

**Interviewee:** Sarah Connell Sanders  
**Interviewers:** Samantha Porazinski and Alexis Distasio  
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**Transcribers:** Samantha Porazinski and Alexis Distasio



Overseen by Professor Cinzia Pica, Assumption University

**Abstract:** Born and raised in Worcester, Massachusetts, Sarah Connell Sanders journey embodies a steadfast commitment to education, family, and community engagement. Inspired by her upbringing, Sarah pursued a career in education, becoming a respected educator known for her dedication to her students. Balancing the demands of teaching with the joys of motherhood, Sarah finds fulfillment in nurturing her two-year-old daughter while actively participating in community initiatives and advocacy work. She also is a columnist for the *Telegram and Gazette* and *Worcester Magazine*. With a sense of purpose, Sarah prioritizes opportunities aligned with her values and aspirations, from advocating women's issues to promoting cultural awareness. As she continues to navigate the complexities of work, family, and community, Sarah serves as a model of inspiration and resilience in Worcester, embodying the importance of staying true to oneself and making a meaningful impact on others.

**SP:** All right, so we just want to start with your full name and your maiden name, and how you would like to be addressed.

**SS:** Yeah, my name is Sarah Connell Sanders. My middle name is Connell now, but it was my maiden name. I didn't want to lose it, so I changed my name. But the seventh graders I teach very kindly pointed out thereafter, like “You realize you just legally changed your name to Colonel Sanders, right?” I was like “Oh my God, that's so embarrassing.” But my grandparents are very proud that I kept the Connell in some way.

**SP:** Mhm.

**AD:** Do you mind sharing when you were born?

**SS:** Yeah, sure, April 10th, 1987. And I was in Northampton [Massachusetts] actually because my parents were students at UMass Amherst at the time.

**AD:** Oh wow. And do you have any siblings?

**SS:** I have a half brother. He lives in New York City and his name is Benjamin (Gorgorouph??)

**SP:** Nice. And I see your husband is here. What's his name?

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**SS:** His name is Jacob Sanders.

**SP:** When did you guys meet?

**SS:** We—it's funny, actually—we both went to Flagg Street Elementary School, Forest Grove middle school, and Doherty High School. But he's two years older. And we both went to the Jewish Community Center growing up and I, I always knew who he was. And I have this memory of him making a half-court shot at our high school pep rally. And so I was a waitress for a long time and he would come in with his friends. And one day I went up to him and I was like, “Were you a really good basketball player at Doherty High School?” and he's like, “No! I was terrible!” and I was like, “Oh, hi! Like I was younger than you, but I remember you hitting a half-court shot” and he's like, “That was the best day of playing I ever had in my whole life” And then it got him a wife so...[laughs]. But we kind of kept talking from there, and we didn't really know each other all through school, but, you know, I was probably 29 when we got together.

**SP:** Oh, really? Nice, nice.

**AD:** Wow. So we briefly got to meet your daughter. Is she your only daughter?

**SS:** She is, yeah.

**AD:** And how old is she?

**SS:** She'll be two in June.

**AD:** Awesome. And obviously that means no grandchildren [laughs].

**SP:** What are your cultural and ethnic backgrounds?

**SS:** I'm mostly Irish and then a little bit Sicilian. But my husband is Jewish, so we're planning to raise our daughter Jewish too. And he's also pretty Irish [laughs].

**AD:** So you mentioned when you were born your parents were at UMass. Do you mind telling us a little bit more about your parents?

**SS:** Yeah! My mom's actually upstairs right now. She's babysitting today. But they were obviously young when they had me. And they—we moved in with my grandparents for a few years in Paxton [Massachusetts]. And then by the time I was five, we came to Worcester [Massachusetts]. And I always—when I tell my students about growing up here—like I moved

12 times before I was 18, which is a lot, obviously; there was like some housing insecurity there. But now, as an adult who writes and teaches in Worcester, it's been pretty invaluable that I've had all these experiences in so many neighborhoods around Worcester. And I feel like very close to the community and all the communities within the communities because I moved around so much.

