

CO: Okay. Alright, it is Friday morning, March the 16th, and I am in Tiger, Georgia, near Clayton and Dillard. At the home of Sue and Chuck Paulsen, on 80 Applewood Drive. And Sue's just been telling me a little bit about an event that happened recently that turned her life upside down, and I'm sure we will get to it. And there will come a time that you can talk more specifically about that, Sue, and I want to hear as much as you want to share about it. But before you go into that, we'll just start with the first question that I ask everybody. And that's what is your first memory?

SP: Hmm. The first one I can come up with now is sitting in my grandfather's lap in front of this small, coal fire in the chimney in the biggest room in the house that he owned. Which was a 4 room house sitting on his cotton farm. My shins got so hot, they felt like they were on fire and he would rub them, and then he would move me a little bit. And I felt very safe in his lap, so that I didn't want to get down even though my shins hurt.

CO: Do you remember how old you were?

SP: I think I was 4.

CO: Okay. That's pretty good memory (laughs). Okay. Well can you describe yourself as a child?

SP: I was pigeon toed – I had –

CO: Were you small for your age?

SP: I think I was maybe a little smaller than average, but not a lot. They cut my hair in Dutch girl bangs – it was light colored.

CO: So were you a towhead?

SP No, I wasn't – what they called a lint head. Lint head's where those really, almost white haired children that frequently were born to people who worked in the mills.

CO: I thought that's what they called anybody who worked in a mill cause they'd come home with lint.

SP: They did, but then the children they would call – if they were blonde, they would call them lint heads too.

CO: And they didn't mean anything kind by that, did they?

SP: No (laughs). No, it was derogatory. No, I was not a lint head – I was very special because I was the first grandchild in the family. And I always knew I had that special place in the family hierarchy.

CO: So were you the first grandchild on both sides? Your Mother and father?

SP: Uhh, I don't know much about my father's side because he left my life when I was – 3 or 4, I'm not sure of the date.

CO: So your memories are –

SP: All my Mother's people.

CO: Your Mother's family, okay. And you had no siblings?

SP: No siblings.

CO: Okay.

SP: No I was a spoiled first grandchild in the family. With my cute little turned in feet (laughs).

CO: Okay. Well my next question is about your parents – to describe your parents, and since you can't remember your father really, can you describe your Mother? And then tell me what influence she had on you?

SP: My Mother was a very beautiful woman. Full figured to her dismay, because when she was a teenager, it was popular to have a flat bosom. And she didn't have a flat bosom. So she was the 2nd daughter born to the family, and I don't know much at all about her upbringing except I know the whole family worked in the cotton fields, and worked in the garden, and helped put up vegetables and such. They were a rural family –

CO: So they worked in the cotton fields, not the cotton mills?

SP: Field, yeah. They would help pick cotton, they would help hoe cotton. Unfortunately, my grandfather had only 1 son and 5 girls, so the girls had to help. Mother – her sister said when she was young, she was lazy. But the Mother I knew was anything but lazy – she was a wonderful cook, she was super scrupulous about

house cleaning. She was very dedicated to her personal appearance. She could sew, and she was creative with crafty things, like she would make – she would glue rocks together and paint faces on them. And such things as when she lived up here, she did corn husk dolls, and made pillows, and did all kinds of crocheting and needle work and sold some of her stuff. And was – she loved children. She wanted more children, so since she just had me, she took in other people’s children. She worked at the church and went off with the young people on camping trips to Cade’s Cove and special places. And she was very – she was an independent thinker, and she’d let you know what she thought of you right quick. So she was spunky, and she was beautiful, and she made a very good life for herself.

CO: So she was spunky and she was beautiful, and in the ‘20s, she would have been – which is kind of supposed to be a decade for girls who just want to have fun – she might have been encouraged in that spunkiness?

SP: Oh no, oh no, no, no. When you live out in as rural an area as they did, there were no opportunities to kick up your heels really. But she managed to get herself pregnant (laughs) with me, and of course that changed her life. So it sort of cut around – (Loud sounds, cuts out 53:16)

CO: Okay let me get – your mom was 20 when you were born –

SP: Can we cut to 6 o’clock so it doesn’t bong? Cause it’ll get on the tape (clock). So where were we?

CO: You were talking about your Mother, and I’d asked you not only to describe her – and you’ve done very well at that – I wish I could’ve known her (laughs). She sounds like my kind of woman. But now can you – did that – would you have described your Mother the way you just described her when you were a young woman? In retrospect, we see our Mother’s differently as we age. Would you have known her to be that way –

SP: No! When I was – what age do you want me to think about?

CO: Well, okay, let’s start with a teenager. How would you have described her when you were a teenager?

SP: Um, she was amazingly tolerant of the things that I wanted to do, because my stepfather was very frightened of what might become of me, and he didn’t want his – he would say things like “You can’t go to a dance, don’t you realize that X percent of prostitutes come from dance halls?”

CO: Oh goodness. So you did have a step father?

SP: Yes.

CO: Okay.

SP: When I was 8.

CO: She remarried when you were 8?

SP: She remarried. We lived on the farm until an aunt of hers who lived in the Atlanta area – I can't remember the section – her name was Clyde. And she said, "Clyde, you've had some nursing experience, you need to get off that farm and come to Atlanta and what you can do is take care of some sick lady and then marry the man that she was married to. And you'll find you a rich husband." That was the fantasy. So she went to Atlanta, and looked in the paper and there was this add for somebody to take care of a woman with cancer, and she answered it, and took care of the lady until she died. And then that man's Mother came to see him and said "Lester, now that's a good woman." So Mama never gave me any details, but she never left after the lady died. So then they got married (laughs). But he wasn't rich (laughs). And they were very happy together.

CO: So did you think of him in any way as a father?

SP: I came to.

CO: You came to?

SP: Very much so.

CO: Okay, and what was his name?

SP: His name was L.E. Tidwell. And that's him behind you.

CO: Oh, okay. So you did have a father figure besides your grandfather eventually, okay.

SP: I did. When I first saw him I was terrified. He was so tall, and his eyebrows were so big – so black. And I was frightened of him – and I later realized he was just as frightened of me as I was of him (laughs).

CO: But they didn't have children?

SP: No, they didn't. So I never got a sibling. Well, he had 2 children by a former marriage, so I had 2 step sisters, but we didn't interact a great deal.

CO: Did they live in the same house with you?

SP: No. No, they lived in Macon.

CO: Were they the children of the woman your Mother took care of?

SP: No, no. That upright, courteous, steady gentleman had 3 wives – it amazes me. The first one was the one he had children with, the second one was the one who died with Cancer and the third one was Mother.

CO: Okay, well do you want to describe him as your father? As the father who –

SP: I've thought about it since he died. He never embarrassed me. He frightened me when I was a child, but that was not anything to blame him with cause after you get older, you get some sense. He was a good provider. He was sober. He had no vices that I know of. He worked hard in his business and at his job. He had a business but the depression and the sick wife wiped him out. But he was a success at his work, and retired with many admirers. In fact, that's indirectly how we got up here because when he retired, one of his office cronies had talked him into buying a lot on Lake Burton.

CO: Hmm. Now what did he retire form? Did you tell me that?

SP: He worked for a grocery chain – he was a supervisor of Colonial Stores in Georgia and I think parts of Alabama and parts of South Carolina.

CO: Okay. So you lived here –

SP: No. I didn't move here until 2000.

CO: Oh, okay.

SP: When he and Mother married, we were living in Atlanta in the Kirkwood area. And from there, he was promoted or hired by the grocery chain which had a different name at that time, and we moved to Augusta where we stayed for 2 years. And I was in a class with Carl Sanders in the 5th grade –

CO: As in the governor?

SP: As in the governor, yeah. And it was interesting to me because he was – at that age, it was obvious he was a leader. In the dynamics of the 5th graders, he was a standout. So that was interesting, and then we moved to Macon. And I was in the 6th grade, and we stayed in Macon until the summer before my senior year at Miller High when he was promoted and transferred to Atlanta. And the thread of the story is Lake Burton – so he worked with Colonial Stores until they made him retire because of his age, and his buddies had talked him into buying this place at Lake Burton. And then the civil rights thing came along, and the blacks started moving into our neighborhood in Kirkwood. And Mother said “Well this is wonderful. I’ll have an opportunity to teach these ladies how to do things.” And she meant it in her heart – she was a helpful kind of person. But one day, my daughter and her cousin were walking down the street, and some black men tried to pick them up. And Daddy said “That’s it, we’re moving.” So –

CO: Which daughter was that?

SP: My firstborn.

CO: Teresa?

SP: Yeah.

CO: Okay. The name Aiello, I had never heard before until 2-3 years ago we hired a new faculty member who’s name is Aiello.

SP: Really?

CO: Yeah, he’s from Louisiana.

SP: Really? That’s such a long way from –

CO: Yeah, I saw the name and wondered.

SP: Yeah.

CO: Well now I had asked you about the influence of your parents on you – you can tell me what influence you think your Mother had. Do you think that some of who you are or who you became is – are you like your Mother in any ways? Spunky and outspoken and –

SP: Well, I am spunky and outspoken, but I am not talented with my hands at all. And I don't really love to cook like she did. If Mother – I used to, in my adolescent style, used to say if you give my Mother a book, she'll start it and she'll go to sleep. You give me one, I can't hear what anybody is saying (laughs).

CO: So you were more of an intellectual, more of a mind type? Your Mother worked with her hands –

SP: Yeah, and I was happiest with a book and still am. So –

CO: Did you like school?

SP: Yes! We kept moving and I realized that the only way for me to be acknowledged, in my mind – the only way for me to be acknowledged was to make good grades. So I always tried to – and that was the way I tried to achieve some identity in a new surroundings.

CO: Is through school?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: And were you usually good at that?

SP: Yeah, yeah.

