

Interviewee: Dr. Shirley Carter
Interviewers: Marina Gigliello and Alexis Levine
Date of Interview: September 21, 2017
Location: Worcester, Massachusetts
Transcribers: Marina Gigliello and Alexis Levine



Overseen by Dr. Carl Robert Keyes and Prof. Caryl Nuñez, Assumption College

Abstract:

Dr. Shirley F.B. Carter was born on October 26, 1931 and raised in Worcester, Massachusetts. Shirley discusses how she and her sister were the first African Americans to graduate from the Worcester City Hospital School of Nursing. She is a bright, lively, and well-educated woman who has an Ed.D. in Instructional Leadership. Shirley reflects upon her experiences and the sexism and racism she faced as an African American woman. Shirley worked multiple jobs for almost her entire life in order to first support her family when she was just a child, and then her children as an adult. She worked as a nurse on weekends and in the summer to supplement her income as a professor at Springfield College. Shirley explains, that if she could change one thing about how society views women it would be to increase respect and equity of women. Shirley faced many adversities, and she overcame this explaining, "...things were hard, but with God as my father, and Jesus as my brother I knew I could withstand anything." Shirley states that when society repeatedly tells you no, you need an outlet for that anger; for her, that was religion. She acknowledges that religion is not perfect; but if you let anger build up in your mind, it will explode like a volcano. She was always passionate about medicine, and knew she wanted to be a nurse, and by having perseverance and creating allies along the way, she was able to achieve her goal.

AL: Okay. Alright, so do we have your permission to record this interview?

SC: Yes this is Shirley Carter and this is September 21, 2017 and I understand... agree.

AL: Okay, great! Okay so first we want to start off with some general questions about your family and your history with Worcester. So I know you filled out the form, but for the record sake, did you go by any maiden names or any different names at any point in your life?

SC: Yes until I was probably 25 I was Barrow, like a wheelbarrow.

AL: Okay [laughter]. And where were you born?

SC: Boston, Massachusetts.

AL: Boston, Massachusetts. And have you ever been married?

SC: I was married one time.

AL: Mhmm. And I know we talked a little about that before we recorded, but do you feel comfortable at all explaining— a little bit— what you were explaining to us before?

SC: That I was married for three years. My husband left temporarily and never came back. And after our second child was born— he left actually before she was born—he came up and saw her when she was eleven days old. And next thing I knew he sued me for desertion after dropping me at my mother's house temporarily. And I got on a bus and rode all night and went down to contest the divorce. I never deserted that man. So out of prejudice the judge awarded me a divorce. And I didn't want to ever be divorced for a second.

AL and MG: Yeah, no.

SC: It was like no! And I've discovered throughout all these years, it's got—got to be what fifty somewhat so years? I've always put single. Yeah, and so it's like erasing those three amazing years.

AL: [Laughter] Wow! Okay, so you had one child before that happened?

SC: Yeah.

AL: And what's that child's name?

SC: Laura.

AL: Laura. And is Laura like married or have any children of her own?

SC: Laura has a son, Jascha And he on the 13th [of this month] had his 26th birthday.

AL: Aw okay. And then so your second child is— what's their name?

SC: Mia.

AL: Mia. And does Mia have any children?

SC: She has two.

AL: Two

SC: Yeah and she has a grandchild which gives me a great grandchild.

AL: Wow, okay so what are their names how, what are their ages?

SC: Ages I can't do.

AL: That's okay.

SC: The youngest grandson, Jascha, I know he just had a birthday on the 13th. I know he turned 26 ok. [Chuckling] Liam is the next the oldest grandson and he's three years older. You can do the math. [Chuckling] Ari is three years older than that so she's in her early 30s. Those are the three grandchildren. And Emme Josephine Marie Corcoran is four. [Gets up and picks up pillow with child's photo on it].

AL and MG: Aw, she's precious she's beautiful, oh my goodness, oh my gosh!

SC: A friend of mine, she had one of those coupons and she wanted to make a Christmas gift so that they take a photograph and they make a wall thing with wallpaper but the coupon expired so they said they let her use it and made a little pillow.

AL and MG: Her face is precious. I know oh my gosh, wow.

SC: That's Emme, my great granddaughter.

AL: Okay.

SC: My granddaughter is Arian.

AL: Arian, okay great. Okay so after— let's see. So what cultures or ethnicities do you identify with?

SC: Black Yankee.

AL: Okay and is that something you always grew up with or went to in your adult life?

SC: I grew up isolated from my own people because my grandmother— when she moved here from Malden discovered that black children went to Thomas Street school and she sat in the classroom and there were a lot of immigrant children, a lot of children in the Summer Street area and they weren't learning. They were throwing things at the teacher she said, "we're not going to live in this community," and she moved to the west side and children went to a school – the building is still there, but it's now one of the you know— people live in it, it's a condo or something. And she made a commitment not to raise her children in the inner city so my grandpa bought land out here off of Grafton Street. My mother and aunt grew up here. I grew up here on the other side of Sunderland Road. They wouldn't sell the land to my grandfather because he was black. So his ally and Italian neighbor bought it for him.

AL: Wow.

SC: And then he sold it to my grandpa. So I grew up as my cousin said, “out in the country.” [Laughing] There were farms, Mark Haye’s Farm, Perkins Farm. We literally grew up in the country. We went to all Saint Episcopal Church. So my cousins were the only people I knew of color. So for dances or social things, my cousins were my escorts. No neighbor would date you because they would be called names.

AL: Wow, okay. So when you say you grew up in the country did you personally grow up on a farm in that kind of...

SC: No I just grew up without lights and water for twenty-one years.

AL: Wow, okay.

SC: Wow is right. The city wouldn't do it. It was too expensive to run water and electricity up Ellen Street because there were only two black families on the street and it was too expensive.

MG: Wha—wow!

SC: Twenty-one years old, [hand claps] I went to see the mayor.

AL: Really? And how did that go? Can you tell us about that?

SC: Literally I was adamant, I just—that's what my parents had been told. And I just—that's no excuse and we got water and electricity up Ellen Street when I was twenty-one years old.

AL: Good for you [laughing].

MG: That takes guts.

SC: I know. It got me pretty angry.

AL: Yeah seriously. Okay so you talk a little about your mom but can you tell us a little bit more about your parents?

SC: Besides the fact that she was beautiful [laughs] men said she had bedroom eyes [laughing]. She just had this naive, angelic face and I think she was naive. And she was creative. She could look at an afghan like— like that [points at the afghan on the couch] and make a sweater out of it, she could mak a meal out of one egg and a cup of milk and a little bit of flour.

AL: Oh my goodness.

SC: Creative woman, more creative. Very good with a hammer and nail [laughs] and shovels,

and saws. She was amazing in terms of her skills.

MG: Aw.

SC: But she was very gentle, not aggressive, and she got trampled. Life trampled her.

AL: In what ways would you say?

SC: The parents, my grandparents – had children and they moved here from Malden so she came in grade school from Malden. And she went to —the name of the school just went through my mind. And the teachers gave her a really bad time.

AL and MG: Oh, aw.

SC: And she already knew how to divide and all that kind of stuff. But, she made her you know her symbols a little differently cause she still did the like this and her answers came down there.

AL: [Laughs].

SC: And they corre— they made everything wrong.

AL: Hmm.

SC: And she was getting all A's and B's and there was always a threat. "If you don't raise this C you will not graduate..."

AL: Oh my god.

SC: With a full diploma. They were on her case. She hated school. She came here already knowing astrology. I mean I have one of her schoolbooks and the things that she was learning in Malden were way advanced from the school that she ended up at.

AL: Wow.

SC: So she had a very hard time and she told my sister, "Don't bother going to high school, it won't do you any good."

AL: Oh my goodness.

SC: She finished in eighth grade. She didn't go to high school.

AL: Wow.

MG: [Sighs].

SC: Her sister before her and her sister afterward went to high school, but she was crushed in elementary school.

AL and MG: Wow, yeah.

AL: Okay and so did you live with just your mom?

SC: Abbott Street. Abbott Street.

AL: Abbott Street, okay.