**AD:** And are your parents from Massachusetts as well?

**SS:** Yeah. My mom grew up in Easton [Massachusetts]. She's one of six. And my dad grew up in Paxton [Massachusetts]. He's one of four. And right now she still she lives back out actually in Western Massachusetts, out by UMass. And my dad lives in—he just bought his first house in Milbury [Massachusetts]. But he's a stagehand, so he works at Concert Student Spotlight, and stuff like that. And she is a social worker, so she worked when I was growing up at her family services. We spent a lot of time there.

**AD:** Oh sorry!

**SP:** No, you're good [laughs].

**AD:** You could go with the next one.

**SP:** Oh okay, so you mentioned earlier—wait, where are you from again?

**SS:** So I grew up in Worcester once I turned five, we lived here. But I was born in Northampton

**SP:** Oh, okay okay.

**SS:** Which is like right outside UMass Amherst

**SP:** What would you say, like, the neighborhood was genuinely like?

**SS:** When I was little—or...?

**SP:** From what you remember?

**SS:** Yeah from what I remember...I don't really remember living in Western Massachusetts at all. But when we moved with my grandparents in Paxton, my grandmother ran a preschool. So I just really loved that because even though I was very little, like two or three, I would get to play with all the preschoolers. And then we moved to some apartments in Worcester. So we started off at Park Avenue in a three decker. And I went to Flagg Street. And then even though we kept

moving all over the place, the Worcester Public Schools was really good to me and they said, “You could stay with your friends at the school,” which ended up being really pivotal. But we also lived on Grafton Hill [Massachusetts]. We lived on Vernon Hill [Massachusetts] —actually I guess we were on Vernon Hill first and then Park Avenue. Really like all over. My dad was kind of closer to (\_\_\_\_\_???) Square. And my parents split up when I was two. So they were both living in different houses around Worcester. But they have like a very good relationship which is nice. And I would go back and forth between their houses.

**SP:** Yeah, it seems like you moved around a lot. Did that have, like, a big impact on your life?

**SS:** Yeah no, it definitely did. I think it made me a very flexible person. And I got better assimilating to the situations, which I find helpful now in the professional world. And also, I do what you guys do. And I work for the *Telegram and Gazette*, and I interview people. And so it's easy to kind of feel comfortable because I lived in so many different situations

**AD:** That's awesome! So you mentioned that your family is pretty local, like, your parents do you live in the state. Do you have any other family members close by or in Worcester?

**SS:** My cousin actually just moved here, and she's from Portland, Maine. I think I talked her into it but...[laughs]. And most of my family is like on the Cape [Massachusetts], some in Amherst, some out in Boston. But yeah, we're kind of all over not a lot in Worcester. My stepdad is still in Worcester. He and my mom aren't together, but like, he's you know—he helped raise me and so I see him often. But yeah not a lot of blood relatives. My husband's whole family is, like, in the area still.

**SP:** Nice.

**AD:** That's awesome.

**SP:** So over time, like, what changes would you say you have seen in Worcester?

**SS:** Oh boy [laughs]. Some of it, I'm always thinking, like, “Was it just that I didn't have an income growing up?” You know what I mean? And we didn't have a lot of money. Or has it really changed? And I think the answer is it really has changed [laughs]. Like, last—when I was growing up, the big thing was this mall downtown called The Galleria. And it was, like, built/modeled after an Italian shopping plaza. And of course it was like a total failure. It cut right through downtown. It was a ghost town for a long time, and then they decided to knock it down. And I thought to myself, like, “As long as we're trying to be other cities, we're not going to be successful.” But now I feel like in the last 20 years, businesses have started taking the old bones of all these old factories and mill buildings that make Worcester what it is, and repurposing them, revitalizing them, rejuvenating them. And like those are the businesses that have really brought Worcester life. So if you look at something like Crompton Collective downtown or in

the canal district. And likewise, people are sometimes negative about big developments like Polar Park or like the apartments that are right downtown. But Polar Park was built on like a factory site that had been vacant for decades. And the apartments downtown were actually built on that mall I was just talking about that was like a total disaster economic disaster downtown. And so some of the new developments too are like really smart where they're placing them where it's an area that needs to be revitalized.

**AD:** That was really interesting, I didn't know that.

**SP:** I didn't either [laughs].

**AD:** Aside from the other things you just mentioned with Worcester [Massachusetts], are there any other challenges you think the city has? And if there are, what would you want to change about them?

