright so do any of your other family members live in this area?

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**SN:** Nope everyone lives, we've noticed that my mom's side or well both sides really because being from the Detroit area where the economy went downhill people sort of scattered all over the country and maybe other reasons too, you know, following all these different job paths and things

**CB:** So you said you currently live in Leominster right?

**SN:** Yes.

**CB:** Okay so is working in Leominster like your connection to Worcester or do you have any other connection to Worcester?

**SN:** Oh well we come—my husband and I, this is sort of the city we like to come out to. We do both go to Boston for the symphony. We have had symphony tickets for forever and we go to visit friends and do other things with friends and then we do some stuff in the Leominster/Fitchburg area, but we always pick up copies of *Worcester Pulse Magazine* or stuff like that so we are getting to know what is here and sort of exploring. Sort of like—there is a what is it called... Ralph's? There is this club that I think is really neat. It sort of has sort of heavy metal music which I don't really listen to anymore but it's got music and it's got all these fun events we went to a writers slam that was there. That was this writer's slam that was this mucho libre that was very fun and everybody there was really nice so we to try different things like that. I used to belong to the Worcester Art Museum when I first came to the Boston area because I visited it and I was so impressed by it. I like moderately small museums and I just thought it was the most incredibly terrific museum so I joined that for a while and actually now we still go to it a lot because we have the kind of membership a the Fitchburg museum that I can use the membership card at the Worcester museum so we go to all their shows too. Those are the main things. I keep meeting at parties various people who live in Worcester. Actually recently we were back in the neighborhood that we used to live in Boston in Dorchester and I was chatting with somebody there who used to live right around the corner from me and it turned out that he and his husband had moved to Worcester or Shrewsbury and it was just the funniest thing that they had move to a similar house that sounded really similar to our house. Theirs was just like right off of 290 and ours is right off of 190 and they would describe, "Oh yeah we have all this space and we have this and this and it's affordable because there is the highway nearby," and we went, "That's what we did!" [laughs] so it's been interesting to meet how many different people that are coming here. The big thing though is wanting to explore the cultural opportunities because there is so much that is neat here. Oh and my husband sings in a chorus in Worcester now so we go to the events that go with that and I go to see him perform at Mechanics Hall so I'm feeling very much part of the city now.

**CB:** That's awesome. So I know you're new to the Worcester area but what challenges do you think the city still faces and what would you do to change about the city?

**SN:** Oh okay well, I think I'm sort of extrapolating from Fitchburg particularly that both cities have you know what underlies the economy keeps changing that it is a struggle and it's interesting that actually I feel like in some ways Worcester is in the same position that the town I grew up in was in when I was in college which is that at that time the car industry was really suffering and it was a heavily immigrant city. Very, very heavily actually. I'm from Dearborn and Dearborn is famous for having the largest Arabic population in the country or about the same as L.A. [Los Angeles] so there is Dearborn, Detroit and then L.A. has about the same so at that time they you know there were a lot of challenges with such a big population of immigrants moving in now it's been a great strength for their economy. I think that might be the case in Worcester too that you've got a lot of people that have come in that are trying to get jobs and that it is going to start a great strength for the economy, but there is always some shaking out with it. I certainly see when I visited the downtown that there are some neighborhoods that I used to go to a lot and now if you walking around there are people offering you heroin and stuff so I can see that the neighborhoods have gone downhill. So I mean it's struggling with the same things that are affecting so much of the state with problems of the opioid and heroin problems, but I think those sort of things come and go in waves. I saw before when I was younger with the crack epidemic in New York and D.C and now they're really not affecting those cities anymore. But I think those are the biggest challenges. I don't know if you asked about strengths, but what I've seen knowledge of how to or the development of different neighborhoods to create quality of life like in the neighborhoods I think of especially of the Canal District with all of these different arts groups going on and just sort of neighborhooody small businesses starting up. Things I think are great strengths for the city and I have been reading about medium or moderate sized cities all over America are really getting stronger and stronger because actually people your age and millennials are moving to them. Like Chattanooga is kind of famous. I've been to a bunch of different medium sized cities smaller than Worcester even that people really want to go to because you can afford to live right downtown and you have all these things that are in the area. So yeah my husband and I recently went to a music, a winter music festival in a little town outside of Ann Arbor. I can't remember which one it was. It was just like that when I had been a kid. It had been this really struggling fairly poor little town and now it's got brew pubs, restaurants and it had this music fest and all this stuff because so many people lived there or were going in to have fun because it was easy and easier and cheaper than you know the bigger cities nearby.