CO: Okay. So up until your Mother married your stepfather and they left – and he supervised grocery stores, your grandfather – did he continue for the rest of his life to work on a cotton farm?

SP: He did until his health didn't let him anymore, and then he sold his land and they moved into Cedartown with one of the daughters.

CO: Now that's where you were born, near Cedartown, right?

SP: Yeah, halfway between Cedartown and Rockmart.

CO: Okay.

SP: But if we got mail, it was addressed to Cedartown.

CO: What about the extended family? You said your grandMother had – or was it your Mother had 3 sisters?

SP: She had 4 – let's see. She had 4 sisters and 1 brother.

CO: And was that a close family?

SP: Yes, very close.

CO: And did you have lots of cousins?

SP: Lots of cousins, and I was the oldest. (laughs).

CO: Right. And what was that like?

SP: That was – well, I always excited when we were going to see my grandparents, because I knew that all my cousins would be there because everybody came. When Clyde and Lester were coming, everybody gathered. And so it was like holding court with these younger cousins.

CO: Now Clyde was a sister –

SP: Clyde was my Mama.

CO: I've got Francis---

SP: Francis Clyde.

CO: Oh Francis Clyde, okay.

SP: But they called her Clyde.

CO: Okay.

SP: You gonna change these names?

CO: Ma'am?

SP: Will these names be changed?

CO: No. You want anonymity? Do you want them to be anonymous?

SP: I don't know, I'll have to think about that.

CO: Okay, sure. And if you do, now we can't change them on the recorded version, but on the written version, which is typically what anybody accesses, we can put whatever you want. We'll put at the head that these are – you know – for anonymity, we've changed the names.

SP: I'll think about it.

CO: Sure, sure. So did you all get together much? Was this like a once or twice a year thing when the big family –

SP: We always went on thanksgiving, and we always went at Easter. And then I would go in the summers to stay a couple of weeks with my grandparents.

CO: Did you continue to have that close bond with them throughout your life?

SP: Yes, my aunts and uncles are very important to me.

CO: But you talk so tenderly about your grandfather – your first memory was sitting in his lap –

SP: Oh, I loved that man. He was quiet, he was tall, and he worked hard and he was tender with me. And I just had an affinity – a natural affinity with him.

CO: Was he a reader? Or was anybody in your family like you in that way – a reader?

SP: Nuh uh.

CO: No. So did they think you a little bit odd because you were such a book worm?

SP: I don't think so.

CO: No, okay. So they were proud of you? Were your parents – your Mother proud of you?

SP: Yeah, I always felt they were proud of me.

CO: Alright, that's always helpful.

SP: Very (laughs), yeah.

CO: Alright. Well what about your Mother's relationship to her Mother? What was that like? Especially that she had 5 sisters.

SP: All those girls adored their Mother. All of 'em did – now they bickered among themselves, but it was pretty good-natured bickering. They would – in later life when we would get together, they would tell stories about how they got mad at each other and – “Clyde was lazy. She didn't like to chop cotton.”

CO: Now did they chop cotton or pick cotton on your grandfather's farm or was he a tenant on someone's farm?

SP: No he owned the land.

CO: He owned the land, okay. Alright well that's helpful (laughs). So many people that I talk to here come from tenant backgrounds, so okay. So your Mother had a good relationship with her Mother?

SP: Yes, she loved her Mother and her father and her sisters.

CO: Now where was she in the –

SP: She was second born.

CO: Okay, and what about your relationship with her? Was it ever strained – when you were a teenager was it strained?

SP: With my Mother?

CO: Yes.

SP: Well, she would fuss at me to practice the piano, and she would fuss at me to dust the dining room table, and “be sure you do the legs too.” And I was – I would reluctantly put my book down and go do it. I respected her and I appreciated her because she was a buffer between me and a normal teenage life and my stepfather, who was frightened of what might happen to me. And Mother would say things like, “If you hold her down too tight, she'll run away.” Cause 3 of her sisters had run away.

CO: To get married?

SP: To get married.

CO: Okay. Now what effect did that have on the family?

SP: Oh, I think they just came to accept what happened. They didn't split over it or anything, they just – was the family.

CO: Did they have lots of kids? How many cousins were there?

SP: Lets see, my oldest aunt had only 1 child. The – Mother had only 1, the next one had 4, the next one had 2, the next one had 2 and the boy had 3.

CO: That's 13 total – so you had 12 cousins. Okay, so that was a pretty big Christmas and Easter.

SP: Yeah. Thanksgiving – we didn't go at Christmas. It was too cold (laughs).

CO: Okay, alright. But other than that conflict about doing chores, you and your Mother got along okay?

SP: Yeah. Both of us knew we were different. I had my head in a book and she was making something. But she made a lot of my clothes, and she – there was no strife.

CO: Well, I ask that question because – well, I'm interested in Mother-daughter relationships, but it's almost a given now that girls will have some kind of conflict as teenagers with their Mothers. Well so I'll go ahead and ask – what about you and your daughters? Did you have any – did they have any conflict when they were teenagers?

SP: Oh, well – I see where you're going – yeah, my Mother did – when I was a teenager, my Mother didn't know much, and my daughters as children were the same way with me. I just didn't understand.

CO: Oh, of course. Well that's a fact of life, isn't it?

SP: Well yeah (laughs). Well, that kinda thing went on, but we didn't – it was only – later in my life, I had a very sad estrangement with my son. When he was a teenager growing up, we got along just great.

CO: But the estrangement came later?

SP: The estrangement came with his 3rd wife.

CO: Okay.

SP: Who didn't want anybody around him but her.

CO: Do you mind giving me your children's birthdates? The year is enough if that's – Teresa?

SP: '49.

CO: 1949, okay. And Earl – do you call him Earl?

SP: Earl is '53. Laura is '55.

CO: Alright. So that's my generation. So – okay, but you didn't have estrangement from your daughters when they were teenagers except of course that they knew everything and you didn't know anything, but otherwise was it –

SP: I don't – I know they resented me, because I was trying to control them in certain ways. But no, we never had a serious – I don't think we did, they might.

CO: There wasn't any long standing alienation?

SP: No.

CO: Okay, alright. So when you became a teenager – you know we mark that now with whenever – girls have – start wearing makeup, or at least that's what my generation did. Now heaven knows what all they're doing, but –

SP: Oh, I wanted to wear short shorts because they looked so cute, but my Mother didn't like that. "Those shorts are too short." But that's what people wear, and I wanted to have a certain look.

CO: And she didn't want you to wear the shorts for reasons that to us now are obvious, but then –

SP: (Laughs).

CO: (Laughs). But then it seemed obvious to you that you ought to be able to because everybody else was.

SP: That's right.

CO: Okay, well can you name what might have been the most significant thing that happened in your life or to you or you know, around you up to the age of 12 when you were a child. Did something happen that was memorable or?

SP: Oh, when my Mother married my stepfather. Life certainly changed then.

CO: Yeah. Now in retrospect, did it change for the better?

SP: Yes. Much better.

CO: Now why is that? Is that for financial reasons? Because you had –

SP: I think it was identity. I remember asking my Mother what would my name be after she married? Would my name be different from hers, and she said “well, it doesn’t have to be.” “Well I want my name to be the same as yours” I told her. He never adopted me, which in later years, curiously, I resented.

CO: So was his name Dixon?

SP: No, that’s my husband – first husband.

CO: Okay, so what was his name?

SP: L. E. Tidwell.

CO: Oh I’m sorry, you told me that. And so your Mother became – Francis Clyde Tidwell. Okay.

SP: And I became Sue Tidwell.

CO: But not legally?

SP: Not legally. But I put it – I still used the name, and as a matter of fact, when I go vote, I have to register as Sue Tidwell Paulsen. See, I’m – Janie Sue Reeves Tidwell Dixon Paulsen.

CO: Okay.

SP: The name has been a problem all my life. Legally, and with the VA and people like that. And even now, since the doctors want to get paid, they have to put down Sue

Dixon Paulsen, and sometimes they leave in their files that I'm a D, when I really want to be a P (laughs). But – it's confusing.

CO: Oh, I know that complexity. Well what were some of your struggles as a child?

SP: I was a bed wetter, and I was so embarrassed and I couldn't seem to help it.

CO: And how long did that last?

SP: Well let's see, they got married in '34 – and I was 8 – probably till I was about 10.

CO: Okay. And so twice now you've mentioned embarrassment. Has that been an issue for you in life? You just don't like being embarrassed? Nobody likes being embarrassed, but some people are embarrassed more easily than others. Has that been an issue?

SP: Well, I didn't want people to know I wet the bed. Oh.

CO: Sure. But you also mentioned that your stepfather – one thing that seemed to be –

SP: He never embarrassed me.

CO: He never embarrassed you, yeah.

SP: My Mother sometimes did.

CO: Oh, okay now how would she embarrass you?

SP: Well she would run her mouth in a way that I thought was inappropriate. She would speak up about something and I'd say "Mother!!" But he never did. I guess cause (laughs) – he just pretty much kept his thoughts to himself. I don't know, he was remarkable – we were very blessed that she found him. Mother was – she was kind of "spurdy." She would say something right quick, and then she would stand by it. She hardly ever said she was sorry about anything.

CO: Was that hard for you? Did you –

SP: Not especially – it was just that –

CO: Did she do it in other ways other than saying 'I'm sorry'? Would she make you aware that she felt bad about something?

SP: No.

CO: No?

SP: Nuh uh.

CO: So you don't think she felt remorse?

SP: She had a rather intact personality, I would say. Rather than feeling – I don't think she felt self-conscious. I have struggled with self-consciousness, but I don't think she did.

CO: Wow, okay. Does that make you wonder how people could get by without being self-conscious when you yourself are?

SP: Hmm, I don't think so, I think I just say that person is not like I am, but then that's alright (laughs).