SC: Abbott Street School it's called.

MG: Oh I've heard of that.

SC: In—in between Pleasant and Chandler. It still exists.

AL: Yeah, I think I've drove past it before [laughs].

MG: Yeah.

AL: Okay so did you just live with your mom or was your father living with you as well?

SC: He lived temporarily with us until what— my sister had started school, she started when was five, I started when I was four, so it was very brief time that he lived with us because we moved from his sister's house—it was the Great Depression and there was still you couldn't drink...

AL: Prohibition?

SC: Yeah Prohibition was still active. And his job as red capping, he got not tips, he didn't have enough resources, he was went military brought us to Worcester. Grandpa gave him and my mother a hunk of land.

AL: Oh my gosh.

SC: Yeah on the other side of, on the other side of Grafton Street. But I don't remember him living with us. I remember him coming and by the time I started school, he was gone.

AL: Hmm, did you ever see him after that again?

SC: Oh boy did I ever. Yeah I chased the man.

AL and MG: [Laughing].

SC: I just— I wanted to know where he was, yeah.

AL and MG: Yeah.

SC: So I knew his third wife and the son that he adopted from her. And I knew his fourth wife and I know those children. And I lived with him for a while in Germany.

AL: Oh wow, in Germany. What—why in Germany?

SC: Because there is still military.

AL and MG: Okay. Okay wow.

SC: He was stationed at the Seventh Army in Stuttgart.

AL: Wow.

SC: And he had felt badly about all the years that he hadn't been available so he invited me to come to Europe and he'd see to it that I got to Paris and to Rome. And I said okay!

AL and MG: Laugh together.

SC: I'm ready.

MG: That's a nice thing.

AL: Hard to turn down that offer.

MG: Yeah!

SC: Yeah, yeah.

AL: Okay, so are your parents still living?

SC: Heck no. My mother died in '77, he died the '80s, he outlived her.

AL: Oh, okay. And you said they had both had a couple of marriages. Was your mom married again after your father, [SC shaking her head no] okay so that was the second marriage?

SC: No she married Bill Perkins. So I have a Perkins sister.

AL: Oh okay.

SC: My oldest sister.

AL: And is that the sister you went to nursing school with?

SC: Nope.

AL: Nope.

MG: [Sighs].

AL: Nope, that's a different sister.

SC: We have the same—the sister I went to nursing school with, was we both have the same mother and the same father.

AL: Okay.

SC: All the other siblings we share one or other.

AL: Okay so what's her name, her first name?

SC: My sister—my mother's first daughter is Louise Perkins.

AL: Okay.

SC: But she's married to Cato.

AL: Okay so but your sister that you went to nursing school with?

SC: The one I grew up with was Audrey.

AL: Audrey, okay. Alright, so and then your brother too, was that a half sibling or?

SC: Half sibling.

AL: Half sibling.

SC: We have the same dad. He was born in Germany. He had to make the decision.

AL: Oh wow.

SC: Of what—what his passport would be.

AL: Wow. Okay. Okay so we talked a little about you growing up here in Worcester. So what kinds of things were you able to do as a child here? Other than going to school. Was there a lot of kids to play with or anything like that?

SC: Yeah, when we lived on Ellen Street our closet neighbors were the Millets, and then the Birtzs and in those days, it was really possible to play all day and get far away from your home and not be afraid.

AL: Yeah.

SC: And in the spring, we all—before grandpa Millet plowed his garden, all the kids in the neighborhood would build roads and bridges and everybody have a play car.

MG: [Laughs].

SC: And we did hide and seek and red robin. And we had apple green wars, oh my god.

AL: What's that?

MG: Yeah what's that?

SC: When the spring winds knocks down the apples early.

AL: Uh- huh.

SC: You pick up all the apples you could, you stuck them in your shirt or something and then you get behind something and you pitch them at people.

AL and MG: [Both laugh].

SC: And I couldn't throw for you know what.

AL and MG: Both laugh.

SC: As soon as I got up to throw something...

AL: Oh no!

SC: I'd get knots on my head. I'd leave and go play dolls with the girls on the porch. I was not good with football in the gang. And I was not good with pig pile.

AL: Laughs.

SC: Cause somebody said pig pile and jump on...

AL: Oh no!

MG: Yeah!

SC: If you're on the bottom, hot dang!

AL and MG: [Both laugh].

SC: A lot of skating, sliding.

AL and MG: Hmm hmm, yeah.

SC: Mark's Pond we skated all winter. I would—I'd stay on the pond until my laces froze and I couldn't take my skates off. I'd have to walk home in my skates.

AL: Oh my gosh, wow.

SC: We could get on our sleds and slide from the top of like Arcadia Street all the way down to Lake Ave. There weren't that many cars.

AL: No. Wow.

SC: Two kids on a sled [slaps hands together.]

MG: Ahh.

SC: A little ice!

AL: [Laughs] Oh my gosh. Wow. So...

SC: We had wars with the sleds too we had tried to bump each other off the track.

AL: So you would describe the neighborhood as fairly fun as a child? And happy?

SC: Yeah! [Shows enthusiasm].

AL: [Laughs].

SC: This was the early '30's, it was safe, it was fun. Yeah I always wanted a bicycle and I learned to ride a bike, a boy's bike, by riding it sideways.

AL: Wow.

SC: You put your leg—yeah I was smart. You put your leg under the boy bar thing.

AL: Ahhhhh [shows interest]!

SC: I always wanted one but I was like probably seventeen before my aunts in Boston through my father somehow gifted us with a bicycle. I was so thrilled.

AL and MG: Aw [Both laugh]!

SC: I went to nursing training at seventeen and I didn't get to ride it much. We sold it to the Gustafson girls [laughs].

AL: Oh my gosh, that's funny.

SC: Yeah, must've really had a bike then.

AL and MG: [Both laugh].

AL: Okay so you said you came to Worcester when you were about three.

SC: Yeah.

AL: And you said before that you were living with your dad's sister?

SC: Mhm,

AL: So...

SC: Actually they called her Sister.

AL: Oh really?

SC: Yeah her name was Eulidia or something like that but everybody called her Sister.

AL: Okay.

MG: Oh wow.

SC: And in Sharon, Massachusetts.

AL: Okay so what—do you know what made your parents decide to move out here?

SC: Yeah! The Great Depression.

AL: The Great Depression.

SC: No more tips as a red cap, no income, put all the house load goods in storage. Couldn't keep up the rent. Bootleggers lived on the—on the another apart of the floor we lived and they were getting raided all the time by the—by the narcs [narcotics officers].

AL: Wow.

SC: Yeah, so we moved to Sister's house in Sharon.

AL: So you said your dad was a red cap. What is that?

SC: Okay, back in the day, there used to be men in uniforms with kind of high red hat, I don't know who wears caps like that now. But they were Red Caps and they would carry your luggage for you.

AL and MG: Okay, aww.

SC: And you—you had a gratuity, a tip. It used to be dollar bills.

MG: Oh.

SC: And then it got to be for coins. He had a name for a quarter. And it got down to dime and then no tips at all because the Depression got so bad in the early 30s. So he was running around with people's luggage and getting nothing.

AL and MG: Oh yeah. Wow.

SC: He worked for the WPA [Works Project Administration 1935] for a while.

AL: What's that?

SC: Works Project, good 'Ol Roosevelt came in.

AL: Okay.

SC: Herbert Hoover's reign was over.

AL: Yup.

SC: And good ol' my president came in.

AL and MG: [Both laugh].

SC: Roosevelt and he started trying to get people jobs by the WPA— men did bridges and repaired things.

AL: Okay. Mhm, mhm.

SC: Works Project—WP—what'd the A stand for? Works Project— Administration.

AL: Okay. Mhm, mhm.

SC: The WPA, so he was out there logging and building and getting money.

AL: Yeah. Mhm. Did your—

SC: And he—that's when he joined the service. He was always in the service or active. That was a way to make money.

AL: Did your mom ever work at all?

SC: Oh yeah.

AL: [Laughs].

SC: Cottage industry. She made hairbrushes.