**LM:** So I know you've only been here about three years but have you seen any changes in Worcester over the past few years?

**SN:** Well, it's funny I can sort of compare, I moved to eastern Massachusetts in '91 and I used to come out here a little bit so some of the comparisons I am making to like different neighborhoods like downtown that are a little bit compared to them though I didn't know it all that well. I would walk around and I would walk as far as Holy Cross [College]. But I can't think of too much other than there are some things that are or I have seen because I like classical music and because I like the arts so I have gone to the Hanover Theater and to see buildings like that, that were closed before, I think that I went to something at Mechanics Hall before it got fixed up. I'm not sure, but I think I went into it for some reason before it got fixed up because

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when we went more recently I was like my God! [laughs]. Definitely with things that influence the activities at the Hanover Theater had, but I'm not sure or remember many details of different things about in the city itself or even in the county or even where I am living or working we joke that we are already old timers in Fitchburg because I can say, "Well yeah, that's where that Newbury Comics used to be, or that's where the such and such was, and now it's an Italian restaurant." [laughs]

**LM:** What distinct characteristics makes Worcester the place that it is?

**SN:** Oh [laughs] Well I think that [short pause] the big thing to me is that is something that it actually shares with a lot of New England, but which is that you can find all of these really long traditions that still affect things that you can still decide to get involved with. Like the chorus that my husband sings with they have been singing the Messiah for 130 or 40 years or something crazy like that at Christmas time, and I think people were always startled when you know I'd be saying, "Have you gone to the Worcester Art Museum yet?" Because I started—my field was art history, art history, and so all these people have never been there and I was like, "You got to go there. It's got all this amazing stuff." You'll see all these, all these artworks that you'll know from the intro books, intro to art history books, that you'll have no idea that they're in an urban city like Worcester, but, but so it's this combination of this very old New England-y things that you know—what was it—baby, Mrs. Freak and Baby Freak, that's the name of one of the famous paintings at the... [laughs] which is just so funny [laughs] and everybody loves it because what a strange name. [laughs] But then also with the more recent industrial background but even that is quite, quite early and so the ways that influences the communities is that you have such a big strong Italian neighborhood influence and, and French and Greek I think. It's funny because when I came to this school, as I drove up I kept thinking about this book that I read that was written in the, maybe the 1940's about the French American culture in New England and one of the things they have in the end was like "looking to the future" and they were saying that everybody that's involved with Assumption College agrees that it will never stop having all of its instruction in French because it's too important [laughs] to them. So I just, whenever I come here I always think of that like at that time. I don't know when it stopped, but like maybe if I came when I was a baby here you know that everybody, everybody, would be still be speaking in French which is to me really, is super cool [laughs] because I love, I love international, I love foreign languages and learning about the. And I love the complexity that different cultures bring to the United States so I'm sort of very aware of it myself. I ended up learning French because no one spoke it at home anymore, but I knew it was my culture and it's like my husband ended up learning Russian because his name is Russian-Jewish, although actually he found out with the internet he found out that it might actually be Ukrainian-Jewish, not Russian, [laughs] but he already learned Russian, but you know that sort of interest in our roots is something that because I was interested in history, has always been something that I thought is really cool and, and because I have so many different backgrounds I can sort of dip in and pick and choose [laughs].