**SS:** I would say affordable housing is a huge one. Also youth violence right now is really top of mine. We've lost a few Worcester public school students this year which is tough. But I always—I'll ask my students, “How many deaths involve—what is it—firearm related deaths do you think there were this year?” And like, I don't know, you guys want to take a guess in a year an average year in Worcester?

**AD:** Oh, I don't know about Worcester?

**SP:** I have no idea.

**SS:** Take a guess.

**SP:** A year?

**SS:** Yeah.

**AD:** I'd say, like, 20 plus.

**SP:** For a year? I don't know, I don't know [laughs].

**SS:** I said 50 when someone asked me, but it's actually closer to, like two.

**AD:** Oh!

**SP:** Oh, oh my goodness. I was like...[laughs]

**SS:** But I think that's the perception we're working up against, right? Like trying to be proud of ourselves as a city and not always imagine the worst. Sometimes we can't get out of our own

way, people who are from here. But in terms of youth violence, there's a lot of people doing really cool things. And part of that is like sharing data among the police department, the schools, City Hall's crime force or whatever, and youth task force. So sharing information so that you can kind of consolidate resources, I think, is going to be a huge step. And then also looking at like "What are the causes of things?" like a lack of affordable housing, because addressing mental health and substance abuse and violence are things that can prevent housing insecurity down the line. So those are big priorities. We also are kind of a media desert right now. It's the second-largest city in New England. And there's like just a tiny fraction of the staff at the *Telegram and Gazette* still working compared to when I started there 10 years ago, and that was even like a really tiny staff compared to what it had been 10 years before that.

**SP:** Okay, so like kind of building off of that, another important topic is of like Worcester is how women are like treated, their experiences here. Do you have any examples?

**SS:** Yeah, I guess I wrote a story. It was probably—it was one of the last things I did before the pandemic, so it must have been 2020. Where a bunch of like really powerful women told me stories of being disrespected in the workplace. And one of them was Harriet Chandler, who I think was one of like the godmothers of this project that you're doing. And she was the [State] Senate president at the time and she told this harrowing story of being sexually harassed by her professor at Clark University. Like, you know, in the '60s. And then there were other women working in business in local banks and law firms who had just as terrible stories that had happened far more recently. And that was really eye-opening for me, but not a surprise. The eye opening part was that they were willing to go on the record, because I've had some terrible experiences. I think all women have. And certain things have changed since the Me Too Movement a little bit, in terms of visibility. But yeah, I—especially my last employer was not Worcester, but was a different school system. And I just had some really terrible experiences. I don't know, do you want me to like...?

**SP:** Yeah, you can go in depth if you feel comfortable.

**SS:** And I've had great empowering experiences too working in that same school system. But I had one experience in particular where they found a camera in the women's faculty bathroom, and that was really horrifying for me. And a male colleague was fired at some point but that was like really—it made me feel so vulnerable and violated. This is more anecdotal, but when I first started teaching, I think I was probably 24 or 25, and I was sitting in a meeting in the back of a history teacher's classroom, and he had this poster of all these Patriots cheerleaders in their bikinis. And I'm thinking, like, "I'm a pretty confident 25-year-old woman, and that's making me uncomfortable." Imagine being a 12-year-old girl with body and security issues trying to focus on history class and I having to be like... So I said something to him and he was like, "How dare you? That's one of my former students, and I'm proud of her." But like clearly that was not what was going on. And I was just, like, so mortified. But that was kind of it was a pre-Me Too moment that now I look back on, and I was like "Oh you should have pushed way harder on that one," you know what I mean. But I felt like I had done something wrong. So I think a lot of my

experience as a woman, here in Worcester has been me growing into my own voice and being able to have thick skin, but also to speak up for myself when I feel like somebody's doing something that's not right for me or that I'm not comfortable with.

**AD:** Thank you for sharing your experience and being very vulnerable.

**SS:** [laughs] I should say some positive things too.

**AD:** But I'm glad you feel that you could be more vocal now as a woman in Worcester and I apologize that has happened to you. If you want to take a lighter route, we could talk about your education, if that's okay? So where did you attend high school?