AL and MG: Ah.

SC: Out of pig bristles, there was a factory off of Main Street near Chandler Street where she got her supplies. She actually had a stand and tools and she'd take these bristles and put wire around them and put them on the back of an aluminum brush.

AL: Oh my gosh.

SC: Yeah, cottage industry. She worked for the WPA sewing.

AL: Okay.

SC: Then she ran elevators, cleaned offices, she didn't do childcare. My aunt Evvie did the childcare thing. But she ran an elevator just till the end of her days.

AL: Wow. So what exactly is running an elevator?

SC: It's working on Mechanic Street and bringing people upstairs to the businesses there or downstairs to the cellar where all the equipment was for air raids. One flight up and one flight down.

AL: Okay.

SC: For a vacation once and for family money I ran her elevator, oh my good boogely woogley!

AL and MG: [Both laugh].

SC: Boring!

MG: Oh no! Ugh!

SC: But she knew all the people. There was the radio station there too.

AL: Yeah.

SC: She knew the radio station people and she was very social in her job there.

MG: Oh, she must have liked it then yeah.

SC: She could handle it.

AL: Not your cup of tea? [Laughs].

SC: Oh no, that's when I made the decision to go into nursing training with my sister.

AL: Okay.

SC: I am not going to run an elevator all day. I did get licensed to run an elevator.

AL: Okay, oh wow you had to get a license and everything?

SC: Mhm, mhm.

AL: Oh wow. Okay so have you always—I know you said you grew up here physically but have you lived in Worcester since you come here at three?

SC: I got out of Worcester as soon as I could.

AL: [Laughs].

SC: It was not even a nice place for me to grow up. So at about how the heck old was I? It was early '20s they had this nursing program at Georgetown University Hospital.

MG: Wow.

SC: My father had then moved to Washington D.C. and I lived with him and his fourth wife temporarily until I got my own apartment then on 2727 P Street in Georgetown.

AL and MG: [Both Laugh] Oh wow.

SC: Worked with the Georgetown University Hospital...

AL: Wow.

SC: Got the heck out of Worcester, they had this wonderful earn and learn plan where you could get your degree in nursing by going to the Catholic University and then make sure your classes and your nursing assignments would blend together well. And I got this grant...

AL and MG: Oh wow.

SC: ...at Catholic University.

AL: Wow. Oh my gosh.

MG: That's awesome.

SC: And the nursing arts people said, "We don't accept colored students, you all have to go to Maryland."

AL: Oh gosh.

SC: Catholic University would not accept black students in the 50s.

AL: Wow.

SC: And for me to go to Maryland and then work the job it was not possible.

MG: Yeah.

SC: So my dreams were dashed. [Slams hands together in a fist].

AL: My gosh.

SC: It was like I wanted my degree in nursing! Never happened.

AL: So what did you do?

SC: You don't want to know.

AL and MG: [Both laugh]

SC: Besides the – this word crushed keeps coming up, it just sort of like... it—it—it made me so... I guess you could say despondent that this was my plan (claps hands together) and this was my goal (claps hands together) and I—I was touted. It was like—so I met this handsome soldier...

AL and MG: [Both laugh].

SC: Who my father introduced me to him! And believe it or not, Oscar Dilahan Carter, six foot three, brilliant, ambitious, was just like my father.

AL and MG: Awe.

SC: He had ended up marrying four times and you know left me after two years. It was like I married my father.

AL and MG: Wow.

AL: So did you ever get the nursing degree or—?

SC: Never.

AL: Never. Okay.

SC: Worcester State College [said] I had too many advanced degrees they wouldn't let me in their program. I'd have to commute to Amherst or to Fitchburg, so all my degrees are in Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts, Doctorate in Education, Instructional Leadership.

AL: Wow, so what are all the other degrees in? Like what subject?

SC: Master of Arts, Bachelor of Arts—Education.

AL: Like, oh – Education. Okay.

SC: We actually got recruited to go to Assumption College...

AL: Really?

SC: Uh huh. They had a really good recruiter, how could I ever forget his name? Because the Worcester City Hospital required that you get all your sciences at college so for our six month training where they call your probe we were getting on a bus everyday taking anatomy, physiology, microbiology, sociology, physical education, it seems like there was something else required.

AL and MG: [Both laugh].

SC: But this recruiter from Assumption, because we had college credits from Worcester State, which was just a college then, said that we could start school at Assumption—no women were allowed to go to Assumption—at ...

AL and MG: Yeah, right—right. We were just—

SC: ... the Saint Augustine Institute with all these credits that we learned in nursing. And Paul Ryan was his name. He got a bunch of us especially city grads [Worcester City Hospital] I think maybe Saint V's [Saint Vincent's Hospital] nurses did some college but all our sciences were earned at Worcester State. So with like I don't know 60 advanced credits, I think you needed 120 or something. I bit. I went for it. Yeah.

AL: So—

SC: Then we discovered actually in the bachelor's [degree] we needed to do an oral defense and a senior paper, yeah. And yeah then they opened up the day school to women.

AL: Right—right.

SC: And one of my advisors who I think he was an English professor, he was a nice guy. He said, "You're still taking courses," because I got the 120 [credits] I got the Bachelor of Arts, and my major was Education. He said – I didn't want to take crafts— I didn't want to take anything that was like required. I was through with required courses. I had something like 15 credits. He's like, "You're halfway to your Master's."

MG: Wow.

SC: Why don't you just—

AL and MG: Yeah, go for it might as well!

SC: I was like really? Only 30? That's all I need is 30?

AL and MG: [Both laughing].

SC: Working full time, raising children, I continued and got my Master's and then I did my practice teaching and I was certified for elementary and secondary.

AL: Wow. Okay so let me just make sure I got the timeline straight here.

SC: [Laughing].

AL: So you too—you did take nursing classes at Worcester State?

SC: It was required.

AL: It was required for Education?

SC: No for nursing.

AL: So—

SC: For your nursing background you had to be good in anatomy and physiology and in sociology.

AL: Right.

SC: And microbiology and yeah—

AL: So did you practice as a nurse as well?

SC: I was working 11 to seven, as a nurse praying for my patients not to die in the night because it was a long procedure...

AL and MG: [Both laugh].

SC: Getting ready for the morning, running across the street, putting—taking off my uniform, putting on my street clothes, getting on the bus, riding to Worcester State. I was sitting in my chemistry class nodding off because I had worked all night.

MG: Ugh.

AL: Oh wow.

SC: And the—the chemistry teacher was another sweet one. I've—I've had...

MG: [Laughing].

SC: Good luck because he never said a thing about me nodding off and the textbook was identical to the one we had in classical high school.

MG: Yeah.

SC: I LOVED chemistry.

AL: [Laughs] You sound like me!

SC: I loved chemistry.

MG: That's her (Pointing to Lexi)!

SC: We—we raised chickens and I the one who liked to eviscerate them. I knew where the lungs were, I was—

MG: Oh my gosh.

SC: I was into it.

AL: Okay. So—so you were already practicing as a nurse before you even took the required courses?

SC: Simultaneously.

AL: Wow. Okay. So what did you need for training to be able to practice since you didn't have—since you hadn't finished all those classes?

SC: You did what they called nursing arts skills you know, how to make beds and not only give somebody a bed pan but to do morning care, evening care, back rubs. We did testing for urine; we had benedict solution in—in test tubes.

AL: Uh- huh. [Laughs].

SC: We put drops in and cooked them.

AL: Oh my gosh, yup. Good ol' benedicts.

SC and AL: [Laugh together].

SC: We actually made a flax seed poultices to put on boils. You mix flaxseed and I think it was baking soda and put them inside these mesh things to put on wounds. And we—we were responsible...

AL: Yeah.

SC: ...for our whole unit when you were on at night. There was a wonderful orderly who would come by and give us some awful tasting coffee.

AL and MG: [Both laugh].

SC: Sandwiches sometimes made out of spaghetti whatever was left over.

AL and MG: Oh my gosh. [Both laughing].

SC: Yeah. We—we did the formula room. We made formulas and the autoclave. We did nutrition we packed those vans for food. We were hired help. We actually got a stipend.