CO: Was becoming a teenager, was that – okay, you said you wanted to wear short shorts. I'm assuming you were a teenager.

SP: Oh yes.

CO: Yeah, so you recalled that as creating some kind of conflict. Did becoming a teenager – was it noteworthy in any other ways? I mean, did you feel more – I don't know, free to be who you were when you were a teenager?

SP: Well, I would spend a lot of time wondering if I would ever get married and would I – and who, what would that be like, and would any boy ever like me, and so on. But that just took care of itself because in those days, you didn't – you had a series of boyfriends, you didn't have one and stick to him forever. And so I became aware that I had enough boyfriends so I didn't have to worry that I was going to be a wildflower. So I guess you have this fear that nobody might ask you to dance, but that turned out not to be a problem. So that was a relief. And I loved – some of the happiest hours of my life were dancing.

CO: Dancing, okay. So did you dance a lot as a teenager?

SP: In my late – yeah.

CO: Was that what you did on –

SP: That's the Glen Miller years.

CO: Oh, okay.

SP: Jitterbugging. Most fun in the world, cause you got the beat and the music was wonderful and you could feel it in your body, and your body was moving to it and it was just glorious.

CO: Mmhm. So that's what you did on dates? You all went to dances?

SP: Mostly.

CO: Oh, that does sound like fun.

SP: It was.

CO: Is that what you remember most about your teenage years? Were they relatively care-free?

SP: Yes, they were.

CO: Okay. And so can you think of other things that you and your Mother might have disagreed about other than the clothes you wore? Did she mind you going dancing? Did she dance?

SP: No she didn't, she wasn't allowed to, and she never had a chance to. She was a Mother too early – she was 19 when I was born, so – okay I lost the question.

CO: Well I think I was asking you did your Mother mind if you danced? I mean, was that something she –

SP: No, she would stand up for me and let me – and say to my stepfather “Let her go, let her go.” And I'd come home and I'd tell her what a wonderful time I'd had, and “Oh, it was so wonderful” and this and this. And I had lots of boys break in on me, and I was popular – they liked my dancing, I was a good dancer. And she could tell that it made me happy.

CO: Do you think she envied that since she didn't have it?

SP: I have no idea.

CO: Okay. Did you call your stepfather, “Daddy”?

SP: Yes, and I remember the first time I did it. I was working myself up to it. I thought “is it alright if I call him – he’s not my Daddy. When can I – do I call him Daddy, and if I do, when am I gonna do it?” And I remember he was walking ahead of me on some kind of path – I don’t know where we were, but he was with another man and I was behind him maybe as far as from here to the dining room table. And I stepped – I was just walking along not looking where I was going and I stepped into – sort of a hole, and it startled me and I said, “Daddy!!” It just popped out of me, and he jerked around (laughs), and looked at me, and I was embarrassed because I wasn’t hurt and I had said the word. And I said “I’m okay” and he turned around and went on and acted like nothing had happened. And that helped me.

CO: So then after that –

SP: After that, he was Daddy.

CO: Oh, and was it awkward anymore?

SP: I don’t remember – I don’t remember it if it was.

CO: Yeah. Were you 8 or had that taken a couple of years?

SP: I think it took about 6 months – that’s just a guess. It didn’t happen right away.

CO: Yeah. Well was there any – I try to understand if people grew up with a sense of gender awareness, like did you – do you think your Mother would have treated a boy differently from how she treated you because she had an idea that certain things were appropriate for girls and certain things were appropriate for boys?

SP: Probably, but I don’t know.

CO: Okay. But you didn’t have a brother, but she had a brother. Do you have a sense that he got any special treatment?

SP: He was expected to go find the work, whereas they were expected to stay home. And he did, and he married a – he went to work in a mill in Rockmart, and he married a girl he met there. And in some way that was a disappointment.

CO: They didn’t want him to work in the mill or they didn’t want him to marry a girl in the mill?

SP: I don't know, it was all mixed together in my mind.

CO: Okay.

SP: I think they were proud that he got a job because this was the Depression. And every bit counted. I remember there was dismay in the house when one of those years, Daddy Big got only 2 bales of cotton out of his fields and that was not much. So if we hadn't grown our own food, we would have been in big trouble.

CO: Now you were just three – well, you were three and a half when the stock market crashed, so you spent your childhood in the Depression.

SP: My Mother said that in the brief period she was married with my birth father that there was one time that she had nothing in the house to eat except some weevilly cornmeal. And its interesting – that made an impression on me because to this day, I have got to have a full pantry (laughs).

CO: So the Depression marked you from hearing stories from your Mother?

SP: About food, yeah. Gotta have a lot of food to fall back on. That's unconscious.

CO: Oh sure it is, yeah. Do you recall disagreeing with your Mother's values? It sounds like she was independent minded, but you've already used that to describe her. But what sort of religious values did she have?

SP: They were both Baptists. And very early, I disliked the church. I did not like the idea that if you didn't do "thus and so" you were going to hell, and I didn't like the idea that all these millions of people who didn't know about Jesus were going to have to go to hell. That was – I couldn't handle that. I didn't know what else to suggest, I just knew that wasn't right. So I began to distrust the church.

CO: Do you have any idea how old you were when you began to question that?

SP: Six or younger.

CO: Wow, that's pretty young. Did your Mother and stepfather, do you think they questioned those values?

SP: No, my grandMother remarked one time – I said "Daddy Big doesn't go to church with us", and she said "He'll go to hell for it." And I said "I'll go with him," because I didn't want him to be left all alone.

CO: So your grandMother obviously believed those doctrines –

SP: Yeah, and my Mother did too, and my stepfather was a deacon in the Baptist Church, and in every church he ever went to. And he was very, very saved.

CO: Mmhm. So did they use that evangelical discourse like that – did they talk about John 3:16 and – you know.

SP: Oh yeah, you had to remember it of course, and then there it was all over the signs – anywhere you drove. And I'd think about that and – gee, that was his only son? Does that make sense? I questioned all of it, but I didn't vocalize it to them because I instinctively knew I would just get in trouble.

CO: Now – so your grandfather didn't go to church, do you think he didn't believe? Do you think he questioned it?

SP: I heard from one of my aunts later when I asked about it – cause this sorta troubled me all my life, going “Why was Mama Big so convinced he was going to go to hell?” And my Aunt Hazel, the youngest one – I told her that maybe 2 years ago and she said “oh, Sue, she got over that. She didn't mean that.” And that was a tremendous relief to me (laughs).

CO: So you don't think necessarily that he changed but she changed?

SP: Yeah.

CO: So she came to accept that he –

SP: There was some kind of dispute between my grandfather and another man in the church, and my impression is that the other man wrongfully accused my grandfather of something. And that made my grandfather so mad, he didn't want to have anything to do with that bunch anymore.

CO: So he had been a church goer, but something happened and he quit going?

SP: I'm not clear on that, but I suspect that that's –

CO: Okay.

SP: Because I don't have any data. All I have is some –

CO: Impressions?

SP: Impressions. And I don't know that they're accurate.

CO: Well you'll have an opportunity to talk about your religious beliefs, and – more specifically about that, so – but this is helpful to know this now. When you were a child and a teenager living in your Mother's home, were you conscious or were they conscious of the world outside the house? Was it like – would they talk about –

SP: Politics and so forth?

CO: Yeah, politics or national – international news. Because you've lived through –

SP: Yeah, I remember Daddy talking about Herman Talmadge. And there was some question that some dead people had voted and – he'd shake his head. But he wouldn't – he would mention things that were in the news, but he wouldn't preach about anything.

CO: What about FDR? Did your stepfather or grandfather have opinions about the Roosevelts?

SP: We were all mighty grateful to get electric lights.

CO: To get what?

SP: Electricity.

CO: Oh, which his program helped.

SP: Didn't FDR do that?

CO: Absolutely, he did. Yes.

SP: Yeah, cause we had – I studied in the 1st and 2nd grades by lamp. And we didn't have a bathroom – we didn't have running water. It amazes me to think that my life span covers living like that, to what's going on in the world today with –

CO: To the computer –

SP: With internet and (laughs) space travel and the Wall Street business. Its just –

CO: Right. Well, did your parents ever talk about Roosevelt? He was such a larger than life figure.

SP: I don't – All I know is that we were Democrats, and I didn't know why. And I didn't think about it, but we were Democrats. So if that's the family identity and I'm in this family, that's what I am. (laughs)

CO: Unlike the religion? You questioned religion –

SP: Right, I didn't question the politics.

CO: When you were a child, did you have a particular ambition to be – clearly you were an intellectual. There's no doubt about that. Before you even knew what to call it, you were an intellectual. Did that come with a desire to be or do something with that?

SP: I wanted to be an opera star (laughs).

CO: Oh okay, did you talk to your family about that? You liked opera?

SP: I loved "Indian Love Call," the one Jeanette McDonald sang (laughs). And I would go around singing "Indian Love Call" a lot.

CO: Oh my goodness, what a picture. (laughs).

SP: (Laughs).

CO: So were you serious about that? You wanted to be an opera singer?

SP: Oh, I think I really was at a certain age. I outgrew it pretty fast, but I was intense about it at one time.

CO: And did you talk to your family about it or did you just go around singing?

SP: I just ran around singing. No, I didn't talk too much about 'em cause if you tell somebody something, they'll find some way to disagree with you (laughs).

CO: Okay, or talk you out of it?

SP: Yeah.

CO: Well once you got over that, did you have an idea that you wanted to do or be something?

SP: No. I always envied people who had a specific goal to work toward. I just kind of wondered what was around the corner. Okay, if we can get to Macon, when I go to high school –

CO: Sure. Well I do have a section on education – can I just ask you quickly before we go – cause that's fine to move to that, but did you have particular kinds of books? You liked to read all the time. What did you read?