**SS:** Yeah I went to Doherty High School, which is right down the road. And they're actually building a new high school right now, so we went last weekend and got to say our final farewell to the old Authority. But I had a great experience there academically; I was really in love with English classes, I love to write. And I was a swimmer, so I had an English teacher, who was also my swim coach, that was incredibly supportive, and she really pushed me in my swimming career. And then I got a scholarship to go to Fordham University, which is in the Bronx [New York]. And I swam there, Division I, and I was an English major and also an education major. So I did all my student teaching in the Bronx [New York], which was eye opening. I ended up back here because I was working for a nonprofit in the summer, so it's like a summer program for underprivileged kids is what they said at the time, but I think now you would say like "at risk" kids [laughs]. But I went there when I was little, so that's how I got involved and that's how I ended up teaching back in Central Massachusetts. And when you're a teacher, they give you five years to get your master's degree. Which is really challenging just because you're not at that point in your career teaching, making enough money to pay for a master's degree. So I went to Boston College, which was like an incredible program. I got to do half of my studies in the school of education and the other half in the English Department. So studying literature with all these grad students and like, I just was having the time of my life. But then when the bill came, I was like, [laughs], "What do I do?" So I got a job at Armsby Abbey. Have you ever been there?

**SP:** No, I haven't.

**SS:** It's a restaurant on Main Street [Worcester]. And it was just so, like, cool and culturing that I—I feel like that's a part of my education too, almost as much as, like, getting my masters of Boston College. They were really really involved in the slow food movement. So you had to study all the beers and all the cheeses and know all the farms. And they would give you tests every day and I just learned so much. And when you get a job there, they ask you, "What's your long-term goal?" And they don't want to hear, like, "I want to be a server. I want to become the bartender." They want to hear, like, what—why are you doing this job that's requiring you to, like, study this cheese list every day, you know. And for me I said, "Well I—I want to start writing professionally, like, maybe about food." And they really helped me to make that happen,

but there were other people who said, like, “I want to be a farmer.” And now, like, I'm thinking of one guy, Eric Nelson. He was a bartender and now he runs the orchard for Treehouse which is like the most successful brewery in the country. And there was another guy that said, “I want to brew the beer.” And so now he's the head brewer for Exhibit A, which is out by Boston. It's a really successful Brewery. So they just—they helped you to push to the next level, and that felt like a big part of my career as well.

**AD:** Aside from your—you sounded like you had great experiences. Did you face any challenges while you were in school?

**SS:** I was in school—I mean being a student athlete is hard. Like you have to wake up at 4:30 in the morning and then you have a full course load and then I—you go to practice in the afternoon. And I think we ended up—we were training 25 hours a week, so I mean it's like a part-time job and then you have regular school and then there's a social life. So that—figuring out how to balance all that was great. But, like, I said, like growing up here is very tumultuous. Money was hard. I never felt like there was a lot to do, so I became really focused on swimming and I moved to New York City and I was like—I remember being, like, two weeks in and just being, like, “I get to keep doing this? This isn't a vacation? Like, I get to live here.” And... So even though it was really hard, it opened my eyes. I guess one part that I think is interesting, looking back, is that we were in the Bronx which is like by all accounts one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the country. But the campus was gated and it was just like a lot of you know young white Catholic people inside this little bubble and they made it kind of hard to get out. So my last two years I—I did my student teaching in the high schools. Did you ever see *A Bronx Tale*? It's kind of an old movie but I...

**SP:** It sounds familiar.

**SS:** I've been student teaching at that high school, and then I lived off campus with all my friends, and I started to volunteer more, and then I felt like more a part of the Bronx than I did while I was there. But that was something I struggled with.

**SP:** So, like, with facing your challenges, did you have, like, support networks or anyone there?

**SS:** Yeah, I mean, my best friends in the world are my two college roommates. One of them was my swimming teammate who became a roommate, and the other one...I said that I wanted to be paired up with another athlete but not a swimmer my freshman year. Because I was like, well, I know I'm going to spend like so much time with the swimmers but I want someone that understands this crazy commitment. And they paired me up with the coolest track girl in the world, and she's still my best friend. So they became a really strong support network for me. My parents, you know, were as involved as they could be. I think there's been a lot of, like, substance use issues in my family, a lot of mental health issues. And so now with my daughter getting a second go around where they're super involved, and it's so sweet, and I'm like so excited to see that for her. But when I was in school, I—I didn't come home a lot. Like I said, I worked at a



nonprofit in Central Mass in the summers, so I would actually just live there and, like, very rarely see my family, which is too bad now but... My grandparents were a huge part of my life especially when I was really little.

