

Interviewee: Susan Scully-Hill
Interviewer: Courtney Foley
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Abstract: Susan Scully-Hill was born on October 20, 1963 in South Amboy, New Jersey. Having graduated from Michigan State University with her PhD and having worked as a professor at Emporia State University, she came to Worcester in 1998 in pursuit of a teaching position. Throughout the interview, Susan expresses her dedication to her work, her family, the Worcester community, and her efforts to balance each responsibility. She expresses feeling a heavy burden, as a working mom, to meet everyone's expectations. Department Chair of the Human Services and Social Rehabilitation Studies program, she enjoys her career as an educator, and feels fortunate to form relationships with her students, whom she finds interesting and stimulating. She is grateful that she continues to learn and be challenged in her career, and feels that her students influence her as tremendously as she influences them. A wife and the mother of two, she believes that a woman's role in her family is irreplaceable and what is truly worthwhile. Dr. Scully-Hill and her family are actively involved in the community, supporting various causes and participating in fundraising activities. She has served on the board of the Elm Park Early Childhood Education Center and her son enjoys regularly volunteering at a nursing home. She values the diversity in Worcester and the opportunity this city provides, but touches upon the improvements she would like to see.

CF: So do you give us full permission to record this interview

SS: Yes

CF: The first question is what is your full maiden name?

SS : Susan Maria Scully

CF: And your married name?

SS: Susan Maria Scully- Hill

CF: When were you born?

SS: October 20th 1953

CF Do you have children?

SS: I do have children

CF: How many?

SS: Two children

CF: What culture or ethnicity do you identify with?

SS: I am Irish and also, I forget what it's called before. It was Czechoslovakia and now it's Czech Republic. I am from the Czech side of the Czech, before, yeah.

CF: OK

SS: And I'm Hungarian

CF: Have you ever married?

SS: Yes

CF: And what is the name of your current husband?

SS: Calvin Hill

CF: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents?

SS: Sure, what can I tell you about my parents? My mom, Dorothy, she lives in Michigan. She is 73 and she is a retired administrator from General Motors and my father he is deceased, he died about five years ago. And my parents divorced when I was ten so during my growing up years I didn't live together with the both of them. And my father basically worked for the city of South Amboy, New Jersey and he was like a mechanic.

CF: What was your parents' education

SS: Well my father has a high school degree and my mother she has a masters degree but she, when she first had us she just had a high school degree and then when we were growing up she was going to college for a bachelors degree and then also her masters degree

CF: You said your father worked in South Amboy, so is that were you grew up or?

SS: Part of the time. I was born in South Amboy, and when my parents got divorced then my mom moved to Michigan with all of us kids. And she wanted to, you know the automotive industry was in Michigan and the Detroit area and she felt that she would be able to get a job and she could support us on her own and also another thing that also concerned my mom was that we would be able to go to college and in Michigan there

were a lot of state schools and so she thought that we would better be able to afford to go to college and we would have more college options than living in New Jersey. There were more private schools, less public universities and colleges so the educational system is what made my mom move. So I would say I pretty much grew up in Michigan.

CF: And where do you live now?

SS: I live in

CF: Worcester?

SS: Mm mm

CF: So how did you come to Worcester?

SS: Well, so I lived in Michigan, that's where I went to college and I got all my degrees from Michigan State. So when I was graduating with my PhD in 1996 I starting looking for jobs. And, it is kind of interesting how I did end up here because at that time I had maybe four or five job interviews at colleges and three of them were here in Massachusetts, but Assumption wasn't one of them at that time. Another interview that I had scheduled was in Kansas, and that was the first one I went to and I was offered the job right after the interview and I didn't have an opportunity to come to, it was Springfield College, UMASS Boston and somewhere else I was going to interview here. But I was afraid that I wouldn't find a job or I wouldn't get it, there was no guarantee that I would get an offer somewhere else, so I accepted the job and I lived in Kansas for two years. But being from New Jersey originally and then living in Michigan, Kansas was really a culture shock for me in many ways. And so I stayed there two years and I enjoyed my position but some of the, first of all I really like the beach and the ocean and being near water, so being in Kansas was very problematic. There were really no beaches and it was dirt that you lay on to sunbath or whatever, it was really.... But so geographically I felt rather disconnected. But also it is interesting that when you do talk about cultural differences, whether you come from a different ethnic background or a different country or whatever but even just within the United States there's a lot of cultural differences. The people there were very friendly but maybe a little more intrusive than what I would be accustomed to and personally space, everyone had their nose in their business. It too being the Bible Belt part of the country, people were much more conservative than I was and it's funny how people make friends, would be "Hey would you like to come to my church?" and they wouldn't really understand like why you wouldn't want to go to their church or why you know maybe you just didn't go to church or didn't go frequently, you -- it was sort of odd to them because everyone went to church and that was sort of you know the social thing too. And then the other part of it for me where I was at in Kansas was sort of in the middle of nowhere, and there really wasn't any cultural diversity and I'm not joking when I say like you couldn't get a bagel. Like here you could go anywhere and get a bagel and there they just didn't have bagels