**LM:** So what do you think women's experience in Worcester has been generally?

**SN:** Hmm well, [pause] golly, if I [pause] well, I could, I should tell you, when I was thinking about an oral history I was thinking about telling my cocktail story which I'm always telling this story about my own experience when I was younger and taking math classes. So I'll introduce this by saying that I read that in places with a tradition of heavy industry that in business it's much harder for women to get taken seriously and that they see that you can't move ahead, and that's why that the culture in a place like Boston or New York, maybe San Fran [San Francisco], are more open to women moving up and I think that here, here we're very strongly influenced by the fact that we're close to Boston. But on the other side it is this tradition of heavy industry that was like mostly men, that I mean the places where it's really tough apparently are like Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh, you know, some of those areas where it was all heavy industry, so that may be the case here as well, I feel like I see some of it, and I think we're still so influenced by, you know, if you guys watched Mad Men, all that stuff really was true. So you figure, I was, I'm like the same age as one, as the kids in Mad Men, one of the younger ones even, but I have this story from when I was in tenth, eleventh grade, yeah I was in eleventh grade, I was in the advanced math class, or the ones that they sort of divided everyone up by your grades and things like that. So I was in the college prep, and then the A-track, or whatever they called it at that time, and for my trigonometry class I had this teacher who created a seating chart. What he did was he waited, and the first few classes you just sat down wherever, and he took note of what your name was and then he created a seating chart, And what he did was he put all the boys in the front, and then he put all the girls alone at tables at the back, and then he wouldn't answer any of our questions. If we raised our hands he wouldn't call on us. He wouldn't, and so after a while we we just moved to sit next to each other we were like, "Screw this," and we're just as serious as these other students, but we never really figured out a way to get up because if we'd go up to ask him a question, he would talk so quietly that we couldn't hear him and what we finally figured out to do was we started asking the boys to ask our questions for our proofs and things like that. And so for me I got frustrated and I had always loved math, but I had two classes that I found really boring, in math, in a row, and so I didn't take the next pre calc [precalculus] class that was coming up. I just quit doing math, and I was the only one I think who quit of that group. I look back now, and there were—of the women that were in that class, there weren't many of us in that particular class, and one is a professor of genetics at University of Michigan, one worked, the last I saw her, she was working at Sun Microsystems early in their years, so she did really well in IT and me [pause] one other, I can't think, I think one is in finance actually, and then one teaches, went to the University of Michigan's engineering school and became a high school math teacher [laughs. So I'm sure she's much better [laughs] than he was, but people can't believe that there is somebody alive today who still had that experience, but it was still around with the older teachers, or it was still around with some of the more subtle things that you'd see. Like I remember reading about how there were classes that, you know, oh a woman will raise an idea, and then it's called, you know, the guy's idea, and then the guy will sort of extrapolate from it and they'll call it his idea and I saw that happening when I took some classes at a community college in Wyoming. I've gone to Bryn Mawr which is a women's school, so they took us very seriously as students so we didn't really see that kind of thing, and so then when I was at a community college taking classes for fun in business because I had started using all this business stuff that I never studied at school so I took some classes, but I sat there going, "Oh my god

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they're doing it, oh my god they're doing exactly what I've read about." So I think there's still some of that, those things still remain. Other than that I don't know though, probably we all have the same challenges with uncertain business, you know the uncertain economy here and things.