SP: I didn't have anything to read. I read the Progressive Farmer over and over and over. And then finally they did have a traveling library, and I could get books when that bus would pull up. I don't remember what they were – they were not classics. But –

CO: Fiction? Was it mostly fiction?

SP: Fiction, yeah. Yeah, I loved stories, so – I still do. I don't pick non-fiction books to read. I think it's very enriching to hear accounts of other lives.

CO: Well you know I like that (laughs), because I'm running around with a recorder getting them everywhere I turn. I can certainly relate to that. Well were others in your family – they didn't like to read necessarily – but were there any musicians or –

SP: No, I was the first one in the family to go to college. And I don't know that any – one of my cousins did go to college, but I don't think – I think there was just 1. The girls all got married and the men went into building. My grandfather was an accomplished carpenter, and so his sons, his grandsons, sort of took after that.

CO: Well now we can talk about your education –

SP: Okay, we were living in Macon in – when you get out of Junior High and you go to Miller High, you have to decide whether you're gonna take the Vocational Track or the Academic Track. I did not consult my parents at all. I picked Academic. I didn't tell them – it didn't occur to me to ask them. I think I knew what they would say?

CO: And what would they have said?

SP: They'd of said, "you're gonna be a secretary. Or you'll get married. What do you need to go to college for?" That was the mindset – that was not meant to – they thought they were being realistic.

CO: So you knew you were going to college?

SP: I knew I *wanted* to, I didn't know that I was going to. That was not easy.

CO: So education in your household wasn't really all that valued?

SP: Nuh uh. No, Mama was kind of surprised when I'd bring home all A's – She'd say "Sue brought home all A's. She made all A's all year." And they would say "oh, my goodness, she's smart." But I don't remember it being a really big deal. Okay, so as I said, the summer before my senior year, Daddy was transferred to Atlanta, and I had to go give up my stature because I had been elected to a couple of things – I can't even remember what they are now. Something about student government and so I was the new kid as a senior in high school in Decatur. I thought my life was over – but I had this wonderful teacher at Decatur High. Her name was Grace Kurr, and she was a magnificent teacher. I remember her to this day, and one of the things that – besides being such a good teacher and helping me learn so much about literature, which fit right in with my love of reading – one day she just sorta tossed off the remark, she says, "Well, you know, the main reason to believe in God is that we want one." And that struck me as a very significant remark. And I've used it several times since then – there's somebody walking by the buzzer.

CO: So did you determine that you didn't need a God?

SP: No. Not – nuh uh. No. I – No. Nuh uh, I just thought that that was a reason.

CO: That explained –

SP: That explained. Yeah, right. Okay, so I graduate from college – from High School, and all the sudden I get a – I'm told that I have a \$200 scholarship to go to Wesleyan. "Oh! That means I could maybe go to college! Daddy look! \$200." He says "We can't afford it, even with the \$200." So I went to – I loved to roll this off – the Atlantic Division of the Evening Extension of the University of Georgia. Which was in a building next door to the Tabernacle down on Lucky Street in Atlanta. It grew to be Georgia State, but when I went there, it was pretty dinky. And it was not accredited, but I lucked into some wonderful teachers there.

CO: Now was the Atlanta Division of the University of Georgia –

SP: Atlantic Division of the Evening Extension of the University of Georgia.

CO: But you'd think being attached to UGA, it would have been accredited.

SP: You'd think.

CO: But it wasn't, so –

SP: As far as I know.

CO: So you started there –

SP: I started there, and had some more good teachers and it made up my mind that I want (dogs bark). (2:57).

CO: Okay, so you're at –

SP: Okay, so – the plot thickens.

CO: May I ask, would this have led to a degree or was it sort of a preparatory school for –

SP: it was sort of a – mostly it was to educate people to be in the business world, but I had already decided that I wasn't going to point myself that way unless I had to. So – I met this girl, Mary Francis, who was – to this day a very good friend – and we both said that we needed to get away from home. We needed to go to school somewhere out of Atlanta, and this Junior College was just a stopgap. So we decided we wanted to go to Auburn, which we did. And somewhere in there I met my first husband, and –

CO: At Auburn?

SP: No, I met him through Mary Francis – he was a co-op student at Tech who had dropped out for a year to do something – oh he'd been in the Navy, that's right, and he was discharged from the Navy because he had an ear problem. So he was gonna go back and co-op at Tech some more, and when he came down to get that arranged, Mary Francis' friend wanted him to meet me. And so we did, and then we decided that we'd get married. So –

CO: Were you in love with him?

SP: Oh yeah, I was wild about him. And so after that Auburn year –

CO: So you did go to Auburn for a year?

SP: I went to Auburn for a year, and then the summer following the Auburn year, we got married. And I worked for a year at War Assets Administration.

CO: At what now?

SP: War Assets Administration. It was surplus property after World War II. They had to get rid some of that stuff, and I was a clerk.

-----End of part 1-----

-----Start of Part 2 (51:32)-----

SP: Mary Francis had taken a year off too. And a matter of fact, she was up here at Hambridge Center learning how to weave. She decided she was going to go back to school at Agnes Scott. Well I was fit to be tied. Mary Francis was going to go to Agnes Scott, and here I was working at War Assets. So I said "I want to go to Agnes Scott too." (laughs) So I went and applied, and it turned out that at that time, Auburn was not accredited either. So I had 2 years of college and neither college was accredited. Agnes Scott had not very much interest in what courses I had taken so far – furthermore, I did not meet their requirement that you have Latin in high school. So –

CO: Did you have a language at all in high school on the college track?

SP: Spanish. And I had some French at Auburn, cause they didn't have Spanish at Auburn at that time. Oh my – so I went and talked to the Admitting office, and I said "I want to go to Agnes Scott", and they said, "Well why don't you go back to Junior College." And I said "it's not a good school", and they said "well, why don't you go back to Auburn?" I said "I'm married – my husband goes to Tech on the GI bill." "Oh, uh huh. Could we meet your husband?" So he went with me, and we reiterated that I didn't want to go back to the Lucky Street place because it wasn't accredited, and it wasn't a good school – I wanted to go to a good school. They admitted me provisionally, and if I failed to make a B average, I would not be allowed to come back. So that's how I got into Agnes Scott.

CO: And what about the money?

SP: The money? I had a working scholarship.

CO: Working scholarship, okay. That was pretty common though, wasn't it?

SP: Yeah. I worked in the library. And –

CO: Well you must've loved that!

SP: Actually, no, all I did was type up the cards that went in the door things –

CO: Index cards for the card catalogue.

SP: Yes. But I loved Agnes Scott, and I studied hard and I graduated with honors.

CO: Wow. And what year, do you remember that?

SP: '49. I was pregnant. But I was 4 years married, so they couldn't say anything.

CO: Okay.

SP: I would not take anything for those Agnes Scott years.

CO: So you and Mary Francis were there together?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: Did that sort of reinforce your bond as friends?

SP: Yes, very much so.

CO: Did you room – well no, you didn't room –

SP: No, we didn't room together. We roomed at Auburn, but then I got married. And we lived at home with my folks while he got his Masters and I finished Agnes Scott.

CO: And what was his Masters in?

SP: Physics. No – yes. I forget. His – one of his degrees was Physics, and his Master's was an EE – or the other way around, I'm not sure.

CO: And what did he do?

SP: He worked at Tech Research Station.

CO: Oh alright. And then you married your – this husband is –

SP: I was married to Fred for 35 years. Then I was single for 16 years. Then I met Chuck. I met Chuck in '97 – '96 – late '96, and we were married the next year.

CO: Now before we leave your education, did you go for any more graduate degrees? Anything like that?

SP: Nuh uh. No.

CO: Okay. So you got a 4 year degree in what at Agnes Scott?

SP: English.

CO: Okay, well that seems suitable.

SP: (Laughs) It fits.

CO: Did you like writing all those papers?

SP: I got used to it, and they all blew away [in the tornado], but occasionally before they all blew away, I'd get one out and read it and think, "Gee, I did that?" (laughs).

CO: Okay. Well can we talk a little bit about marriage and children and Motherhood and all that stuff?

SP: (Sighs).

CO: Do you need to take a break?

SP: No, I don't, do you?

CO: No, I'm good. Sounds like you don't want to talk about marriage and children and Motherhood though.

SP: Well, it is kind of painful. I was bedazzled by my husband because he was so smart, and he was so different. And those very things turned out to be bad for the marriage.

CO: Oh my. Even being smart?

SP: Well, I don't know how to talk about that, cause I enjoyed his smartness, and I actually worked with him for a while at Tech, and we had some good times sharing

work. We married in '45 – Terry was born in '49, I stayed home about – I don't know. We lived with my Mother when the baby was born, and my Mother sort of took over the baby. She really bumped me out of the way.

CO: Now was that a good thing or did you resent that?

SP: I was – I was glad she helped take care of the baby, cause I didn't know how. But then it grew so that I realized that it wasn't my baby anymore.

CO: Did you work away from the home after your daughter was born?

SP: Yeah. I did, I went to work – well we didn't have any money.

CO: Even with your husband in a full time job, was it still too –

SP: He didn't make a whole lot then, cause he was just – I just got out of school, and he just got his Masters, so he was not very high up on the salary list. And we didn't have our own place – we were living with my folks. And we felt obligated and tied down and so forth, so I went to work at Tech so we could ride together. And then we bought a house –

CO: When Teresa was a baby?

SP: She was – I don't remember how old she was. I think she was about 18 months or so. Anyway –

CO: But you got her out of her Mother's household? How did that feel?

SP: I got her out and well (laughs), she still took care of her while I was at work. So it wasn't until I quit work that I sort of got my family back. And I did that when I got pregnant with my son.

CO: Now Sue, you talked about your Mother a few minutes ago in – well, anything from idealistic to sort of neutral terms, but –

SP: Well, she took my baby away from me because of my lack, not because of her being graspy.