CF: [laughs]

SS: I mean, I know that's strange but again I think it sort of points to what some of the cultural difference are, so I, it really didn't fit well for me. You know going into the supermarket and having and you know, even an ethnic food isle or it was, and not seeing people, everybody was just the same. So at that point, well really pretty soon after I got there I said that I would start looking for another job and I did and that's how, that's what brought me to Worcester, to Massachusetts.

CF: And do you have any other family that live in.....?

SS. Just my immediate family

CF: What challenges do you think the city of Worcester still faces or what would you change?

SS: Challenges, there are many, and a lot of people are really like, very negative about Worcester. As a matter of fact, if I could just say this. My neighbor -- I was speaking to her on the phone the other day and she, um, we were talking about the director of the Plourde and she was asking me what was going on with that. She said I hear you're interviewing, and she said something like, "Oh are you kidding? Who would want to come and live in Worcester?" And, you know from outside of this area. And I was you know really surprised, maybe not surprised, but anyway the point is that if you have lived other places, Worcester is really not a bad place to live. I just shared with you my experience about living in Kansas with the lack of diversity and people holding different views than I did, that you know Worcester is, I find Worcester to be pretty liberal. I find Worcester to be very diverse. And those are things I appreciate about it. There are a lot of options for kids in terms of recreation and educational opportunities, all of the colleges, so I think all of that is very positive. But certainly Worcester lacks a certain level of sophistication I think, a lot of people feel, and even destinations in Worcester that are maybe stimulating or. You know I am every happy that we now have a theater, that is something that we enjoy doing. But it doesn't have a vibrant downtown area, it would be nice if there was a vibrant business district. It would be nice if there was a little upscale shopping. But you know Worcester, in general, is not an affluent city so being able to support some of those things is challenging. I think you know where I went to school, where I went to college; it was very much a college town. Very eclectic, very artsy, it would be nice if we had a little bit more of that here. I even kind of hesitate to be too negative because I think that even if Worcester can't offer all of those things to its residents that we are so close to so many other places, like it's so easy to go to Boston. It's very easy to go to the beach, it's even not that far to go to NYC. You don't always have to live right in the spot that has everything happening, you can travel. But I think, of course, maybe upgrading the public school systems here, but again resources are very limited, it's an urban schools setting, but its not like it is in Detroit, so that's good, that is my editorial on Worcester.

CF. So that's Worcester as a whole, but what do you think women's experiences have been in Worcester?

SS: Women's experiences in Worcester? Well I can honestly say that's really a question I have never really thought of and I would consider myself to be very interested in women's issues. And I really can only speak from my experience of being a woman and maybe friends that I have here. And I really couldn't speak for most women in Worcester because I have had many more opportunities than many women do. So, I mean, for me it's an empowering experience. I find that there are many professional women that I can network with and have connections with. I think, when I look at, right now the mayor of Worcester is a woman. There are women in high ranking positions in government in the city and city council. I would have to say that there are opportunities for women here. But again I would be aware of making a blanket statement because you know there is great ethnic diversity in Worcester and socioeconomic diversity in Worcester so if I were say a Hispanic woman with a high school education and English as a second language, things would be very, very different

CF: You went to school in Michigan, was it..

SS: I went to Michigan State

CF: And what were your challenges going through your education

SS: Well maybe at first figuring out what I wanted to do with my life was a big challenge. And too there were like even some gender related issues there of , I think in some ways being pushed to pursue traditionally female careers. The things that I remember considering that were very much supported by, you know counselors in my high school and also my mom were things like nursing, and becoming a teacher. I mean I ultimately chose social work, which too is pretty predominately female. But I think that was my biggest challenge, figuring out what I wanted to do with my life.

CF: And upon finishing your formal education what did you see as your options after graduating?