**LM:** So where did you attend school and what were the names of the schools?

**SN:** So, oh okay, it's actually sort of interesting the elementary school I went to, when I started there it was a k-12, so that was sort of, I think it had been around as a school since the 20's. So I remember that as we were little bitty kids, the high schoolers seemed so tall and scary to us, but I remember going at graduation time and asking them for one of the--from their tassel on their graduation thing, like they would pull off individual strings and give them to the little kids and we'd be like [laughs]—it was exciting for us. So it was this combination that when—we'd say the teenagers are over there, I we'd have lunch earlier, and then the teenagers had lunch and we were always scared we'd get, like if you went to the bathroom or something and came out and all these huge 5'6" teenagers would be around, it was very funny [laughs]. So that was Lowrey School, I guess it was just called the Lowrey School there and then it was Lowrey Elementary and Lowrey Junior High. By the time I got to later elementary they had gotten rid of the high school, they just put it into the big high school, and then I went to Fordson High School on Ford Road [laughs]. And oh, I always—I love, I joke about this all the time, so it was on Ford Road, and our, what do you call it, our football team were the tractors all because of the auto industry, they made tractors up the road, so yeah that when they do the cheer, they'd yell "oil job" [laughs] it was really, really cheesy. But it was a very beautiful school it was built in the 20's and it had a sculpture gallery, and it had murals, and it had arts and crafts tiles, sort of like the, the, incredible, beautiful buildings around here that you sort of walk in and are like, "Wow what was this, look, look Tiffany windows!" So it was sort of like that, and so that was Fordson. And then I got into a gifted students program when I was in high school and did a few classes, like I was able to get out a couple classes, and take college classes, which I loved, at Henry Ford Community College, and, and then it turns out, then I went to Bryn Mawr College, and they didn't accept any of the credits from it because they were very picky about what they would accept. They also wouldn't accept AP [Advanced Placement] credits unless you had gotten a five, and so I got, so I had taken an AP test and got a four, but I didn't worry about it that much [laughs] because things used to be a lot cheaper, so I didn't have to worry quite as much about finishing a semester early or anything. So I went to Bryn Mawr, and I took, as a I said, I took a year off between junior year and senior year because I wanted I wanted to do more experience, I wanted to get like an internship or something, and I ended up getting a college work study job in an art museum, which was really cool, for seven months, I think it was grant funded, and then I went to the Goethe Institute in Germany for two months to learn German because for art history you needed German. So I had learned Spanish in high school, and then you could only, they only offered two years. It wasn't a very college-oriented high school, and so they only offered two years, and if you wanted a third year you had to take a bus across town to a different high school, and I didn't want to do that, a friend of mine did that for German, but I didn't want to do that. So I started with French and then when I went to college I took French and then they said, well to be an art history major, like if you're going to do graduate school, which I was considering, you have to be able to read German. So I thought—I used to say I speak half-assed

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Spanish, and half-assed French, I don't want to have speak half-assed German [laughs.] So I went to study over there and to travel around in Germany and I really got very comfortable in the language, and so at various points in my life I got fluent, almost fluent, in German and fluent in French, but it disappears again. So I did two months at the Goethe Institute and then finished at Bryn Mawr. Then got accepted to graduate school, but got a job working at an art gallery and decided that I wasn't going to start graduate school because I already had the job, so eventually later, I reapplied for graduate school and I ended up going to Boston University for art history because they had—a professor of mine really recommended them as being good for sort of working in museums, for really, sort of the practical side of art history, rather than just becoming a professor, like if you went to Yale or NYU [New York University], or some of these others, or Harvard, it was really oriented entirely towards being a professor and I don't think I was quite at that level. I have friends from college that went on to become professors and they were just scary how good they were [laughs]. They were the kind that were getting their—whose undergrad papers were good enough to be published and things, it was just crazy [laughs]. Very impressive though. So those were the places that I went to school.