CO: So you didn't feel like you could take care of Teresa?

SP: Certainly not like she could.

CO: So you trusted her to –

SP: And that – I am not as maternal as she is. I am not close to my grandchildren like she was close to hers. That's just not in me. I love 'em to death and when they're grown, I interact with them a lot better than I do when they're little. I don't get down on the floor and I don't help people make cookies. (laughs).

CO: Is there anything wrong with that?

SP: Well, I felt like there was so – I know – I'm going to make an A in everything and when I didn't (laughs) it was wrong. But I didn't make an A in being a young Mother carefully tending to every need of the baby. I'd rather be reading a book (laughs).

CO: Well, I know something of that – my daughter used to introduce me as, "This is my Mother, she's not normal." So (laughs) I know what you're talking about. She was an only child too.

SP: (Laughs) Oh, it took me a lot of years to realize you don't have to be good at everything. (laughs) Where did I get that notion? I don't know. I think I gave it to myself.

CO: Right, of course. But now, you went out on a limb there and got pregnant with a 2nd one. Was that planned or was that –

SP: None of them were planned.

CO: None of them were planned, okay. Well were you happy about that when you found out you were pregnant?

SP: Yeah, yeah. I was settling into being a young Mother in a neighborhood of young Mothers, and I was happy to have a son. And then the 3rd one came along and it became increasingly obvious to me that my husband was not much of a family man, and he was not much of a partner either. He liked to live in the world of ideas and he liked – he was obsessive about straightening things out. One of his co-workers who met me said, "you know you're a real surprise." And I said, "Why?" He says "Cause Fred spends so much of his time at work, when he could be at home with you." He said "I thought there was something wrong with you, but there's not. There's something wrong with him." Fred is now in a nursing home and they think that he is – the word won't come to me. It's not autistic, it's – it's that other thing that starts with an a.

CO: Alzheimer's?

SP: No. He's weak on understanding what other people –

CO: He doesn't have emotional capacity?

SP: Right.

CO: Yeah, I know there's a name. I'm sorry, I can't think of it either, but I know what you're talking about. So this was more of a – probably a physiological brain thing than it was a psychological –

SP: But I had no comprehension of what it was. I thought it was me – if I would be cuter or smarter or more loving or a better cook or – if I were so and so, then he would be different. Didn't work.

CO: Was he – was he a brilliant person, and he was just all in his mind it seemed?

SP: Yeah.

CO: So he may not have had emotional capacity to relate to people.

SP: He had plenty for anybody out of the family, but nothing – somewhere along in the marriage, I said this isn't working. We're going to separate, and if you won't get counseling, I'm gonna get a divorce. So we got counseling. And he went to see somebody and it really helped, because the guy eventually asked to meet me, and when I went in – the Dr. said – I went in and he was sitting there and the chair was here, and there was a chair over there on the other side of the desk, and I sat by the doctor. And he said "That's very interesting, your husband always has to sit over there." And then he looked at me, and rather compassionately said, "it must be very difficult to live with Fred." I felt like I'd lost a ton.

CO: I bet! What did Fred say?

SP: He wasn't there.

CO: Oh he wasn't there – I see, you chose to sit close by, and he was just noting the difference between where you chose to sit and where Fred –

SP: Right.

CO: So he – oh my goodness. Wow.

SP: And he said, “He’s off the chart in almost every test I’ve given him.” He said, “he’s what I call a world’s strange.”

CO: World’s Strange? Wow. And this was a certified psychotherapist?

SP: He was a psychologist, but he had his credentials. So I thought it’s not all my fault. And that was a big – hey babe. (talks to another man) Yeah we’re talking about Fred.

CO: He sounds like a character.

SP: Do you remember what that is that Terry said they diagnosed him as?

Chuck: I know Surely was familiar with it. I heard her say –

CO: Is it Asbergers?

SP: Yes!

CO: Yes. Well now what happened April the 21st 1981? What is that date? It’s by his name –

SP: Divorced.

CO: I’m sorry?

SP: Divorced.

CO: The divorce, okay. I thought he had died, actually, so –

SP: No, he’s still around

CO: Okay

SP: In a nursing home

CO: Okay. Asperger’s, yes. I read something on that not too long ago.

CHUCK: Well that’s what Gerald has too.

SP: Who?

CHUCK: Supposedly. Gerald Kemp.

SP: Oh. Well Gerald's a worse case than Fred.

CHUCK: Yeah.

CO: How did that shape his relationship with his children?

SP: He was a very absent father.

CO: Absent, okay. Was he cold when he was around?

SP: No! No! Somebody said when Fred shines his light on you, it's very warm. -- But it goes off.

CO: And the children um

SP: They – the two girls are still in touch with him and my older daughter goes to see him every Wednesday evening. And she takes care of him. She's--- it's interesting. His second wife -- left. She moved to Pennsylvania. She couldn't stand it anymore.

CO: So this is by now you're pretty well convinced that this had nothing to do with you.

SP: Well – I certainly contributed because I was so angry.

CO: Right but something triggered that anger it wasn't that, there wasn't a lack of something. I mean you've come to at least that conclusion.

SP: Well I'm sorry I was so angry at him because, but I didn't have the information that might have helped. Although I don't think that I could have kept on living with him even if I had known what it was. But I wouldn't have exhibited so much anger around my children. The poor things they saw – misunderstandings flying around. – Okay, where were we?

CO: You're one of the few people that will admit that during your teenager years you had, well, I mean some people admit it but they don't want to talk about it, that you have images of what marriage and family is going to be like. Did you have an idea when you were a teenager what kind of family life you wanted? Did you have that idealized you know, how many children you wanted to have, did you have any idea? No, okay alright.

SP: Not uh.

CO: Well I'm trying to do is figure out if your notions of what romance was supposed to be if your reality looked up to it but obviously that didn't happen.

SP: No, that didn't happen. I think I was just so dazzled by his brilliance, and his knowledge of music and literature and his benign attitude towards life that – that was enough for me – admiration.

CO: You were married to him 36 years –

SP: Oh, well, the last 17 of them were pff. I moved to California. I left.

CO: So you didn't actually spend it with him? Hmm.

SP: I had an opportunity for a job – it was an opportunity to go to California for 2 months in my job, and I took it. And when I got out there, they wanted me to transfer, and I did. And 5 years later we were divorced.

CO: So did your children go? Or actually, they were grown by then, right?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: Well, did you always – you said at one point you worked, and your Mother took care of your daughter. And then you said something about you quit work and –

SP: After my son was born, I quit work.

CO: How long did you stay home with the children?

SP: Um, I stayed home until it looked like the sovereign state of Georgia was going to close the schools rather than integrate. (Laughs). So I went to work to get money for private school. And –

CO: Yeah, I mean your baby daughter was born right after the *Brown vs Board of Education* decision, so you were – you went back to work so you could put them through private school?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: Okay. What was that like? When you had both – well what was it like being at home? Especially for a woman so intensely intellectual –

SP: I liked it because I was in a wonderful neighborhood. We were all about the same age, and we all were having babies – kind of along – and it was a really ideal situation to bring up children.

CO: Now did you live in a – what we see in our minds eye of a 1950's neighborhood? Were you in a suburban neighborhood?

SP: A Suburban neighborhood, and the houses were all built at the same time. GI loans bought 'em –

CO: Had your husband served in the military?

SP: He was in the Navy, mmhm.

CO: He was in the Navy, okay. So you got the GI?

SP: We got the GI.

CO: Well now you described yourself as someone with not a strong maternal instinct – if there *is* such a thing – but did you – how was it being home with little babies? I mean, did you ever question that when you were a Mother of young children?

SP: No, no, they were – no, I enjoyed them. I just didn't get down on the floor and play with em. But I took care of em and we had all these other children to play with.

CO: Okay. Did you ever talk to any of the other Mothers about anything deeper than what baby food they're using or?

SP: We played bridge.

CO: You played bridge, okay. Did you talk about anything? You just don't seem like the bridge playing type to me.

SP: (Laughs). Well, I was then. It was a way to get together, and –

CO: So you enjoyed the social scene with other women.

SP: Right.

CO: And did you feel like you had something in common with – were any of them as intellectual as you?

SP: Well some of ‘em were college graduates, so –

CO: Okay, well that was something. You had that in common.

SP: Yeah, yeah. We were – yeah, we were all pretty much the same education level in that group.

CO: And what class would you say you were? Were you solid middle class or was your husband as a researcher upper middle class?

SP: No, we were just middle class.

CO: Alright. Now how old was your baby when you went back into the work force?

SP: I went part time – I just worked when they were in school. I didn’t – I was always there for em. I think Laura was 6 or so, I’m not sure.

CO: Oh okay. And what did you do when you went to work?

SP: The first thing I found was a – working for a neurosurgeon, typing up his histories.

CO: Hmm, did you like that?

SP: Well it was interesting, and they taught me to x-ray necks and backs.

CO: Good heavens, you were an x-ray technician and probably wasn’t getting paid for it (laughs).

SP: No, I wasn’t. But it was – they were nonchalant about it, and they said, “We’re gonna teach you to x-ray heads and backs” and so I did. And then my husband got upset – he said “you’re probably exposed to too much radiation,” and so I had to say to the doctor “my husband wants somebody to come out and check what the radiation level is – he’s concerned.” And the doctor said “okay.” So it turned out most of the radiation was in his office (laughs), which we told him. But they didn’t deem it harmful to me, so.

CO: So now did he express any – did he have strong feelings one way or the other about you working outside the home?

SP: No, we both wanted private school for the children.

CO: Okay, so did it cause problems at home because – There's a lot of stuff to do to keep a home clean and people fed and people taken care of.

SP: I had a cleaning woman once a week.