**SP:** Uh—

**AD:** Oh sorry.

**SP:** No you're good, you're good.

**SS:** [Laughs].

**AD:** You could follow up with that if you want.

**SP:** [Laughs] I was just going to ask about your best friends. Did you share, like, any other similar interests outside of sports, like school?

**SS:** Yeah! I mean it's funny so... my... so there's Anne and Kathleen, Anne has turned into this, like, high power, I think of us all in college and I was like we were just a disaster! [laughs]. I don't know how we pulled this off but she's like a high powered lawyer and Kathlene works for Microsoft it—like who's, like, having the greatest year of their life because of Chat GPT [laughs] and so they were both doing really really well, and I think we like to have fun, but we also like to have intellectual conversations, like, we have this app called Marco Polo we kind of just, like, chat each other all day [mhm] and we all read the New York Times on Sunday and then we talk about it you know, so I think [sigh] sometimes when you get older you end up with your fun friends and then you have like your core value friends who really will be there whenever you need them and I have a lot of fun friends in Worcester [laughs] who I love so much but, these people like I have history with and I met them my freshman year of college.

**SP:** Do they live close by or...?

**SS:** So Anne is in New York City.

**SP:** Okay.

**SS:** But it's nice, there's a flight now from Worcester so you can be there in 20 minutes!

**SP:** Oh, great! [laughs]

**SS:** Which is kind of crazy, and Kat is in Seattle but she has an office in Stanford, Connecticut so she's back a lot so I would say we see each other like a dozen times a year. It's a small world. [laughs].

**SP:** Yeah.

**AD:** Yeah it really is, do you mind if I start asking about, like, work? And s—...

**SS:** No not at all.

**AD:** Okay, when was your first job?

**SS:** [Chuckles]. My very first job was at the Jewish Community Center as a lifeguard, and then I became a camp counselor at this place called Camp Putnam, that was a nonprofit, that—where I went as a camper when I was little, and I worked there for like too long [laughs], like, I feel like I aged out but I went through the ranks there where I was, like, counselor, then it was the waterfront director, then I was the assistant camp director, then I was writing grants. And at some point like I said I ended up living out there and, I was just like, so isolated it's only 25 miles from here, but in the summer it was the happiest place in the world, with tons of little kids running all around, and in the winter it was just so, so lonely, and quiet, and creepy like to be in a summer camp, by yourself, in the woods, in the cold. So that's when you know I and I also I broke up with somebody who was living with that there and I came back to Worcester and I was like, “Okay, I'm only staying here for like six months, I'm moving to New York City,” but then I just developed this beautiful network of friends at Armsby Abbey and I met my husband, and now we're like Mr. and Mrs. Worcester. Our wedding was called the Worcester wedding and we sourced everything from Worcester you know, so I'm really owning it, my Worcester identity. [Deep inhale]. But after camp when I was 22—so like, my first job out of college was at Auburn Middle School. And I stayed in Auburn for 10 years, and then I got a job in the Worcester Public Schools at Burncoat Middle School five years ago. And then I started writing for the paper... 10 years ago I got a column at *Worcester Magazine* and then *Worcester Magazine* joined with *Telegram* and so I've had a column for like a decade. I've also done like a lot of freelance for the *Worcester Business Journal*, and *Edible*, and like a bunch of other more niche publications.

**SP:** Yeah, so it seems like your work's very important to you— like could you explain what it means to you?

**SS:** Yeah! It's funny I think for a long time I felt like it was my sole identity or sense of purpose, and this is something I've been talking about with my students a lot. It's like you can have a bunch of goals like Michael Phelps had the goal to set a bunch of records and win a bunch of gold medals, but if you don't have a sense of purpose then once you achieve the goal you can get really depressed and that's what Michael Phelps talks about. He broke all these records, and met all his goals and he's like, “Now I'm going to kill myself.” He went through this terrible like

suicidal period cause he just was like, “What else do I have to live for I'm just a swimmer.” And so after that he found his sense of purpose which was like I'm going to talk to kids about mental health, and he can do that for the rest of his life. But I think for a long time for me I was so obsessed with doing a good job, and having people tell me I was doing a good job at work, [inhales] that I totally missed the fact that like I didn't have a sense of purpose and so figuring out how to say “no” has been a really huge thing. Having a baby has been a really huge thing, but... coming with some parameters or boundaries for myself. I used to say “yes” to every writing opportunity because I just wanted to get my writing out there and any chance to get published I'd say “yes.” Now I ask myself okay... does it have to do with education? Does it benefit women? Or does it have to do with like illuminating a cool cultural element of Worcester? And if the answer to those is “no” all three of them, then I say, “No I can't do it.”