**LM:** What were your challenges in education?

**SN:** Oh well, so other than the, the math thing, I had [pause]—I was one of these people that loved, that did pretty well in school because I was a good abstract thinking and test taker. If they, I always joked, if they also tested like, creativity I would have really fallen down because I never developed that as much. I have friends who are artists and they're—I have one friend who I used to tell this story, she could look at multiple choice and she could come up with a plausible scenario for all four of them because she was so good at coming up with stories. She's now, she's now an artist [laughter] a performance artist. So it makes sense, but it's true she used to—she showed me an example and she came up with these really good stories for each one which prevented her from being able to pick just one because they were all so good you know [laughs] but I was more of that, sort of analytical. Like they think they're going to fool me into picking this one, but I'll do that one. So the challenges were more [pause] making decisions on what to study. I've always sort of—I've always struggled back and forth because I liked this and I liked that and I liked this, and I've had a few different times when I was in college that professors sort of offered to help me get into special programs or something and I think I didn't have the decision making skills developed to, you know, sometimes I would say no because of one small problem that I would think, “Oh I haven't taken this required course for it,” but actually they would have helped me work through that and so, I think it was that I didn't know how to do that sort of decision making and to not just do it all myself, but actually, one of the big things I've finally learned in the world word was that if you're, like as an executive director, they are not hiring me to do everything myself, they are hiring me to figure out who to go to, to draw in to do this, so that was probably my biggest challenge was extrapolating it from the abstract world to the real word and in some ways realizing, you know [pause], I had closed off certain opportunities really fast just because I didn't know how to evaluate whether they'd really work for me.

**LM:** Upon finishing your formal education, what did you see as your options?

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**SN:** Oh [laughs] well that's really, that's really interesting because I—my bachelor's, even though I was working at an art gallery, when I graduated it was one of the worst years to graduate. In fact, when my husband graduated they said, "This is the worst year to graduate since 1982" [laughs] which was when I graduated [laughs]. They said, "Which was even worse," but I was looking and looking and looking and I couldn't find much of anything, especially, you know, my friends that had like econ [economics] degrees, and math degrees were finding it a lot, a lot easier. So I was looking at grad school, but I ended up, to be honest, a lot of how I decided on where to go to look was based on having a boyfriend that wanted to go to this place. Like he, my boyfriend in senior year was, had been a poli sci [political science] major and so he wanted to go to D.C. [Washington, D.C.] to try to find work. So I'm like, "Okay, D.C., sure!" [laughs] And oh I didn't even, did I mention D.C.? I did, I think, that's how I went to D.C. so I just started looking at bulletin boards to see what—actually no, that's not true. I actually went to a couple of the college [pause] career planning offices and when you had to sign in saying you were, you know, you were a student, you were a alumni of that college I would just say, "Uh, yes I am," and I would just sign in and use their things and when I actually first got down to D.C. I got a job through an alumni from my school that I had met before that they needed a, what do you call it, a paralegal, and so I got a nice like ten month, temporary job, or something like that, as a paralegal. So it was actually very good, it made it easy to get, but I went back and forth between using friends and connections like that and not realizing at all that I should use friends and connections [laughter] so it was very much sort of flailing around. Like I got a job in an art gallery, but it was a part-time job as I recall, or maybe it just paid really badly, I don't remember which. I think it paid really badly, and so I also got a job at the same time teaching English as a foreign language, and so I would start the day very early, do the art gallery, drive over and do the Berlitz teaching and then end the day really late and it seems like when I was young, in my twenties, I was always working two jobs. Yeah, I didn't have a lot of practical knowledge [laughs] about how to go about it to be honest [laughs].

**LM:** What support networks and mentoring have been important to you?

**SN:** [pause] So which ones have, yeah because I kept not realizing that people were offering to mentor me, let me think, but [long pause] so, there had been a few different things, one was that when I moved out to Wyoming, I started just looking into—I wanted to meet people, and I started looking into local groups and I just started going to all their different meetings and, and I met people that were active in politics and things. I met a lot of people that were different ages, and so, a lot of them really helped me a lot with just sort of getting settled and trying out new things and being encouraged to try new things and going and doing it, and when I was in graduate school, we created some of our own groups. Like a friend, a women that actually did this work, somebody who I didn't know who became a friend put something out like, you know, "Does anyone want to go to hear this artist speak and I got a ride and we can do it." So we went to see the artist speak and it was canceled because of a blizzard, but we all hung out and talked and then we went to, we into this thing where we would go to museums, during the summer where we would go to a museum every week on the free day and there was an artist and, a few art historians and we would all go and just look at the art and talk about it. That ended up

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being—we became very close and it was just sort of talking about your field and in college there were a lot of things that were like that too.