CO: So you had some help – once a week's not a whole lot. But you had some help with it. Did you feel a burden about having to take care of everything in the home?

SP: Yeah, cause he wasn't there much.

CO: When did you realize that you had married someone who had the –

SP: It took me a long time, cause I was very proud of him because he did all this classified work for the government, and he couldn't talk about it. And he had to work hard to get in all these requests for grants. And then he had to do a quarterly report on what they were doing, and this was hard work, and he was the man who could do it. I bought that fiction.

CO: And so you began –

SP: I think I was – well after we separated – after I blew up and said you get counseling or else – I forget where I was going with that.

CO: Well I was asking you about when you recognized he was not quite available emotionally.

SP: Oh – it was 2 weeks before the children asked, "Where's Daddy?"

CO: And he was where? What had happened?

SP: He worked so much, nights and weekends, they didn't realize he was gone for two weeks until two weeks. I said, "Honey, it took them two weeks to realize you hadn't been around and that shows how much you're not here. And I'm going to have to find my children a Daddy." So he shaped up for a while. But then when I went to California – the idea was when I took the job they offered me in California, I said "This gives us a chance to start over. We've gotten so that we're not having a good life together, and you've got contacts out there, you can come to California too and we'll start over." The children were all in college, and he said, "Fine, let's do that." He says, "but I have to finish this project, and then we'll look into it." Well he never did. And by the time I got

out there and found out I could – I didn't have to worry about leaving his plate in the oven, and I could do as I damn well pleased, I didn't want to go back.

CO: Were there ever any attractions outside the marriage for either one of you?

SP: Oh yeah.

CO: While you were married?

SP: Yeah.

CO: Okay. But it sounds like you were both pretty committed to the marriage –

SP: Well, we were until enough time went by that I was so unsatisfied with –

CO: Now would this California opportunity have come around at about 1975 or '76?

SP: Yeah.

CO: Divorced in '81, so it was mid '70s when you went out to California.

SP: Uh huh.

CO: Alright. You really stayed married a long time. Considering.

SP: Thirty-five years in all, yeah. One of my friends said "Sue, you've been pulling an empty wagon long enough."

CO: Mmhm. But was it hard even though you – you know, you knew there wasn't anything left. Was it hard to divorce?

SP: Not for me.

CO: No?

SP: Nuh uh.

CO: Did you get the sense that it was hard for him?

SP: No.

CO: And what about the children, how did they take it?

SP: It was hard for them.

CO: Even though they were grown?

SP: Yeah. It was hard for the girls – I don't think the son had pretty well given up on his family and gone to do his thing, so.

CO: So did they have divided loyalties? The children.

SP: I don't think so.

CO: They just found it hard. Did they have families by then? Families of their own?

SP: The oldest one did. I don't know; I've gotten fuzzy about the dates.

CO: Well that's okay – actually, how many grandchildren do you have?

SP: I have seven.

CO: Seven grandchildren. Are they grown?

SP: My son's children are in their late 20's, my first born's children are in their 30's – two girls, two girls – and then my 3rd child had a boy and two girls. And they're all grown, and the youngest grandchild I have has now had a baby, so I have a great granddaughter. But Terry's youngest child has had a boy and he's five, so I have a great grandson and a great granddaughter.

CO: Okay. How did that feel?

SP: Wonderful!

CO: Really?

SP: Yeah. Miraculous. It helps you orient yourself to where you are in life. It's an orienting kind of a thing.

CO: And you don't have this feeling that it makes a difference – that you don't feel all that maternal instinct to these little bitty –

SP: Nuh uh.

CO: No. Okay. Well how do they feel about you?

SP: I still don't want to get on the floor.

CO: Well, hello. How do those little ones feel about you?

SP: Uh, variously the – my oldest grandchild is an intellectual, and she's too smart for her own good kind of. When she was about seven, it occurred to me to talk to her about it. I said "Jennifer, you have noticed that you're a lot smarter than a lot of other kids in your class, haven't you?" And she said, "Yes." and I said, "That's gonna be a problem for you all your life. And you have to learn to be patient with people who don't think as fast as you do."

CO: Do you think she got it?

SP: I asked her about it a few years ago. I said "do you remember when we were in the car? We were on Claremont somewhere and I told you about that." And she said "I certainly do. I remember it real well." She said "it made a difference." So we're –

CO: You're close?

SP: We communicate when we're together. We're not together a lot, but – now the 2nd child, I didn't relate to as well. And now that she's a Mother, and earning a good job and is doing well in her job, she has a lot more self-respect than – and so she has more respect for other people.

CO: Is this Laura?

SP: No.

CO: Teresa?

SP: Teresa's daughter Kate is the one that has the little boy and we're improving our relationship as I age, and she ages. So –

CO: Okay.

SP: She's – I was gone in California so much of their growing up, I don't feel like I can contribute much.

CO: This your grandchildren?

SP: Yeah.

CO: But where are they now? Okay, she's in Decatur – Teresa. What about her children?

SP: They're in Metropolitan Atlanta. It's either in Duluth or Norcross or somewhere down in there.

CO: So do you see each other on special occasions or holidays?

SP: Mmhm. They were here for my birthday last week.

CO: Oh your birthday was last week!

SP: Last Sunday.

CO: Sure was (laughs). Happy birthday! Belatedly.

SP: Thank you.

CO: And so what was that like?

SP: It was great!

CO: Was it?

SP: Yeah.

CO: That would have been Eighty....

SP: Six

CO: 86, yeah.

SP: That's not really true, I'm really only about 44 (laughs).

CO: Now that's a question. I have a question about how old you feel in your mind, and I knew you weren't going to have any trouble with that question. Some people don't

know what I'm talking about, and some people just get it like that, and I knew you would get it. See, you got there before I did. Um, well I have a question about – it sounds like to some extent, when the children were small, and you were at home and you had something of liberty of interacting with these other Mothers, you know. You had that in common with them, you got that – are many college graduates. Did you miss the active role in Mothering at all or have you ever missed it? Have you ever looked back on it nostalgically?

SP: Nuh uh.

CO: No. Or that period when you were with the other Mothers?

SP: I don't think so. I think – there are so many other things to think about.

CO: Right. But it's interesting to me, because in the south there's a whole lot of sentimentality around Motherhood and child rearing and I haven't talked to a single woman who missed it (laughs).

SP: (Laughs). How about that?

CO: I expect somebody to at least lie about it, but nobody even lies about it.

SP: That's very interesting.

CO: It is, I tell ya. Do you think that Motherhood – you had three children – do you think that Motherhood shaped the person that you are in any way?

SP: Well sure. It takes up your time, and you could have been doing something else – I don't know what. But that's a path and I don't regret having had it thrust upon me. But I didn't really elect it.

CO: Yeah. Cause all three – first, second and third were –

SP: Surprises.

CO: Surprises, okay. What do you think it means – okay, let me go back. If you could go back and do that Mothering role again, what would you do differently? You don't have to answer that if you don't want to. I could write a book on it – many women could (laughs).

SP: I think I'd have to be a different person.

CO: Well, no, but I don't want you to be a different person. Just –

SP: I – you mean if I could pull the strings of fate and arrange a different set of knowledge or something?

CO: No, I don't even know – I mean I guess with every person it means something different. But being the person you are and still knowing the things that you know – you can't change yourself, but you would have foreknowledge perhaps of – you know, of things, what would you do differently? Does that make any more sense?

SP: The only thing I can think of is if I had a better understanding of Fred, I would not have inflicted so much anger in my life.

CO: Okay. And that of course would have affected Mothering.

SP: Yes.

CO: Sure. Well I had one woman say recently and I thought it was just absolutely profound – she said, “You know I would have just made other mistakes.” So (laughs) –

SP: That's wonderful.

CO: I know, it really was. But some people will say – they're very precise in exactly what they feel they would do differently.

SP: Nuh uh. No, I feel like I was just bobbing along on life's current. I don't think I took an active role in planning my life – I let things happen.

CO: Mmhm. Are you that way now?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: So you – and so how different is it now from what it was like then?

SP: Its much more relaxed.

CO: That's gotta be helpful.

SP: Oh yeah. He likes to read and I like to read, and we're a little bit better at understanding the sack of rocks we have to drag around.

CO: So it helps to have somebody who understands the makeup of who you are?

SP: Do we ever understand the makeup of who somebody else is?

CO: Spoken like a true philosopher. Well, some people think they do. Some people think they do.

SP: I think it's very hard for me to get out of me, and really understand where somebody else is. To the extent that I would like somebody to – I don't think I'm capable of knowing another person like I wish another person was capable of knowing me, so I just don't think we can do it.

CO: But you try –

SP: You try, yeah. You try and you try to use your head.

CO: Do you feel like you know yourself? You want somebody else to know you, but do you know yourself?

SP: Yeah, I think I do.

CO: Do you think there's anybody who knows you – not a spouse, but a friend – a person you've related to?

SP: Nuh uh.

CO: No. Is that lonely?

SP: Mmhm. Mmhm. I had the illusion that some people did, but it was cause I wanted it more than it was there.

CO: So you don't think your children really know who you are?

SP: I think Terry does. Yeah, I think she does.

CO: At this point, but not until more recently?

SP: Well, she – yeah.

CO: Does that feel good?

SP: Oh yeah, she's my right arm. And Laura is very close too – we have – now she's an intellectual, and we have real good conversations about philosophical stuff. She is becoming a "life coach" and (laughs) every time we –

CO: Really? A life coach – I mean that's a profession? She's doing that?

SP: Yeah, mmhm. She's working on that and so I (laughs), my son in law said "every time you talk to Laura you feel like you're being counseled." (laughs).

CO: Now what kind of educational training does that require?

SP: She's got a Masters in non-profit something. And she's – this life coaching business, I don't know what that entails in the way of training. But I think she's honest in assessing her own aptitude and her place as that, so I –

CO: What kind of life coach do you think she's gonna make?