SS: Well that's good, cause that makes me think of another challenge. Having a bachelor's degree in social work and looking at the prospect of not being able to support myself with what it is that I could make, definitely presented a kind of challenge. And maybe the other thing too was, very much my social work degree is in child welfare and development, wanting to work with children and even maybe an early childhood education setting but again the pay being so low and having a professional degree, if you will. So the options, what was the question again?

CF: What did you see as the options after graduating?

SS: So I saw my options of having you know a low paying job, but enjoying my work and or going on to graduate school, which would allow me to hold a more professionalized position and certainly to earn more money.

CF: What support networks or mentors offered support?

SS: Well I have also had a supportive close network of friends, and being kind of a verbal person too that's pretty open that has always I think helped me to find people to talk to or people that will listen and we can gravitate towards each other. I could offer support to them and they could offer support to me. And there was something else that I was thinking of saying, oh mentors. Yeah, mentors were really, really important in my life, and I'm thinking of one woman in particular who was my supervisor at the undergraduate internship. She really helped me to figure out what graduate program to pursue. She is someone I will always be grateful to and I will always remember because she pointed me like exactly in the right direction and how she knew, I don't know. And then, in my masters and PhD program I had also a woman as a mentor that I am still in contact with today that she was just tremendously supportive in you know educationally as well as professionally. If I were to need a letter of recommendation for something today she would write it for me. For any kind of career advice, I could go to her. And to the importance of those mentors, when you feel like its not worth it or you feel like your in the wrong place, that really offers you support and help to keep going or to steer you in the right direction.

CF: When did you begin working outside of the home? Was that 1996 when you graduated or?

SS: Well, I mean I did work after I graduated with my bachelor's degree as a nanny and then I did work after my master's degree for two years as a professional counselor, but really professionally I guess when I really started working was probably in 1996.

CF: And was that when you went to Kansas?

SS: Well in 96 was when I graduated with my PhD and I worked as a Professor at Emporia State University.

CF: And being a professor, what has this work meant to you?

SS: Well it doesn't feel like work to me. I mean it's hard work and it's demanding, but it's a career. It's very much part of my identity. And I feel like probably like one of the most blessed people in the whole world. I mean, I want to win the lottery but [laughs] barring that- No, and really and even so, that could not have ever done for me what being in this career has done for me. And I guess really the most poignant thing that I can say about it is that it's so much intertwined with who I am that it's not necessarily my job, like, "Oh, I've got to go to work today" or I mean getting off work or taking off work. It is just so integrated with who I am, but also with my family and so many areas of my life. Like, I have you know, the wonderful opportunity- and I'm not just saying this because you guys are here in front of me- but honestly, to just meet students and it's so reciprocal that I'm so rewarded by my relationship with students seeing how they grow and how they develop and what they learn but they also have influenced my life too tremendously for how I've grown and what I have learned. So, not many people get to you know, always be meeting and forming relationships. You know 99.9% of the

students are phenomenal human beings. They are so interesting and so stimulating to know. You know, who gets to do that? And get paid and sort of have wonderful work arrangements too because I have a lot of flexibility and I still can be the primary caretaker for my kids- you know, be a full time mom for them, and get to do something that I love and continues to challenge me intellectually because if I want to learn something new or teach a new course or try something different, than I can do it. I don't have to do it only this way. So, I mean you know, aside from being able to be with my kids and my family, it's great.

CF: How have you balanced these different priorities and responsibilities in your life?

SS: How have I? I don't know that I have always. That's the really, really, really hard part and I think that as women go, it's so much harder for us. And I'm not like going to beat on men or be negative at all about a man's role in life, but it's very challenging to find balance, if not impossible to find balance and I, as a woman, continually feel that I'm not doing enough or I'm not good enough or I feel guilt if I shortchange one area in my life or one person in my life. And, sometimes it does get upsetting and frustrating when sometimes it feels like as a woman you feel like you have to do so much more to be viewed as equal or as competent as maybe a male counterpart. And, we balance so many things. Even though I have a rather egalitarian relationship with my husband, you know the bottom line is I'm the mom and when the kids are sick at school, I have to pick them up and I am home with them. I help them with their homework. I know everything that is going on in their lives. You know, you try to share more things or responsibilities, but predominantly, the burden falls to the woman or the mom. Sometimes too, there's even that well I can't do something, I can't stay, I'm sorry I have to get out of here at you know, this time because my kids are coming home and I need to help them with their homework, I need to get them to activities. There isn't tremendous understanding or I haven't experienced tremendous understanding from colleagues or people that pay that that's valued are like "what do you mean you have to leave at three?" or "what do you mean you're leaving now?" and that happens I think to me a lot. That's sort of a personal trigger button, like "Oh, you're leaving now?" Well, its three o'clock and when I go to my other job which goes until the kids go to bed. And so sometimes I just think that you know, we have a heavy burden.