AL: Wow.

SC: 90 bucks a month they took 60 out for maintenance, you got 30 dollars cash enveloped down to city hall. We brought an envelope with cash it in. 30 bucks.

AL: Oh my gosh, 30 dolla—

SC: A month.

AL: So was—was that a good rate?

SC: You could buy stockings, you know, because you had to wear you know white stockings it was enough to buy stockings.

MG: Wow.

SC: Because my sister and I went in together, we gave my mother one check and between her and I we split it so we had 15 bucks. A month.

AL: Wow okay. So did you and your sister live together while you were still going to school?

SC: Did we live together while going to school?

AL: Mhm.

SC: We lived together until we went to Thayer Hall. We were told by the first nursing director [Worcester City hospital] that if we came in together, they wouldn't lose a paying student because the other nurses probably wouldn't like to room with us. So since we were coming in together they you didn't have to worry about losing one of their students. They had a few Jews, but they had never had black students in the school nursing. Since 1800 something, this good, prestigious school of nursing admitted men, admitted a lot of male nurses, excellent school of nursing.

AL: Oh my goodness.

SC: So the interesting thing about Thayer Hall when we were accepted everybody had their private room.

AL: Wow.

SC: This was the first time they had showers, water, food.

AL: That's Thayer Hall?

SC: Thayer Hall.

AL: T-H-A-Y-E-R?

SC: T-H-A-Y-E-R. Thayer Hall. So that's where we lived for three years...

AL: Wow.

SC: In the dorm.

AL: Okay so you got your nursing—you did other nursing classes there?

SC: They called them nursing arts yeah all the skills, the hands on skills of—of body care that doesn't happen anymore. You go to a hospital nobody gives you a basin to wash your face, nobody ever rubs your back, or...

AL: Right

SC: We—we did bed side nursing.

AL: Wow.

SC: Yeah, you did the med's you did the—you did all the like I was talking about the insulin—I mean the diabetic testing. And if you had to give insulin, we boiled all our syringes and you had to match them by number sterilely cause you had a barrel and a thing to put your plunger in. I worked in the central sterilizer room because you rotated...

AL: Right.

SC: Through the hospital I took the burrees off of the needles in the central sterilizing room...

AL: Oh my god.

SC: I took ether to take the sticky stuff that left by adhesive tape somebody left on the Bardex tubing. You'd have to take ether to clean those off before they were autoclaved I made Novocain and had to make sure that it didn't bubble cause you had this glass flask and if it bubbled, it was useless. So—I was 17, 18 years old went down to the central sterilizing room.

MG: Oh wow.

AL: Well we made Novocain in my organic chemistry lab; I was 20 years old and would never be allowed to touch a medication in a hospital so wow. That's really amazing. Okay wow. So—let's see we talked a lot so I have to make sure I don't repeat myself here. [Everyone laughs] okay so getting back to Worcester a little bit, what challenges do you think the city still faces today?

SC: Racism. It's still alive and well. I can go to a CEU—Continuing Education thing and you always you know get credit for them, you have to defend your license by continuing education and I'll go out after the program to fill out my thing and they hand me the LPN [Licensed Practical Nurse] sheet. I'm RN [Registered Nurse]. But that's never assumed on site.

AL: Right.

SC: That I'm a Registered Nurse. It touches everything in your life including being accepted to the nursing school, few Jews. But my nursing arts instructor after that six months called my sister and I in, she wanted to apologize to us.

AL: Wow.

SC: What is she apologizing to us for? You know, we called her “mama.”

AL and MG: [Giggle].

SC: Because she was the epitome of Florence Nightingale in terms of a nursing person who we dedicated our yearbook to.

AL: Oh my gosh.

SC: And she called us in to apologize because she voted no to let us be admitted to the school.

AL: Wow.

SC: And I—I didn't know the whole faculty had to vote whether or not to admit us.

MG: Yeah.

AL: Oh my gosh.

SC: And she thought, really feared it would degrade the uniform to put it on a black person. I got physically ill. I wanted to puke. And I sat there and I sweat. And I just oh well you know they—they—voted at city hall it was okay because they voted at city hall to admit you but they checked with the faculty to see if it was alright. And then they—they took a vote to the student body. They all voted yes, let them in.

AL and MG: Wow, wow.

SC: Yeah, the women and men that I met in the Worcester City Hospital School of Nursing between 1949 and 1952 I'm still in touch with. We're allies, we're buddies. When I went to Germany with my father's enticement...

AL: Yeah! [Giggles].

SC: My mother broke down. How can you do this to me? You know what he was like. He left us, da—da—da. She just —she had meltdown. And she was needy at that particular time. My classmates – Ginny, Eloise, Madeline said, “Oh we know your mom. We know your mom. Every Friday fish and chips.” There were certain things that we did for her to keep her be a happy woman who just wore this mantle of sadness.

AL and MG: Awe.

SC: And they said, “We will go every week to your house and spend time with her and we will bring her fish and chips.” They did that for six months.

AL and MG: Wow, awww.

SC: My classmates.

AL: That's amazing.

MG: So sweet.

SC: Madeline is the only one who's dead. We were just out visiting Ginny Sullivan Monest. I'm still in touch with those gals. And guys. The guys have died too. I know Makenna died, and the other two in our class are both dead.

AL and MG: Wow.

SC: Yeah.

AL: Okay so one question I guess I have is so are—do you have the education degrees in nursing like did you teach nursing or? —

SC: Can't.

AL: No. Just Elementary.

SC: If you didn't have your degree in nursing, you can't teach nursing. No, I could instruct aides. Nowadays aides do the bedside care.

AL and MG: Yeah, oh yeah.

SC: But no just about when maybe the early 80's the state mandated that all...

MG: [Coughs].

SC: ...children in Worcester had to have a health education course and you had to teach about nutrition and drugs and the phys ed teachers got stuck teaching it and they hated it. Cause they have to run up from the gym to the classroom. They were showing *Reefer Madness* as one of the [movies] for the curriculum. And I'm trying to think of the other dang thing they were showing. They showed about two films and that was the health education course.

AL: Wow. Oh my gosh. [Giggles].

SC: So, they recruited RNs because we could say sex out loud and penis out loud.

AL: Oh my gosh. [Shocking voice].

SC: Yeah! [Giggles] Cause you had to teach about sex education, you couldn't say the word in class but we had to cover sex education and nutrition and drugs. And that *Reefer Madness* movie

was crap!

AL: [Chuckles].

SC: I mean—it—it wasn't based on facts at all so there was a budget because it was a new thing and because we had been recruited at Assumption College I had my degrees. I could teach elementary or high school and I was still working 11 to seven at Worcester State Hospital...

AL: Oh no!

SC: Where they were recruiting and I thought I'd like to try it.

AL: Yeah.

SC: You know in my nursing arts—the supervisor of nurses at Worcester State Hospital Cathleen Coutou said, “Oh Shirley, I've always wanted to teach. This is a great opportunity I will write you any recommendation you want...”

AL: Wow.

SC: ...why don't you do it?” And she just like tempted me.

AL: Yeah.

SC: So I worked something like a two week you know—pra—pra—you know professional goodbye letter. And started I think I was finishing the 11 to seven when they did the orientation and I was the health and safety teacher at Worcester East Elementary School.

AL and MG: Oh my goodness.

SC: I worked for the public schools for 13 years.

AL and MG: Wow.

SC: Teaching salud y seguridad. Health and safety.

AL: Wow.

SC: Loved it.

AL: Yeah?

SC: It was so refreshing. Everybody was well—most everybody was well. Snow days it took at

least a year before my children say, “Maaaa, there’s no school,” because I’m out shoveling because...

MG: [Laughs].

SC: Nursing there’s no such thing as a weekend.

AL: Oh right.

SC: Or no such thing as a snow day. And that I was so into it they’d have to haul me in from out doing shoveling.

AL and MG: Oh my gosh.

AL: That’s so funny. So just a couple more Worcester questions. What do you think women’s experiences in Worcester have been generally?