SP: Well, she's heavily oriented religiously, cause I am *not*. And she –

CO: What is her orientation?

SP: I would call it Evangelical.

CO: Okay. So you think that's going to influence her life coaching?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: Is Terry?

SP: Terry is also a religiously conservative person. I'm the liberal in the family – well, Chuck is too.

CO: Do they worry about you?

SP: I think they do. I think they do, because my beliefs are so different.

CO: Are you going to be able to talk about them when we get to religion?

SP: Oh yeah.

CO: Good, I look forward to that. Well if I ask you right now what it means to be – what is a good Mother, could you define one? Could you say what it is?

SP: I think a good Mother nurtures in terms of food and shelter and clothing and allows the child to discover who he is.

CO: Are you an affectionate – what role does physical affection play in that?

SP: Oh, we're big huggers. I hug most people (laughs).

CO: And were you a hugger when they were little?

SP: Not as much as I am now, cause I was not hugged when I was a child – it doesn't come – it had to be learned.

CO: Are they huggers – were they huggers to their children?

SP: Yes.

CO: Okay, so do you know somebody – whether it's somebody personally or somebody on – you know, in the movies, television – that you would say is an ideal Mother? Or grandMother?

SP: I don't know anybody who's ideal. I have – I guess my notion of ideal is exaggerated.

CO: Did either one of your daughters come close, or daughter in laws or? Were they in the –

SP: Terry. Terry comes close. She's done a real good job with her girls, and she's doing a great job with her grandchild. And she does a great job with me.

CO: She sounds like a wonderful woman.

SP: She is. She really is, she's just –

CO: Does she enjoy her grandchild?

SP: Oh, does she ever! Does she ever.

CO: Well now we're gonna close up here in just a few minutes if you can hang on for about 12 minutes to take a break. Can you make it 12 minutes?

SP: Sure.

CO: Okay. Do you think Mothering is easier today or harder than it was like when you were Mothering?

SP: I think it's harder.

CO: And why do you think that's so?

SP: Well, because the culture seems to demand that they hover over them every instant. And I didn't – I sort of let them raise themselves. They were a little family among themselves – the three of them.

CO: Did they take care of each other?

SP: Mmhm. They played together.

CO: Okay. Could you say what you admire most about each of your children? You don't have to, or if that doesn't seem like—

SP: I think my girls are basically good people. They're attractive people, they're – I think they're learning to do a good job of taking care of themselves instead of giving too much away. My son is an enigma to me because he is not only estranged from me; he's estranged from his own children.

CO: Do you think he may be touched with what his father had?

SP: What an interesting idea.

CO: I mean it's a physical thing, it certainly probably has genetic –

SP: Could be, I don't know. Could be.

CO: How about your ex-husband's father? What sort of person was he?

SP: I never knew him, so whatever impression I have of him has to be -- it can't be accurate. He was a minister –

CO: Baptist?

SP: No, Anglican.

CO: Ah ha, he was a priest.

SP: He was a priest, and my husband once said rather bitterly, he said, "We did not have peers. We had bishops and those who needed help."

CO: Wow. Okay, so you think you'd call your daughters good people. Was there a time in your son's life when you two were close?

SP: Yeah. I felt like we were. He would say things like "Mom, I want you to listen to this, I know you'll like it." Some kind of music he – and I always did. So he sensed – (dog barks)

-----End of part 2-----

-----Part 3 101:36-----

CO: Okay, we're back, we just took a break for lunch, and we – I believe we finished up – yes we did. Finished up the children and marriage, and that sort of thing. We can always come back to it if something comes up. The next category of questions, Sue, is about work. And so you had several jobs outside the home?

SP: Yes.

CO: Can you just kind of list them – I mean could you list them?

SP: Okay. While I was in college, I worked summers at Georgia Tech at various little clerical things. When I got out of college, after – when my Mother took care of my baby, I went back to Tech full time and worked as a research assistant. But what I did was – I was the security officer for the classified – and I did some editing. So then after that, when I quit work to take care of the children, then as I said we wanted money so we could send the kids to private school, I got part time jobs with doctors. And then I was recruited by a friend to work for the 1970 decennial census. And I loved that job – it was a 6 month job, and I was office manager for collecting data in DeKalb county and part of Atlanta and some of Gwinnett. Some of Fulton, all of DeKalb, and some of Gwinnett – no, all of Gwinnett. And I loved it because I was the boss. And I – we came in -- we scored well in coming in high up in the speed of the job. And from that I got hired at the regional planning commission to run a study of employment. It was in

connection with starting the Marta trains – they wanted to know how many people worked where, and so we did that. And while I was doing that, I was recruited to go work for the Census Bureau, and so I did. And I worked for the Census Bureau until I was recruited to work for Social Security, and I worked over in the black area of town.

CO: And what sort of information were you compiling then?

SP: Well, you mean at Marta? Or in Social Security?

CO: Yeah, in Social Security.

SP: Well I was trained to be a claims rep – I was the one you come to, to get your money when you retire, or when somebody dies or if you're disabled. So I did that for a while in that boulevard area, and then one day I happened to be in the main office trying to get something out of the file cabinet when I heard the manager – who was not a very stable person – come out and says, "Is anybody interested in going to California for three months? They need some help out there." And I said "I am!" And he said "your husband won't let you go, I'm not going to put you down." And I said "Yes he will!" And so he said "well, I'll put your name in the hat, but everybody in the world wants to go." And then I had this extraordinary little experience, cause that day I went home, and I was getting ready to go to Garden Club (?) and I was looking in the mirror, putting on my makeup and it was like a trailer on the TV: What are you going to pack to go to California? And the next day I went in and they picked my name. Eerie. So I went to California for the 3 months, and they said, "we like you, how about transferring out here?" "Hey Fred, let's go to California?" He says "you go, I'll come later." So then I stayed out there almost 12 years, and then my Mama got sick and I –

CO: Now that 12 years, were you married that whole time?

SP: Part of it. I think I went out there in '76? Or '77. And we were divorced in '82 – '81. Cause he found a lady who very much wanted him to give her some children, because he made good children, which is true he did. Of course he wasn't the only one who made them (laughs). But – and the 2 children he had with that lady are very fine people, so -- Okay.

CO: So you were out there 12 years doing census type work?

SP: No, this was social security. I loved it out there – I felt very at home.

CO: Now where were you in California?

SP: The Monterey Bay – first the office was in Monterey, not far from the aquarium – they built an aquarium while I was there. And then they put in a – they moved us out of the rented place into a new rented place in Carnell (?????).

CO: Did your children visit you much while you were out there?

SP: Some. By then they had their own jobs, families, and responsibilities, but they did visit me. And all of em did, more than once, and then when Mother got sick, I had to quit that job. So I went home and we thought I couldn't get a job in Atlanta because there was a hiring freeze on all federal agencies at the time.

CO: Now roughly when was this?

SP: '80.

CO: Oh, okay.

SP: '80, '81. And Mama didn't live very long, and that was the scariest part of my life from an economical standpoint because I didn't have a job, I couldn't get a job, Mother didn't have any money to leave me. I started applying – went to every federal agency in the metropolitan area, and they would say you're either over qualified or we have a freeze on. So I really wanted to work at CDC, cause that was pretty close to my house and besides I was interested in CDC. Well finally my neighbor across the street talked to her friend who was a high up at CDC and said, "I don't understand why you all don't hire my friend." And the next day I had an interview. So I worked at CDC until I retired.

CO: Oh wow, was that fun? Did you like that?

SP: Yes, I did. I worked with some wonderful people.

CO: I bet it was exciting at times.

SP: It was, yeah. The first person I worked for was head of – it won't come to me, anyway. Our epidemiologists were always going out to outbreaks. They went on –

CO: That's what this book is about – outbreaks. *Inside the outbreak*, I believe was the title – the one I was telling you about.

SP: What's the man's name?

CO: Mark Pentergrast.

SP: I've heard of him.

CO: I'm sure. That book is probably – according to his Mother – the most successful of his 8 books and I can understand why.

SP: That was really exciting. And –

CO: So now, okay, this was what year? What are the – What year did you retire?

SP: '92.

CO: Okay, so it would've been mid '80s to '92?

SP: Mother died in '8- when did she die?

CO: You said here that she died in '80.

SP: Okay, so I worked from '80 to '92 up at the CDC. '81 to –

CO: Your divorce was April 21st, 1981. Your Mother died May 4th, 1980 according to your sheet you sent me. So –

SP: I may be a little confused there, let's see. No, Fred was not married when Mother died, that's right. She died before the divorce.

CO: Well according to these records, that would be right – the dates were right. So you worked roughly 12 years there.

SP: Mmhm.

CO: Would you say that that's the job you – which job did you enjoy most?

SP: The census job in 1970, cause I was the boss.

CO: Cause you were the boss (laughs), do you like being the boss?

SP: Well, I didn't – I enjoyed CDC work very much, but Social Security work was unpleasant in that management took an adversarial attitude toward the field people. It was like – I don't know – CDC was very collegial, even with the staff people. But the social security was very bureaucratic and you must meet this and you must do like that and so on. It was unpleasant. Especially if you had once been a boss. (laughs).

CO: Is there anything you would have like to have done as a job or profession, a career, other than what you did? When you think about the variety of things you might have been good at, enjoyed, do you – is there anything?

SP: Nope. Nuh uh. No, I never had a specific goal and I had general interest in a lot of things, but not an overriding interest in anything.

CO: Do you think there are any jobs that women ought not to do?

SP: No.

CO: Okay. And when your children were at home, did they get a sense of – your son and your 2 daughters – did you teach them all 3 whether directly or by example to be economically independent? I mean, you said yourself your parents would have not endorsed your academic track, they –

SP: Oh, I wanted my children to have everything I didn't have. Certainly they were gonna go to college, and they would do whatever they wanted to do.