I belonged to the Women's Alliance which was a feminist group that I wanted to see what that was like. So we would end up talking about what we were studying a lot and that always—I learned about myself. That was always beneficial for me because I learned about myself. Even in my current jobs I still see this. It's sort of the abstract ideas that give me energy again. Like what I do in my job to a great extent is supervise a whole bunch of volunteers and supervise employees and write grants and do budgets and write fundraising letters and all these things. But when I want to sort of get energized again about doing it, and I love doing all that stuff, and I'm not really a scholar, but if I go and I read in the field, like if I go and do some research to present a talk, if I do some historical research, or when I was working running an art center, I would go to the college art association and just hear art history [laughs]. That gave me a bunch of energy and so for me that was a big part of the mentoring groups there. And sometimes there it was even, so it was when I was young. I didn't realize that some older folks were, were, were mentoring me. I did have some bosses that definitely did, a woman that I worked for in DC definitely was a terrific mentor, she owned her own business and she sort of started up when nobody had businesses and she had all these great stories about working for *McCall's Magazine* I think and *Glamour* in, in New York and just sort of being this glamorous women in the 50's in New York City. It was neat. [Laughs] But, but later I realized a lot of it was even just, with people who are all around the same age or in the same place that we were sort of encouraging each other, and, like when I wanted to be a curator and I hadn't found a job in it yet I started volunteering at an art center and I started curating the shows there and so that meant that then I started meeting all these artists because I was curating shows and, and so then, you know it was sort of, we just sort of, were doing, you know and they were being a professional artist even though they weren't getting paid yet either [Laughs] we all just sort of encouraged each other in doing it, you know we all sort of pitched in together, and since then I've noticed and when you read history that a lot of different groups that's sort of what they do that if you got this group that shares energy so that if you don't have energy at the moment somebody else will be out there making it happen for you [Laughs]

**LM:** That's great, so what was your first job?

**SN:** Oh well besides babysitting? Yeah let's see I think my very first job, I remember I really wanted to get a part time job. I remember walking around town everywhere when I was [thinking] how old, I think I could start, I think when I was 15 but I'm not sure filling out applications everywhere and the first one I got was at a drugstore a locally owned drugstore working as a cashier. Yeah and that's, while I was there the labor department came in because they weren't giving us the legally required like lunch and bathroom breaks [laughter] and the people and I actually had mentioned to someone I wasn't getting minimum wage but I wasn't 18 yet either but I was talking to one of the women who was working there and she wasn't getting minimum wage either and she was like 60 [laughter] and she apparently didn't know there was a minimum wage so I don't know if she went home and, you know talked to somebody and then, then they called the labor department or if it was just by chance but the people, so I got a check

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later for all those bathroom breaks they never gave us[Laughs] and but the people who had worked, who were 18 and over who weren't getting minimum wage got a check for all the money, so it was sort of, it's [laughter] an introduction to the realities of the world of work.

**LM:** So what other jobs have you had, and what do you do now?

**SN:** Okay. Let's see, yeah, so I was a dishwasher at a summer camp I was a counselor at a summer camp I've taught English as a second language I did a bunch of college jobs, you know, federal work study jobs and then extra ones. I got one that was a very highly desired job because it paid extra because it was after midnight they paid you for like two hours work or something but it was really, you were vacuuming the library after it closed and it only took about 40 minutes or something and it paid something ungodly amount of money, like 20 dollars an hour or something crazy like that [laughter] It was like a job that you gave to a friend [laughs] so, but, so my actual careers even those it was I struggled at the art gallery. The art gallery I assisted the director with all sorts of accounts receivables and like they had this completely disorganized office and I just kept organizing it and organizing it [laughs] answering all the phone calls and doing all the stuff that they had not done that was just in piles everywhere. I was just working through it. And I also did sales of art [pause], yeah I must've, I also went out and help sell art to companies like and install it, if I'm remembering correctly. And then I went out to Wyoming, couldn't find a job at first worked at a Chinese restaurant for a little while and then got a job at a library and at the same time, this is when I was working two jobs at once, in the university library and also as a disc jockey, and, which I always loved music and I thought I wanted to be a disc jockey so I got to do that and it was fun, I used, came up with a stage name and all this stuff and I was also a volunteer lobbyist at the state legislature during that time, I somehow squeezed it all in.