**AD:** That's really interesting and so you touched on having a sense of purpose and being like a parent so, if you don't mind me asking if you want to share your primary responsibilities in terms of, like, house work and child care?

**SS:** Oh my God! I should get him down here [laughs]. He does the laundry and the dishes, he would definitely tell you. I... it's funny we don't have right now like a specific daycare or child care she's going to go to JCC [Jewish Community Center] starting next year a couple days a week but right now his mom does three days, my mom does one day, and then one day we kind of punt [Laughs] on Fridays I have to be in school at seven but then I get to leave at two so he you know we like send her a play for a few hours but we both are doing doing a lot of child care right now, and yesterday someone said to me like, “Wait so you guys have never get a break?” And I don't really think of it that way but it is true that having a couple days next year where she's in daycare are going to, like, free up a lot of time for exercising, or things like that. I make dinner every night, it's something I love. I didn't cook until the pandemic and then you know everyone got weird hobbies, I got really into cooking so that's something I love..we...both do our best to tidy up but one of the bougiest part about me is now we have somebody come and help like deep clean once a month and I'm like [whispers] this is the greatest thing! Like I will write 10 extra articles [laughs] if I get to have somebody clean the toilet for me! So that's been like this there are certain jumps where I think you know I grew up in, like, a not a very wealthy family and now I'm like, “We're middle class! [laughs] We can have somebody come help clean the floors!” And at first I was a little bit embarrassed of it and now I'm, “No just own it you you need help sometimes!” And so I don't know what other chores are there? [laughs].

**SP:** So it seems like... you've kind of found a balance of like, your priorities, and responsibilities would you say like with your self-care...it gets in the way a little bit? Or...

**SS:** Yeah... I think so, I... since I got pregnant with her have started exercising a lot less, and that was part of my community in Worcester is like I would go running with a lot of my friends often and I'm doing a lot less of that now so that's something I want to pay more attention to... but the starting to cook sort of thing actually made us like a lot healthier we're eating out less. And before the pandemic I would write restaurant reviews too which was fun, but I had to go to,

like, another random restaurant every single week, and so we were going out just a lot more so I think we're healthier now that you know we stay home with a little one, eat our carrots. [laughs].

**AD:** What would you say are the pros and cons of the career path you chose? And if you mind giving a few examples...?

**SS:** I will say – so, I always wanted to be a writer. And I had a mentor... as like an 18-year-old, he was my boss and he told me, “No, you cannot be a writer, become a teacher and then you know you can do both or whatever.” And part of me is really resentful where I'm like, “How dare he say that! I should have just gone for it follow my dream,” but now I do have a pension from being a teacher [laughs] and like I have tenure and all of these benefits, I have healthcare that I might not have had if I have really like roughed it and just gone for it in writing or journalism. So yes, I do kind of have this like, “What if I had done that?”

**AD:** Yeah.

**SS:** You just kind of have to ride the wave too and see where it takes us. I wrote a book in 2023, it came out, and it's about education and so that's been my next big chapter where I'm like, “Oh I got a publishing deal! And an advance like I can do this!” So my dreams of being a writer are reinvigorated.

**SP:** What's your book about?

**SS:** It's about teaching.

**SP:** Oh, yeah?

**SS:** Yeah, right now it's like the highest rate of teacher turnover, where just people are leaving the profession at a massive rate, and so the book is about low effort techniques that get big rewards, like high learning outcomes in the classroom to help prevent teacher burnout.