SC: Women in Worcester. You’re talking to an old women okay? My third grade teacher Dora Yoffee— fell in love with her—she helped me understand that I really did have a brain— because first and second grade we had all kinds of substitutes. I didn’t know what in sam hill what we were doing. Lucktivia first and second grade what? Third grade Dora Ypffee she invited us to her wedding.

MG: Oh my gosh.

SC: Then she lost her job.

AL and MG: [Gasp].

SC: Females who taught could not teach after they got married.

MG: What...?

SC: So you want to know what it was like for women in Worcester, in the 30s?

MG: Wow.

SC: And 40s?

AL: Wow.

SC: That was the end of Dora Yoffee. I grieved losing my third grade teacher.

MG: Awe.

SC: Yeah.

AL: Wow.

SC: Yeah.

AL: So what kinds of jobs were there to do once you were married?

SC: [Chuckles a little] There was— there was a second— as a women you were not the second income. You could go into nursing, you could be a secretary, you could be a school teacher as long as you you didn't get married. All school teachers were marms, school teacher was a marm. They were all old mai—

AL: What's a marm?

SC: It's an old maid.

AL: Oh.

SC: A marm. Yeah, so that's what was open to you. You could be a good wife.

MG: Wow.

AL: Yup.

SC: You could go into the nunnery. Some of my classmates went into the nunery.

AL: Wow.

SC: Genine Ulogy, never expect she'd be a nun. By junior high she ended up being a red-headed fiesty nun.

AL and MG: [Laughing].

AL: Oh my gosh wow that's funny. Wow okay so I think we did most of the education stuff so do you want to cover some of the work?

MG: Yeah sure! Yeah so since we covered a lot of the education we're going to now move on to like the work category. So what was your very first job? Like what age did you start working?

SC: About 10 or 12 I guess.

AL and MG: Ahh.

SC: So my first job was hawking, selling things that my grandmother and my aunt and my mother made. They crocheted lace on the edges of handkerchiefs. I got one in my pocket [reaches in her pant pocket]. They made stuffed—you'd buy these patterns of these animals and you'd stuff em.

AL and MG: Aww, oh my gosh.

SC: They made doilies that people put under lamps.

MG: My great grandma does—yeah.

SC: They starched them and they had these big ruffles. I loved selling things.

MG: Yeah.

SC: My sister was mortified by knocking on doors...

MG: [Laughs].

SC: Trying to address to somebody. What color lace would you like?

AL and MG: [Both laugh].

SC: I would go back and you know do the special orders and then I also hawked— I sold eggs because remember I raised chickens?

MG: Yup, wow.

SC: And I had some of these—these aren't fancy ones [talking about the handkerchief in her pocket].

MG: [Laughs].

SC: I still use these with the lace on then. And my aunt crocheted like The Last Supper, she would crochet a whole panel with figures and they were just very talented women. I didn't inherit that.

MG: [Chuckles].

SC: But selling eggs, oh, we had good laying hens and sometimes I'd get double yolk eggs.

AL and MG: Oh wow.

SC: I think I used to get a dollar a dozen.

MG: [Gasps].

SC: I mean in the 30s and 40s that was...

MG: That's a lot.

SC: Yeah so I'd love—I'd have regular customers. And I knew you could tell when you had jumbo eggs, that they were yolks, that they were twin chicks.

MG: Oh my gosh.

SC: Yeah.

MG: Well it seems like you've had a lot of experience working.

SC: Well, I think if you wanted to work commercially if you weren't doing cottage industry or selling stuff that you made, you had to go through the department and get a work permit. And I think I got my work permit when I was 13. And then I helped clean houses. I washed dishes at the Esska Cafeteria. I cleaned chemical labs. My sister and I worked for the only black dentist in town, Dr. Marshall. We cleaned his office, sterilized his tools. I worked at the Victory Beauty Salon, I was a girl Friday, I made the soap. You'd take it solid and take a ball of it and put it in the gallon jug. And I watched, I babysat her daughter Penny while she moved—while she was in school. I washed the furniture down. I had a magnet to take hairpins out. I would go down to David's Delicatessen. They were there for hours under the machine. And I'd buy them hot pastrami sandwiches and they'd tip me.

MG: Oh those are good!

AL and MG: Mhmmm.

SC: Yeah David's Delicatessen it was right on Main Street. Best hot pastrami sandwiches in the world. But I'd get tips for that. And then I got my elevator license. I ran the elevator at 306 Main Street. And it was a hydraulic, which meant it was run by water. The water would push you up and it was the lever you had to make it level off the floor. I was so proud.

AL and MG: [Chuckling].

SC: It could bounce a lot, but not too much bounce you know. Yeah, that's what I did. I cleaned

some houses, I opened up some houses for teachers, you'd take— I went out to their summerhouses and cleaned acorns and stuff out and uncovered furniture, that kind of stuff. And yeah any job possible.

MG: Yeah I was going to say that!

AL: Right.

MG: So based on your experience from working when you were younger, do you— what do you do now?

SC: I'm retired.

MG: Oh that's good!

SC: [Laughing]!

SC: But I did teaching for 13 years in Worcester public schools and then I taught at Springfield College because my doctorate was in instructional leadership I taught health teachers.

MG: Oh!

SC: And I worked UMass [University Of Massachusetts Hospital, Worcester] I would moonlight and work summers because that was the beauty of teaching schools, so I could work all summer. So I worked on five West, Pediatric Mental Health, I worked eight East Adult Mental Health, I worked for agencies, I worked a short time at TeachACore— no not TeachACore. Yeah, I did nursing and teaching simultaneously. And then even when I was working in Springfield I was another girl Friday one night a week at UMass because the teaching salary was like a pittance and I was a professor, an assistant professor at Springfield College and it was like thousands of dollars difference.

AL: Crazy!

MG: Wow!

SC: Yeah, but I love teaching health teachers and getting placements for them and stuff like that. I like that job, so I hung in but I would supplement it by working UMass.

MG: The hospital?

SC: Yeah.

MG: Wow. So you talk a lot about like nursing and in your experience with the different jobs

you've had and with your experience how did you become like passionate about like, you know that career and like nursing and education?

SC: Well, besides the, again, community of classmates, which was a draw, we supported each other. The mantra in nursing school was “the door swings both ways.”

All: [Laughing].

SC: They were— well harsh and exacting you could not— we ended up— I think 33 of us graduated, but they weeded us out in the first six months because things had to be exact and precise and you had to know your procedures you had to be able to fill in. Yeah like again, we worked CSR [the central sterilizing room], we worked cystoscopy, a specialized unit, we had to relieve in the emergency room we were assistants in the OR [operating room], in surgery you were a scrub nurse, you had to know your instruments by heart, it was exacting, okay. Best training in the world at [Worcester] City Hospital.

MG: Oh!

SC: Best school, you know many of the graduates went into the military and were generals for crying out loud.

MG: Yeah!

SC: Yeah so, what was your question?

All: [Laughing].

MG: Oh mine? Mine was what made you do this work?

SC: Passion!

MG: Yeah to do nursing.

SC: My head was in medicine, I really wanted to be an ophthalmologist. Eyes fascinated me. About 18, I donated my eyes to the Boston [Massachusetts] Eye Bank because they can use the cornea— your eyes can be reused. And I was just inspired by some person or patient at 17 who had done that. So I think by the time I was 18 I had donated my eyes to the Boston Eye Bank. And again that satisfaction that you get for helping someone. I actually wrote a memoir. And I wrote about what it was like for me— and I was probably about 18 or 19 by then—sitting with a patient who had a very toxic pregnancy. And they wanted to get her to deliver because the toxicity was so extreme. And they discovered the baby was hydrocephalic— it had a huge, watery brain and she could not deliver it vaginally and I sat with this woman. I got permission to go over my assigned time to stay with her because she was having such a difficult time and I had

kind of bonded with her.

MG: Yeah.

SC: And so they decided that they would do a trocar cannula... you're going into medicine?
[Points to AL].

AL: Yup!

SC: They would puncture the baby's skull so they could just pull it out vaginally, but they did that and she still couldn't deliver it.