I don't even remember how I did it, I remember I used to work a lot of weeks I would work six or seven days a week and I remember working on Saturday mornings and then finishing early and there was a ski, a downhill ski place that was city owned that you could just drive up pretty quickly and it was only something like seven or ten dollars to both get a lift pass and to rent equipment so I would go, "So I think I'm going to go skiing this afternoon" [laughs] "I'm sick of working," and so you know after I finished work I would go and ski so that's where I started learning when I was in college that, that, when I got really tense from a lot of work, in college I used to go swim laps or I would go run, I started running with a friend and then when I was in my 20's I would run or I would ski or I would swim and , that was pretty much, I'd so.

Then I got a job in Denver I was applying for jobs all over the place and I got a job in Denver selling art so I worked there in a gallery for a while and then I decided I was going to try to go to graduate school but my experience in college was they said "how much money do you have saved?" and then they took it all so I was like "I'm not going to let them take all my money." So I decided to go to Europe again and, because a friend from the first trip to Europe had invited me to go and, and visit and stay at his family's house in France and stuff and so I went there and I ended up just meeting somebody and having a relationship and staying in France for 14 months [laughs] and, and deciding, and applying for graduate school. And so then I went to graduate

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school. And while I was in graduate school, oh I already left out things like the paralegal job, right? And, so I was a paralegal for a short time [laughs] I guess I mentioned that, so then I when I went to graduate school I worked in a law firm to help, I was, I came and was like I'm going to graduate school and I went through money so fast it was Boston, it was so scary [laughs] so I went and got a job in a law firm. And later got a pick up job at the Museum of Fine Arts leading gallery talks and things. Stayed with the legal job even after I finished graduate school until I got a job at Forest Hill Cemetery which was working with the director there. This was more arts—it's not arts, it's non profit administration, but at Forest Hills Cemetery which is a historic garden cemetery and got involved in putting on their big celebrations their 150th anniversary and got a lot more experience than in doing a non profit administration. Oh and during graduate school I worked, had a federal work study there too and I learned how to write grants and things, working for the art gallery and I got hired for temp jobs in the summer, it's just a million jobs. And then after being the assistant to the director at the garden cemetery, I got a director's position at an art center at the Brookline Arts Center. Was there for almost ten years as the executive director and then left there and came to Fitchburg to be the executive director at the Historical Society, and that's where I am now. [Laughs] and eventually I'll—I can't imagine what it will be like not to work. Whenever I imagine it I just imagine what I'm doing now, but doing it as a volunteer. [Laughter]

**LM:** So what has this work meant to you?

**SN:** Oh well, well so, it's interesting because you know there have been times when I thought well gee if I had followed up in my interests in math and, and, like I'd considered when I went to graduate school getting an MBA [Master of Business Administration degree] and doing like information technology so sometimes I think of that and how much money I would make with that, but ultimately I realized money wasn't that important to me so much as work that I found, found challenging and enjoyable. Because I'm a person who's interested in the field and in ideas it's sort of helping, I always say midwifing that, that when I was running an art center I was putting, I was not only helping make sure art classes ran but putting on art shows which were giving artists sometimes their first major show and things. So now when we have kids come in and they're learning history I feel like it's this wonderful chance to open up the field of history and in a way what was important for me was being able to actually interact with actual really old objects and see what those brought from the past, you know, when you're working with something that's 200 years old or 400 years old it's just so amazing to think of it coming out of the past to you. So I try, it's very important to me to sort of share that excitement with other people, with kids or with just other people who are finally getting a chance to, to be, to expand their interests in something like, for that reason, whenever I've been writing about what you're seeing, whether you're at an art gallery or here at the Historical, now the historical display I try to always make it really comprehensible for the beginner. Somebody that doesn't know anything at all about the field, that it will still give them what they need to get interested and learn something rather than just talking to people who are already in the field. It's always been the thing that I wanted was to create an entry point for people because I've seen so many people then take off and then they do all these brilliant things that inspire me, you know [laughs] so I just like the fact that I can, that I use, even though I'm not doing the research myself I am able to organize things.