**AD:** What inspired you to write about that topic?

**SS:** Well it's funny, it was an Assumption professor, he read my column, or so he says, which is, like, very nice because it's mostly for Millennial moms [laughs] and his publisher had reached out to him and said, “You wrote a book for college professors,” because as I'm sure you've noticed there can be like brilliant chemists or biologists or whatever but then they come in and they're supposed to teach you and they have no idea how to teach chemistry or teach biology. So, he was noticing that at Assumption, he wrote a book that got a lot of attention nationwide, so he actually teaches at Notre Dame now in South Bend, Indiana. But he helped professors to, like, learn how to be a teacher, and so they asked him to write a book on the same topic about K-8

education and he's like, "I don't know about K-8 education but this lady in the newspaper does. She's a teacher she writes about it all the time!" So, we connected, and that was—it was kind of, like, a beautiful... not coincidence, but I did, I feel like I got really lucky.

**SP:** So, so like, from the choices you made varying from, like, staying in Worcester, writing a book, teaching, and—do you—would you say you're proud of that? Or maybe, do you have any regrets?

**SS:** Yeah, I am really proud of it. I think...you only get one hometown, so you have to learn to be proud of it. Cause that's it right? And Worcester is mine. And so living here, and having my daughter grow up here, and being proud of where she's from, is something I didn't always feel and I really want her to feel it and then maybe she'll feel free to go off and move wherever the world takes her. But I felt like I had some unfinished business here. And...here I am! We always say we want to die in this house [laughs] like, I just, I love it. We've lived here for five years and we keep doing work on it, and we love living next to the school because there's just beautiful grounds for everyone so... Yes, I think if you had talked to me, certain points on my path to this moment, I would be like, "Oh my God, I really regret!" Like I got into Columbia and I didn't go for grad school because I was too afraid you know my partner at the time was like, "You can't afford it, you can't you're the most fiscally irresponsible woman I've ever met in my life" [laughs], there's no way and now realizing it I was like oh that was just like a tactic to get me to stay here so there were certain things where for years I was I cannot believe he talked me out of doing that and going going to live in New York City again and, and now I'm like yeah but you wouldn't have your daughter, and your husband so sometimes you really just do have to... have to trust that you're going to end up where you're supposed to be.

**AD:** So it sounds like your daughter, like, influences a lot of your life choices, and you just want what's best for her, so would you say—would you say that your daughter has really made an impact on how you— your outlook on life?

**SS:** Yeah! I think my husband made me want to be a better person, my daughter makes me want to be a better person, it's like a sense of accountability for yourself where you just really want to take care of yourself so you can take care of somebody else. But I, like, I also love how much she's gotten me out into the community to do things where I was really into, like, the restaurant scene, you know I knew all the restaurants, and bars in Worcester, and we would get invited to all these great events and fundraisers. But now with her, like, we go to the Botanical Gardens [chuckles] and the EcoTarium, and the art museum, and the library and those are all these really vibrant community spaces that I was not utilizing before.

**SP:** Would you like to have more children?

**SS:** Yes, yeah we would.

**AD:** So it sounds like you are really active in the community, and I was wondering if you're also active in... the community— community, politically?

**SS:** I am not. I— when I met my husband, he was working at City Hall. He was the Chief of Staff for the city manager. And [laughs] honestly he, like, scared— not scared me, but it was just kind of being under the microscope all the time and City Hall is like a place for triage you know, where if something goes wrong in the city they got to figure out how to fix it. It's a really high stress environment and so I... I think, I would never be interested in running for politics and part of it too is like in Worcester the city counselors don't make a living wage, so that you have to have another job that allows you to, like, go to daytime events. So, that's why I think a lot of them are in real estate, and things like that. But like, you can't be a teacher and then also be a city counselor and like fulfill your obligations? But it can't be a full-time job either because they don't make a living wage. So that's kind of something I hope Worcester will figure out. But, I also find that people are just right now with social media so critical that I almost— I don't want to put myself out there in that sort of way... because of my daughter too.

**SP:** So, I believe before you mentioned that your family has had substance abuse issues?

**SS:** Yeah.

**SP:** Do you feel comfortable sharing about how that may have impacted your life?

**SS:** Not so much, except to say that, like, it's so much more common than I ever realized, I'm working the schools I guess I—I have a better overview than I did growing up where I think I thought I was, like, the only one and.. was ashamed many times of, like, my family situation or whatever. Now I work in the schools and I'm like, “Oh my goodness if only you had just realized it's, it's everywhere,” but I'm trying to address that with my students and destigmatize mental health so that we can talk about a lot of the heavier things that are happening.