MG: Even when they punctured it?

SC: Yup Pitocin and everything. She could not deliver that child. So they decided on an emergency C-section. So I had to get permission to sit up in the amphitheater for the C-section. They said the baby was dead and I said no, I could hear the baby's fetal heart. And I could monitor the mom's pulse and respiration. It was very different from the thump from the baby. And you know I'm a student nurse and the obstetrician, "No, you're not getting the fetal heart that's the suffle; no that's the mother." No I could hear the fetal heart so I stayed up there in the amphitheater and they took— baby's name was Danny and they pulled him out by his legs and threw him on the lap— you know for the specimen table and he rolled over and yelled.

MG: Oh my gosh and you were probably like...

SC: Yes I was!

MG: Oh my gosh!

SC: I was sitting up there in the amphitheater saying, "Yeah I told you— I told you there was a fetal heart," and they had to rush, someone had to come down from the nursery... and blah blah blah.

MG: Yeah!

SC: Yeah so what got me passionate? The skills, the ability to help people, to know what a difference you've made. I worked in Maine. I lived in Maine that short three years I was married. And I worked at the Maine Medical Center and I can remember requesting to stay on duty and calling my husband to stay on duty because there was a patient my age who— a young man— he had congestive heart failure—no not congestive heart failure he had— what's the disease you get— rheumatic fever. He had a rheumatic heart that filled his whole chest but there was no muscle to it. No relative came to visit him. He was expiring and he said, "Will you stay with me?" and I said, "yYes." I sat there in the chair and held his hand. And he talked to me about

how he couldn't feel his legs but he could still squeeze my hand. And I know it got to the point where he could still hear me and I didn't leave until he had no vital signs.

MG: Wow!

SC: What makes me passionate? Being able to do those things, be with people, and make a difference in people's lives and to use the skills you were taught, and see how well they work.

AL: I can relate to these things [laughter].

MG: I know, I wish I could, I'm human services, but still I like helping people.

SC: Yeah it's a good feeling. Yeah [laughter], you can tell you can make a difference.

MG: Yeah it's a good feeling to know you helped someone else too. So another question on this list is what were or are your primary responsibilities in terms of housework and childcare? Like when you were younger and growing up. Were there any rules or responsibilities?

SC: Yeah we had all kinds of responsibilities as young people. You know in the house on Ellen Street where they didn't run up the water or lights, you had to carry buckets of drinking water from our neighbors and Mark Hayes' pond— we melted snow for water because we didn't have any. I actually learned how to wire the house when we got electricity. I was very proud because it was a two-way switch. We learned how to lay hardwood floors— they were out of shape so you had to moisten them and bend them— they were tongue and groove. We had the outhouse you had to move it— it would fill up and we had no service so you had to move it. You'd dig a six feet hole move the outhouse around it put in the new position.

MG: Oh my gosh!

SC: Yeah.

MG: That's like... a lot!

SC: Yeah this is when we were very young. And then again once you got your working card at 13 you tried to earn money for the house. I never kept money that I earned until I moved out to Georgetown [Washington, D.C.] and had my own apartment.

MG: What age did you move out? To Georgetown?

SC: I was probably 24 when I got out of town. I was done with Worcester.

MG: Yeah, yeah I know you were saying that. And then did you have any chores to do with your siblings, did you say?

SC: I only grew up with one sister.

MG: Yeah okay perfect.

SC: We had the same two parents, we're tight.

ALL: [Laughter].

MG: How old is she?

SC: Were Irish twins, there's 11 months between us.

AL and MG: Oh!

SC: Every year for a month, we are the same age, but they still call us the twins 'cause my mother used to dress us alike.

AL: Uh-huh.

MG: Aw that's cute!

SC: It was fun!

MG: Oh my gosh! And then— another question is how has this changed over time like the responsibilities like now, I would you say?

SC: I don't see a change. I can tell you I'm less picky now I used to go through closets and do spring cleaning and fall cleaning. I don't do that anymore. I think now you could call me a clutter woman. I'm writing a book over here [points], I'm arranging for the last reunion of the Worcester City Hospital School of Nursing.

MG: Oh wow!

SC: Getting in touch with classmates. I'm doing genealogy and getting a package from my cousin because I've got letters from the 1800s between siblings. I found an old letter that somebody mentions her [SC's mother] in. I was a snowbird from 2010-2015, I lived with my daughter in Austin, Texas— my youngest daughter, because we were going to sell this house and downsize. And got it on the market and the market was lousy. The property is worth more than the house.

AL: Mhmm.

MG: Wow!

SC: Mickedon Ralph built this house and the house next door, he was waked in this living room.

MG: Oh my gosh!

SC: So this is a good old sturdy house.

AL and MG: Yeah.

MG: Looks good!

SC: But there's no heat upstairs, it's not designed to have heat and there's a lot of chain lights, you know a lot—it's a vintage house.

AL and MG: Yeah [laughter]!

SC: The plan was when I first hit my 80s, was to get grandma kind of relocated to Austin.

AL: Mhmm.

[Phone rings].

SC: And I got a person to live in the house— you don't leave the house empty in New England or anywhere— so I had house mates all the way up until about 2015.

MG: Oh wow!

SC: Yeah, so Inez [housemate] and I would be here in the summer. And I would rotate. I'd come up after Memorial Day and go down after Thanksgiving and now all my stuff is back here because I literally can't...

[Answering machine playing message being recorded].

SC: That's Stacey [about message] .

ALL: [Laughter].

SC: I'll betcha—so I haven't found spaces for everything. But I was the person who, when they tore down my grandmother's house, the bulldozer was knocking over and I was out there picking up letters and books.

AL and MG: Wow!

SC: Yeah my grandmother she—

MG: She had a lot?

SC: She had a lot. So I have all the letters between her and her brothers and sisters. I knew my grandmother's brothers and sisters. My uncle George lived to be 104. That was her oldest brother.

MG: Aw good for him!

SC: I had a child in my arms at his [SC's uncle] funeral. So photographs— I mean then when my mother died, my aunt moved into the house that we grew up in on 12 Ellen Street and when she died, I went up there. So I had boxes. This was the beginning of my collection of stuff.

AL and MG: [Laughter] yeah!

SC: There was one box that I gave to my daughter because I hadn't gone through it and there were love letters between my mother and father.

MG: Aww!

SC: I had no idea they were that much in love. She [SC's daughter] said, "Who is DD?" "Your grandma, your grandpa called her Dotty Dimples." She said, "Who is HAB?" "That's your grandfather Herbert Aaron Barrow." She says, "Ma, you should read these letters, they're hot!"

AL and MG: [Laughter]!

AL: Oh my gosh, wow!

MG: That's cool to look back on you know!

AL: Yeah that you still have them!

MG: Yeah!

SC: Yeah, yeah I have stuff from the 1800s.

AL: That's the good kind of stuff though.

MG: Yeah!

SC: Well I have this anxiety about it. I've been working with Smith College— you know what's

going to happen to that stuff when I die [pause].

AL and MG: No!

SC: Trashed, it'll all be trashed. That's what they did with my aunt at the Cape. That's what they were doing with my grandmother's house, that stuff got trashed. I have magazines—old magazines from— ugh, yeah.

AL and MG: [Laughter].

SC: This is— this is an anxiety that I have, that the things that I have won't have any value so I wanted Smith College to kind of take them.

[Showing us old magazines].

AL and MG: Wow, oh my gosh!

SC: There are forms you have to sign, release forms. My granddaughter knows that you can make copies of these things and then you can make pocketbooks and different things from them.

AL and MG: Wow

SC: And she's [SC's granddaughter] a good, what do you call it, an entrepreneur but she lives in Austin, Texas ok and she's got the daughter and she's in business for herself.

[Wowing over magazines] .

AL: Do you mind if I take a picture of this?

SC: Not at all. I've got gobs of them. I've got my grandfather's— my grandfather could predict the pelt on animals he was a... very talented man and I had all his notes on how he could get his pets ready for showing and reproduce the color on their pelt.

MG: Now 15 cents! [Referring to magazine].