CF: You said that a lot of the burden falls on you as the mom. What does your husband do for work?

SS: Well my husband is an administrator at a college. He works at a college as well, but he is not a faculty member, he is an administrator.

CF: Do you consider yourself to be active politically?

SS: Moderately. My husband's background is in political science so he is very active politically, so he helps me to be more aware. I was very active, more active than I think that I've ever been in the most recent [2008] presidential campaign and election because it was very exciting for me to see somebody who was very intellectual, which I appreciated and then to also have a person of color be running for president and

ultimately be elected. So I was more political and then, my husband is involved politically, but typically I am not very political.

CF: Have you been involved in volunteer community work?

SS: Well I've served on the board for Elm Park Early Childhood Education Center. We also did fundraising for the playground at Flagg St. School. We are quite often fundraising activities for various causes and things in Worcester. Do I maintain an actual number of hours of volunteer work activity? I don't. But my son does. He volunteers at a nursing home and we're very involved in community causes and fundraising kinds of things.

CF: What role has religion played in your life?

SS: Well, I'm a spiritual person and I grew up Catholic, but I think that based on some things that have like occurred in my family life and some of maybe the Catholic perspectives on different issues has not resonated with me that I haven't been involved formally in religion. But, we are spiritual and we do attend church, not a Christian- you know an interdenominational because it's important in our lives. My children go to Catholic school and religion, spirituality, God, and Christianity and the values that are associated with being a good human being and good, ethical morals are extremely important. But I have found that organized religion has not necessarily met our needs or has not resonated with some of our beliefs about being accepting and open to all people.

CF: How has health affected your life?

SS: Well I have been very, very fortunate to be a very healthy person. And you know, as I get older, it is more important to stay healthy and to live longer. At one point in my life, about 15 years ago, I experienced some issues with my spine and my back and I was unable to be as physically active as I would have liked and that was very challenging for me to deal with. And that has shown me the importance of being fit and appreciating having mobility and doing things that allow me to do the kinds of things that I want to do in life.

CF: What has been your experience accessing quality health care?

SS: Again, I've been really, really fortunate because I am a person who has never been without health insurance and had good health insurance. So, anything that I have needed, anything anyone in my family has ever needed with regard to health and medical care, we've never been denied and have always been able to have access to the best in terms of specialists. So, it's been very positive.

CF: Ok, now we're going to wrap up. Now that we are working to tell a fuller story of the history of women than has been recorded in the past, what should we be sure to include?

SS: I don't know, I think in some way that although things have changed and we really have moved forward in so many ways with regard to women's rights, equality, and opportunity for women, that there are still challenges, many challenges that lie ahead. We talked about finding balance, being viewed as competent. There is still a lot of bias, gender inequity, and gender bias. I mean, there is still a lot. And that will probably come out in interviews and things too, but it's certainly to be positive of where we have come from and where we're at, but to remind people that we still have a ways to go.

CF: Do you have any sort of special advice to give to young women?

SS: Yeah, hmm, let me think... You just got me in a mood, sometimes you can just get me in a mood [laughs]... Life will be challenging and the whole you know, trying to achieve balance and feeling that you're a good mom, you're a good sister, you're a good daughter, you're a good wife, that those things can kind of make us crazy when we're all trying to be so good in all of those roles and there is so much work that goes along with that. Don't despair and don't let that get you down. That the experience of being all of those things is so rewarding and so significant and mostly I think what comes to mind is the experience of being a mom. And although you know, I will fail at times- I'm thinking about five loads of laundry and this stuff like the homework and everything- the role that a woman plays in her family is irreplaceable. Because I don't want to say a man can't do it, I'm not saying that, but it's just that that is so rewarding. The relationships, the connections, how your children feel about you, how your family members feel about you are all the things that are worth while.

CF: And is there anybody else you suggest we talk to?

SS: Hmm, yeah, who should you talk to? These women all live in Worcester?

CF: Well, Central Massachusetts.

SS: Let me see who's coming to mind. I would suggest a woman named Betty Flanagan and she just retired from here [Assumption College] and she had most recently been the secretary in IT but she would be someone that is an older woman who before maybe women were in the workplace and she's done a phenomenal job at raising her family and also having a career. So she could be someone that comes to mind.

CF: Well, thank you very much!

SS: You're welcome very much.