**AD:** I know the pandemic was... a big time period where people were struggling with mental health, and you mentioned as a hobby you picked up cooking. So, I was wondering if the pandemic had any other effects on you and your family, or like your job? And how?

**SS:** Yeah, it—well virtual middle school was so weird [laughs] like they're already kind of shy and awkward at the beginning of the year, so at the beginning of the 2020 school year we had a good policy in Worcester. I thought that you can't force them to turn their cameras on because everyone's coming from a different situation and some people don't want to let you into that

personal environment which made sense, but then there were some classes where it was just like, “Hello, is anyone out there?” And you know one kid would be like, “Oh miss I'm listening!” You're like, “Great,” but yeah, the virtual teaching, wow what a challenge with a bunch of 13-year-olds because they don't have impulse controlling like that's a big part of what we do is teach them social norms and how to talk to each other, and through a screen it was a real learning curve for me.

**SP:** So... based, like, on your life experience, do you have any more advice, like, that you would like to give women today or to the future generation?

**SS:** I do. I love the idea that you've got to learn to say, “No,” sometimes. Because a friend told me, “If you say ‘Yes’ to everything, then your ‘Yes’s’ start to mean ‘No’.” And so I'm really trying to figure out what my core values are, and pick, and choose, and when you get to be my age you know, 36 or whatever people— and you're from Worcester and you're a woman people start asking you to be on boards, at first I was like, “Wow! I'm so flattered!” and then some of them I realized they just need a millennial girl to fill this slot pretty much. And so I started to be more particular where I'm like, “Okay does this fall in line?” And so my favorite board to be on has been the Worcester Public Library, and I just finished my term and now I'm getting some asks from other organizations, so I'm really excited about one of the boards that's the Maternity Ward at UMass where I gave birth to my daughter. Because we do want to have another baby and so that one sounds really meaningful, like, something I would look forward to going to. And the other one is the JCC where she's going to be going to school and where I went growing up and learned to swim which became a big part of my life. So yeah I'm trying to figure out how to say “no” to things, and prioritize. And I hope that other women can do the same and not feel guilty about it.

**AD:** So kind of going along that question, the basis of this project is to just tell a fuller story of the history of women, because in the past we feel like that has been lacking, so we were just wondering what you think we— should be sure to include more of?

**SS:** Oh boy...you guys have been very easy to talk to. I'll say— I'm, like, “What am I doing?” [laughs]... Yeah, I think right now I mentioned that affordable housing is a big concern, and growing up I had a lot of housing insecurity, and so I think that's something that's really interesting to look at. Like, who did struggle with housing as a kid, but then has found a place to live in Worcester and what's the in-between, right?” And so, I think I found a really strong partner, and I became really invested in my career, but I also feel very lucky in a lot of respects. So, sometimes I ask myself that. “How did I end up with this normal life? You know?” But... normal is very subjective so [laughs].

**SP:** And do have any—like, any other people, or suggestions of who we could talk to?

**SS:** Yeah, I don't know if—I interviewed a woman this week named Laurie Ross, who is amazing. She works at Clark University and she studies youth violence in the city, and she just has a lot of great insights... I have Jeanette Tozer is a great one too, she works at City Hall, but you know she's been through it just in terms of being the only woman in a room full of powerful men, again and again, throughout her career, and she's a pretty remarkable woman, she's a South High Community School graduate. A really incredible business owner, who's also a South High Community School graduate is Amanda Setaro, she owns a shop called Sweet Janes...downtown [Worcester], and she actually went to Fordham University [New York] with me, but yeah, she's, like, just the biggest go-getter and has had sort of a tumultuous journey, but now runs a really successful business in Worcester. Amy Chase, I bet you've already talked to, but she runs Crompton Collective... yeah. Sorry [whispers].

**SP:** No worries.

**AD:** Well it was really awesome to get to talk to you, and get to know you more, it sounds like you're a very passionate woman from Worcester.

**SS:** Aww, thank you.

**AD:** And it's nice to know that you're very proud of where you came from, and who you are today. I believe Sam and I don't have any further questions for you, but if you'd like to add anything, you'd be more than welcome too.

**SS:** Just good luck, and thanks for listening to me yammer on for an hour, you know, it was—it was nice [laughs].

**AD:** No, thank you.

**SP:** Yeah thank you for having us here. [laughs] All right.

**SS:** Well thanks...