AL: Wow!

SC: Anyhow, I'm collecting stuff for Smith College. But they have this challenging kind of protocol, again, a lot of things you have to sign and they were supposed to come down and look at stuff. Well we never got a date and they never came down so I've got stuff for, you know, all kinds of stuff.

AL: Oh wow!

MG: God wow. Cape Cod?

SC: [Shows scenic picture].

SC: Yeah, this...

MG Oh wow, good vacation spot!

SC: This is going to be a challenge because I know even when my daughters—I love them—were downsizing to sell the house... dumpster, trash. I have this little French bicycle, that you'd fold up and put in your car or put in a little sack on your back I loved my little green French bicycle, I saw it go into the dumpster. I wept over some of the things I saw go when we were downsizing because— yeah I didn't ride it much but, you know. When I was younger and a camper you'd throw it in the trunk of your car and...

AL: Okay so maybe we'll go onto the, the politics and community—

MG: Yeah, yeah.

AL: Community involvement section. Okay so would you consider yourself a politically active person?

SC: Yes.

AL: Yes?

SC: Of course who isn't [laughs]? Who should be, yeah, everybody should be involved.

AL: So what ways, in Worcester, have you been politically involved or active in the community?

SC: I worked at community center— when they still had a community center on Clayton Street. I, you know, modern things I dis. I what do you call it for Elizabeth Warren...

AL and MG: Oh!

SC: ... I did all the phone calls and for Barrack Obama, I did the phone calls. I do the voting thing— I'm an inspector, I work the polls— I write nasty letters, informative letters to presidents I'm on the list I'm sure somewhere.

AL and MG: [Laughing].

SC: Yeah, I was in Texas— when Wendy Davis [Democratic politician who filibustered for 11

hours to stall an anti-abortion bill] did her thing. She was amazing. She actually wore a full catheter so she could stay and filibuster.

AL: Oh my gosh, wow!

SC: All night long, and I was there supporting her. Yeah I haven't ever done any kind of marches. I don't know, I don't get my butt there for some reason or another, but other than that yeah.

AL: And then what role has religion played in your life?

SC: Hook, line, and sinker. I had to grow up— when did I start challenging religion? I had to be almost a grown woman before I didn't just believe everything. As a little person, things were hard, God was my father, and Jesus was my brother, I could withstand anything. And I did withstand anything. So as a small person my religion was like the glue. I taught Sunday school, I was a Eucharistic minister, I was a lay reader, I worked the creche [church's baby scene], I taught Sunday school— hook, line, and sinker.

AL and MG: [Laughing]

SC: And then I think I read a *City Lit Only by Fire*? And it kind of gave all the politics behind religion and I was like momma mia! I was catechized, literally. You know what I mean?

AL and MG: Yeah.

SC: And very often the Episcopal Church doesn't have early services so the three years of nurse's training I went to the Catholic mass with my classmates because they were early enough that we could go to mass. I love the Latin mass.

AL: Yeah.

MG: Aww!

SC: I love the music— so hook, line, and sinker— it was just really a stabilizing force in my young life. Sort of an anchor. Made me a very rigid person. And I'm glad I read the book about how politically religion has been misused and it's like, "Oh Shirley, come on!"

AL and MG: [Laughing].

SC: This is useful—faith I think is very useful. Both my daughters were brought up in the Episcopal Church— one's an agnostic and the other one is an atheist, but they challenged things. You couldn't sing in the choir, only men. You couldn't serve in the vestry [Bishop's committee for Episcopalian Church], only men. I put up with that crap, you know.

AL and MG: Yeah!

SC: But I'm still very active in my parish. It's the community. I've known three generations of people who have gone to St. Matt's, you know?

AL and MG: Yeah!

SC: They're very English, it's changed a lot, its changed a lot. But the tradition and the music...

AL: Still alive?

SC: Yeah.

AL: Yeah.

SC: I mean it!

AL: Yeah!

MG: That's awesome!

MG: So now were going to talk a little bit— we have a few questions on health related questions so how has health issues impacted your life or those in your family?

SC: Hmm, this is tragic as people of the global majority— people of color— African heritage, whatever. Poverty with racism has caused early death in my relatives. Cousins, that lived on the other side of town that I— that were my dates. My mother had said— my mother and grandmother— if you live over there on the east side and run with your cousins you'll be dead. Or you'll go to jail. I was like— and it's like no. Like common. Every Hampton cousin that I cherished is dead. All of them. Every Hampton. Everyone I hung with adored and dated. They are, they're dead. One went to jail. Donny [Hampton, SC's cousin] he was selling drugs and he started using, took an uncut dose, couldn't breath, stopped breathing, walked right through a screen door and dropped dead in his backyard. Diabetes and high blood pressure runs in my family. Cancer runs in my family. Both grandparents had diabetes, a couple of my nieces, my sister, my Boston sister they're diabetics. Hypertension runs. And you know the health safety teacher, I lived what I taught I don't have high blood pressure, I don't have diabetes.

AL and MG: [Laughter].

MG: Good for you!

SC: I didn't want to be fat and 40 and push my adrenal gland. I didn't want to have diabetes. I

wanted to practice what I preach. But cancer, my father had colon cancer. My mother had breast cancer that metastasized— she didn't know she still had ovaries— I mean she didn't know she still had ovaries because they did a hysterectomy, but she got metastasis to her ovaries and that took her out in 1977. She didn't reach her— she was close to her birthday. Yeah she was born in 1903 and she died in 1977 so she didn't quite make 75 but she had a birthday coming up in October. You know how children are, my oldest daughter— Fairlawn was a regular hospital then, it wasn't a rehab— She was in the room and I'm outside the door and I hear my oldest daughter saying, "Grammy if you don't make it to your 75th birthday, can we celebrate it anyhow?"

MG: Aww!

SC: And I'm like, "I'm not going to walk in there," and my mother says, "Sure." So she— my daughter pulls out— who should we invite— sat there and got all the addresses of my Leominster [Massachusetts] relatives and we celebrated her grandmother's, my mother's birthday posthumously and all the relatives came to St. Matthew's Church.

MG: Oh my gosh!

AL: Wow!

MG: Wow!

AL: That's really special!

MG: That really is!

SC: My relatives remember it because I was on the Cape visiting them. And I had put up a sheet and I didn't even know half these people— you know my daughter had addresses to— so there was the Leominster [Massachusetts] branch, and the Cape Cod branch, and the Boston branch. And I did research and I put all this stuff on the sheet and I brought it to the celebration so we could all figure it out and see, "Oh you're Sarah's [for example] child."

MG: Oh, that's cool!

SC: I still have that sheet, I brought it down to the Cape Cod picnic that the cousins had, and everyone said, "Oh I remember that from your mother's wake."

MG: Something else is, what are experiences in accessing quality and affordable healthcare?

SC: I've been blessed with my jobs— I had health benefits from any job. I grew up with a family doctor, Dr. Gibbons, and he was a family practitioner. When my children were growing up it was Dr. Robert Anderson, he was our family practitioner. Before Fallon [Insurance] turned to what it

is now, Fallon was my HMO. And always had a good practitioner I have one now that I adore John Plat. So I've been very lucky with good health care providers.

MG: Awesome!

SC: And I'm a baby, I don't tolerate pain. If something bothers me, I call Dr. Plat and say, "Dr. Plat I have this..." I tore my cartilage in my knee in Sicily [Italy]. And he usually has Wednesdays off and he said "Shirley come in tomorrow on Wednesday and we'll get that looked at."

MG: Oh my gosh, so it seems like your close with him too. Yeah, that's great.

AL: Ok then, just some last few questions. A little bit more about just you and your feelings so how do you get through tough times? And what kinds of thoughts get you through? You talked about your religion a little bit but do you think that pretty much sums it up? The religion?

SC: No .

AL: No?

SC: No [laughter]. I scream, rant, and rage and cry a lot. I know how to have a tantrum. I'll have a hissy fit, I think that keeps you kind of healthy. If you complain and pound the table ...

AL: Get it out!

SC: Yeah come home tired from work, "Kids I'm not in a good mood get out of my sight."