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It used to be the artists all the time they would be so grateful that I would figure out all of the nuts and bolts about something so then it would happen. And I still feel like it's the same way. It's like I figure out the nuts and bolts and how to raise the money so that we can have the doors open and then I get these brilliant writers in or curators to help do the research and I like being able to be on the team with those brilliant people. [Laughs]

**AP:** So we have to wrap up soon, I'm just going to ask a couple more like concluding questions. So based on your own life experience what advice would you give to women today and future generations?

**SN:** Oh yeah, okay I was thinking about that before and of course it's all gone out of my head, [thinking] There's some, I feel like some are so simple but I mean one thing is to, if you're like me and you find that you know oh I can do this pretty well and this well and this well, the danger is you think you need to do it all yourself. And I think the power of teamwork is so huge. On the other side, the thing that it took me a while to figure out and that I've always when I'm talking to friends who are younger and things that I've always suggested is really following who you are and what your own strengths are. That takes a lot of sort of searching, testing things out, trying to do something you have no idea if you can do it because it may be you'll just fall down entirely, but that's okay. But then you'll know or you'll be able to do it, but you'll go, "I hate doing that." So I think it's important; there are things you have to push yourself on. You know working around your weaknesses, but in a lot of ways "to thine own self be true." Figure out what inspires you, what's interesting so that you can keep going back to that well of the inspiration. So some people need—I have very close people in my life who really can't work in a room alone. They just stop working and you know some of them would be very good at say doing research except that they can't work alone. [Laughs] And so they would die of depression if they were trying to do that so instead, you know, and it's not better or worse it's just how you are with other people. I need a lot of alone time too. I love meeting people, but I need a lot of alone time, so on the one hand when you have friends that are trying something new if they're doing an exhibition or doing a concert or you know doing a big, starting a business you go and you support them, because that whole thing about 90 percent of success is showing up. I think [laughs] that it is so important to show up even if you're not in the mood then, but ultimately sometimes you know you can't just push yourself to go out to absolutely everything if you need time that is for yourself. Everything else I feel like are the sort of standard that everyone says that we all have to plan on continuing to learn and things, but maybe I'll say that a variant on that that I've learned from so many different people in my life like these opportunities from friends who are totally different ages and who are from totally different backgrounds and somehow just from learning for its own sake is fun and it's amazing how it ends up dovetailing into what you need at some point or what you need to know how to do that when it comes time to—and then, and then there are some things that you do that may not be useful in your career. You don't know if they will be—for me learning to speak French and German I thought, "Maybe I'll work as a curator in the United States and France," but I never quite got to getting around to doing that but it was still such a pleasure for me to do that and I can still go back to Europe and talk to people in their own language which was always so much fun for me that sometimes you just do it because it's fun because you only go around once. It's like you only have one life to do these

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things so if you think you're going to like doing it [laughs] why not? Well, I actually read this wonderful book by, I don't remember if it was Howard Gardner or if it was somebody else, it was about people who were considered extremely creative in their field and so he looked, he studied them in wildly different fields and he studied what were, what was true for all of them and some of them and for many of them it was that they had these more than one interest that had nothing to do with each other and that ultimately they ended up connecting one with the other and making this breakthrough because they were deeply involved in two there, two different things. One other thing is that I was saying that I didn't have, didn't know how to make decisions when I was young. I should have asked people more. I get the impression that even reading people's biographies you start to get that sense of what's possible in all the different ways that things can happen and later I started reading biographies and going, "Why didn't I do this before?" [Laughs] That's what I can think of.

**CB:** All right I think that's it.