AL: Oh my gosh [laughs] we'll have to keep that in mind one day.

AL: How would you define success in your life? And how has that definition changed over time?

SC: Success. Perseverance. You really want it, persevere and get the best allies you can to join you. Don't do it alone. That's it.

AL: Good answer!

MG: That's really good!

AL: So based on your life experience what advice would you give to women today and future generations of women?

SC: I'm thinking of an Eleanor Roosevelt—I know it's not going to be exactly quoted, but, "No

one can put you down without your assistance.” Her words are much purer than that but it’s like no one can devalue you unless you go along with it. So my advice to women is do not ever let anyone put you down. Don’t agree with them. Don’t align with their screwy thinking.

AL: I like that, I’m going to tell my roommates that one.

ALL: [Laughter].

SC: Yeah, look up that one because it’s an elegant quote.

AL: We will!

SC: And fight. Women need to fight. Fight verbally, fight physically. And any woman today needs to know how to fight and know how to get allies.

MG: Yeah, it’s good to have people on your side too.

SC: Yeah somebody to get your back, but you got to know how to fight.

AL: Yeah definitely! Now that we have a good picture of who you are, is there anything that you’ve mentioned or haven’t that you feel has to be included to tell the full story about you?

SC: Yes. The anger, and the rage, and the disparity, and the inequities that a young person of the global majority like myself run into are enough to make you sick, crazy, or dangerous. And I literally at 21 exploded, I was a volcano I was committed to two institutions. The first one was a private sanatorium in Brattleboro, Vermont— Brattleboro Retreat— because I was so angry I was ready to kill. And the second one was when my stepmother came to that private sanatorium and said that I was ready to be discharged, and the family agreed which was an errant lie. And she said, “Oh you’re going to go to your father’s house, we agreed to take you home.” No, I was going to be discharged in 30 days. I had gone through a series of shock treatments, without anesthesia. I didn’t know who I was, or where I was— 21 years old— like blank— I had literally got myself back. I had come home from some weekends I had a lot of support from my classmates and my nursing arts instructors and interns that knew me. And I threatened her life. I got committed again to a psych hospital halfway down the Cape. That had a fire. What’s the name of the sanatorium half down the cape? I want to say Tewksbury [Massachusetts] but that’s the wrong direction— state hospital half way down the cape. But I was there for 30 days, no medications, no shock treatments, good counseling— good counseling.

AL: So would you say that your anger was trigger by the inequalities you faced?

SC: Inequities, poverty, racism, abandonment, you betcha Charley. I was a pissed off woman. I think that has to be added. Those are things that impact people of the global majority. Disparities are horrendous. And you know someone looks you in the eye and says, “I was afraid

it was going to degrade the uniform.” Something inside of me just churns that says, “Shit, this woman that I adore thought that of me,” you know something in you. My junior high school teacher— when she found out my sister and I were going to Classical High School— she changed our grade. “Oh they’ll never be able to do college prep level Latin.” Because she was our Latin teacher and our homeroom teacher in front of the class. She took ink irradiator and changed our grades and failed us, Cathleen Corbett. Students witnessed it. My mother who hated schools went up the school and defended us in front of the principal. And she said, “No I didn’t.” Son of a bitch you did, call [names of fellow classmates] they were right there when she did it. The paper was all ruffed up because ink irradiator had this little glass thing on it. “You’re not going to go to Classical High School, you’ll never be able to do college prep.” I had to take two Latins, Spanish, biology, chemistry, anatomy, in Classical High School. So my sister and I said were going.

AL: So that’s where your perseverance definitely came in?

SC: Yeah, but in the end I kept— I capped so much of that stuff — I stuffed it down and persevered. And you can’t do that endlessly, adding a volcano. What set me off was my father, when we were in Germany he looked at my sister and I and said, “Your mother took such good care of you, how are your teeth.”

ALL: [Laughter].

SC: At this particular time we still didn’t have water or lights, my classmates had to come out to the house— I was so embarrassed because we were lighting kerosene lamps to study by and digging new holes for the outhouse. And my father had the audacity— maids— riding around his car— he’s a lieutenant coronal—riding around his car flags flapping, people saluting us, food up the ying-yang— maids going down to France to eat escargot. I didn’t know what that was it was delicious.

ALL: [Laughter].

SC: This is snails? Flambé, flaming desserts. We went to Paris, we went to Rome, we went to the Sistine Chapel. And we were going home to dig a new hole for the outhouse and still carrying water from our neighbors to drink. And my father had the audacity to compliment my mother who despised him and didn’t want us to go there anyhow. And how are your teeth? I went for him. I was going to kill him. I had hysterical paralysis when I got to his throat, my body just got paralyzed and it frightened the family. And I got admitted the 7th Army Hospital that’s where I was told you’re a volcano, a walking volcano. Got very good care there but his tour of duty was over so we had to come back to the states. And I wanted outpatient treatment, but my family, my priest feared, “No, you’ll never get your nursing degree if you have a history of mental illness. So were going to make sure you go to the Brattleboro Retreat.” And that’s where they did the shock treatments.

MG: Oh my gosh!

AL: Wow!

SC: Taunton [Massachusetts] State Hospital that's what it was.

AL and MG: Oh ok.

SC: So yeah, it's important for people like me of the global majority, that rage is in all of us, we all carry it. Because the disparities are visual, you still see them. Go to small claims court—my daughter's roommate didn't pay half the rent. And they're saying, "What's your address, what's your telephone number?" And then they get to my daughter and, "Do you have an apartment, what's your apartment," no "do you have a phone?" All the questions changed on site it's like *momma mia* this is that shit again you just run it to!

ALL: [Laughter].

AL: Ok so we just have a few more questions for you.

SC: I've got motor mouth!

AL: No, no that's ok!

ALL: [Laughter].

AL: But before we forget, is there anyone you would suggest gets one of these interviews?

SC: My sister probably wouldn't want to, but she's a sweetheart and she has a better memory than I have.

AL: So do you want to give us any sort of contact information for her?

SC: Well there's also a woman who sits beside me at the senior center, who's again 90— high 90s. She's counting her days till 100. The one who's dying Laura Pierson— dying today— but she had another amazing memory about Worcester and growing up here. Contact information?

AL: Well if you want to ask your sister and your friend, and then you can always give me a call if they want to do it!

SC: Yeah I'll ask them. I've talked my sister into doing a lot of things, and she's, "What now, what now?" And I talked her into going back to school. And she sings with me in the chorus at Worcester State [University]. No homework? We've been singing there for about 10 years.

AL: Okay we just have three more and then we'll be out of your hair!

MG: I know sorry! So do you believe that being a woman has been the cause of any setbacks or disadvantage in your career?

SC: Yes.

MG: How so?

SC: Even in say nurses' training, the male nurses had apartments and the women nurses had to live in the dorm, where they checked you in, and you had to have privileges and there was a curfew, and you could lose your privilege. And the men had apartments okay, the male nurses. When you graduate, okay, the male nurses would get into the anesthesia department or they would go to CSR— much better pay. And they never— if a woman applied, I don't think our application got any further— yeah, yeah it's all through jobs and pay, salaries and opportunities, you can see it in nursing. And your teachers in elementary school, you don't see that many men. It's the woman's job to take care of the little kids. Get out of town. Little ones need men too. So you see it, it's still happening.

MG: And then it kinda relates, back to this question do you think that feminism has changed during your lifetime? Is it different today than in the 60s or 80s?

SC: God yes, I'm so glad I was born in the '30s because the sexualization of women, and the porn industry, and the slave stuff ugh, God how do you maneuver that stuff. You see some interesting things with men. There was a time when men wouldn't let you drive your car because he would be sissified by other men. The harshness of men on men is very bad and you know, men wouldn't change a diaper and stuff like that. So you know, I see change. A man will pick up some of the chores in the house and will change a baby. Both my sons-in-law both cook and shop.

MG: We need more guys like that! And then if you could change one thing about how society views women what would it be?

SC: Respect and equity.

MG: Ok then!

SC: We deserve it!

AL: Yes we do!