CO: So you didn't in any way encourage the girls to go get married and let a man take care of them?

SP: Oh no, no. Nuh uh. I said "you've gotta learn in case you need to support yourself, you need to know how."

CO: Okay. Is there an accomplishment or an achievement that you would like to have had that you didn't? You didn't get?

SP: Yeah, I think the Social Security agency did not recognize my contribution.

CO: Okay. What was it like to retire?

SP: It was liberating.

CO: (laughs) everybody says that.

SP: It was wonderful, and I love it! I love being around – I'm so grateful I lived long enough to enjoy retirement for awhile.

CO: Yeah. Is there anything you miss about work?

SP: No.

CO: Okay. Now about money, are you better off financially than your parents?

SP: Yes.

CO: Okay. Then your siblings?

SP: No siblings.

CO: Oh I'm sorry, that's right, I'm thinking about your Mother's siblings. Alright. Was your family conscious – like I asked you a little bit ago about what class would you identify yourself in –

SP: Well I think we've always considered ourselves middle class.

CO: Even your parents who farmed and –

SP: Mmhm.

CO: Okay. And would you say that you've achieved the financial ambitions that you had set for yourself? Are you better off than you thought you would be –

SP: I'm better off than I thought I would be.

CO: Okay. So could you describe the roll money has played in shaping you into the person you are?

SP: When I went to California, I was very surprised to realize that I could support myself on my salary because one of my coworkers was about my age and she had bought a house and she had supported a daughter through college, and she didn't make any more than I did. And I thought wow, how about that. So I managed to invest in a – I was living in a condo, and I bought another condo unit. I borrowed some money from my friend for the down payment, and paid it off promptly as I could every month. And then I rented out the condo and became aware of the tax benefits and so forth. And then later – and meanwhile I was not living the high life. I was – I finally said, "I've got to have a new brazier" (laughs). So I was very conscious of trying to take care of Mother, hang onto the lake place where she was living, and – cause she couldn't do it, she had not much income. We had to help her and Fred was good about that. We paid her taxes and I think her insurance. Well then after the divorce, I had to take care of that. So my motivations were to keep the lake place which was so dear to all of us, and

to build up some retirement. So I did not live a hedonistic life at all in California (laughs).

CO: And you could've.

SP: I could've.

CO: Well may I ask about that? How your parents felt about your husband Fred?

SP: Well they loved him.

CO: Were they aware of when you started having problems? Was that –

SP: Well they finally had to know it – none the less, when Daddy was sick, Fred was very good to him. He would take care of him and he was very attentive to him, and so – we reconciled and lived together again, and so we were together when Daddy died. I remember Mother was not surprised – she knew how absent he was. So she didn't like it. Fred was a sweet man – when his light shown on you, it was very bright. He just didn't shine much.

CO: Do you think he ever was aware? Did it ever sink in to him? In retrospect, do you think that he just couldn't help it?

SP: Now I think he couldn't help it, but at the time I was just angry. For example, when Laura's appendix popped, and she had to have emergency surgery, he didn't come. He didn't come sit with me. He was helping out at the school at the Miss Briarcliff Pageant. And he thought that's where he was needed. And he was oblivious to the fact that – he really was oblivious to the fact that he should've been with me. And he wasn't worried about her; "Oh the doctors will take care of her." (Laughs) Turned out that our family doctor heard about Laura being there and he came to find me, and he said, "where's Fred?" And I said, "he's working at the Miss Briarcliff Festival thing." So he sat with me. He was a doctor himself, and he sat with me until Laura was out of surgery and we knew she was okay. No big deal, it was an appendectomy. But anyway, it was – it hurt.

CO: How did Laura – did she question his absence?

SP: No. She didn't know he was absent. By the time she woke up, she was in his arms.

CO: Well can we talk about the experience of loss, whether that's through death or divorce or health or whatever? Not many questions – but what is the most difficult loss you've experienced through death?

SP: Mother.

CO: Your Mother?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: Can you recall other significant losses that caused a similar kind of grief?

SP: Yeah. I had an affair once that ended with me getting dumped, and that was hard.

CO: Can you talk about that?

SP: Don't want to.

CO: Okay. But that is exactly what I'm talking about – something besides death that hurts like death.

SP: Yeah. That was so painful. There was so much hope there and it shriveled up.

CO: Did you – how old were you?

SP: Let's see. It was about 1962 – it was 1962, so how old was I? 36?

CO: Yeah. In your 30's. Did your husband know?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: And I know that you've had some health diagnoses that – has that been –

SP: Well, I'm not real happy about having Parkinson's. I don't look forward to being rigid and – but I've got long term health insurance and some money in the bank, so I think I probably won't be a total burden, but it's going to be so hard on my children to watch me go away. And I really wish that we could be put down like we do dogs. I think it makes sense.

CO: Oh goodness. Is that something that – I should know – I know someone with the illness – is that hereditary?

SP: I don't know. I'm the first one that we know of.

CO: Okay. How was it different? This is something I – how was it different suffering a kind of loss that you describe as extremely painful – how different from that was the loss through death was that?

SP: Oh, terribly different. When Mother died, I was glad because she needed to die. But the heartbreak of the other . . .

CO: How long did it take you to get over that?

SP: Oh – Huh, I don't know, let's see. Probably at least a couple of years, maybe 3.

CO: Do you remember how you felt about "Old people" when you were a young adult? Remember thinking 30 was old?

SP: Oh yeah, and 40 was real old. And I was disdainful of people who just sat and rocked and looked at the leaves, and now I love to do that (laughs). The wind blowing the leaves is just so beautiful.

CO: What's been the most difficult part of aging?

SP: Loss of stamina.

CO: But there are some rewards to aging.

SP: Well, I look back and I've really done some living. I got to go to Europe a couple of times – Chuck and I went to Germany, and that was a wonderful trip – we also did a long RV trip out west and one of the memories I cherish is being in Nebraska, and all you could see is wheat and the road in front of you. There were no signs, there were no telephone poles, there were no people, there were no houses. It was beautiful. So I have a lot of good memories, and I don't think about my estranged son much more at all – it's his life, and I can't fix it. I'm much more aware of what I can't fix and so it doesn't bother me.

CO: Is that a benefit of aging?

SP: Yes.

CO: You've gotten a degree of wisdom that really only comes with age and experience.

SP: Yeah. Somebody helped me with that – somebody who had an alcoholic son and I was whining about something one the day and she said “you need to go to alcoholics anonymous” and I said “what?” She said “they’ll teach you about the 3 C’s.” And I said “what 3 C’s?” And she said “I can’t control it, I can’t cure it, I can’t –

CO: Change it?

SP: I forget the 3 C’s – can’t control it, can’t cure it – oh, I didn’t cause it.

CO: How would you feel about your son – or would you conduct yourself any differently if you found out he did have Asperger’s?

SP: Yes. It would console me that there was something that caused it.

CO: What age do you recall – or do you recall any age more nostalgically or more favorably than other times in life? Is there a time that – or like if you could remain at a certain age for the rest of your life because you recall it as a good age, what would it be?

SP: I think when I first went to California. And that was 1977 –

CO: You were 50.

SP: Yeah, and I was so happy because I felt free.

CO: Was that the first time in your adult life that you felt free?

SP: Probably so.

CO: It’s a liberating feeling.

SP: Yeah.

CO: Well can you talk about – let’s see, let’s talk about religion. Can you talk about religion?

SP: Sure.

CO: This is a question I got off of NPR. It was something they put on their website and asked people to write in and say what was the core value that had most driven them? I mean, we have a lot of core values, whether we’re religious or not, but there’s probably

one that drives us more than any other. Can you think of what core value has driven you?

SP: Nuh uh, I can't. Except for maybe wanting to learn. I got a fever for learning when I was at Agnes Scott. I realized how pleasant it is to learn stuff and when you run across references to something in literature – or somebody says so and so and such and such – and you've got a glimmer of what they're talking about. It enlarges life. I wanted to enlarge life, and I still do – that's why I like to read.

CO: Yeah. I used to say that when I first learned that about myself – that when I was learning, I was not aging. That it was like learning stopped time, and I felt like whatever else was going on – if I was learning, then that's where I was supposed to be, and time was standing still and I was not getting –

SP: Yes, I hear that.

CO: And I love the quote by Meister Eckhart that if you're growing spiritually – older spiritually, that that's growing younger. So that to grow – the inner being grows, it gets younger (laughs). I loved that.

SP: I'm not sure I resonate with that, but I'll think about it.

CO: Oh, I did when I first heard it – I may not be quoting it – well I know I'm not quoting him right, but it really – but when you were talking about your family, you said your Mother and your grandMother were religious. So religion was important – but your grandfather got—

SP: I – well, yeah, well I'm getting into a comparison here. Neither of those ladies is religious as I think my daughters are.

CO: Can you discover how different –

SP: Well I think their lives were so different. Those two women were much more restricted in where they could go and what they could do. The rural grandMother had her family and all her chores, and her milking, and her making clothes and her washing things in the wash pot out in the back yard and hauling up water to put in the reservoir.

CO: She didn't have time to do much more than just go to church when she could.

SP: Right, and besides that, it wasn't every Sunday, because they had an itinerant guy that came around every once in a while. So it was not every Sunday stuff.

CO: But your daughters – do they do more –

SP: Church work.

CO: Church work or is it inner work? Do they do a lot of – or is it one in the same for them?

SP: The younger one does more inner work, but the older one has such a heavy job – but she's doing inner work too. And they talk to each other about this, and they've been to workshops with emphasis on religion, but also opening up yourself.

CO: What kind of church are they involved in?

SP: Terry goes to Presbyterian Church of America, which is more conservative. And Laura goes to an outfit that's called the Kingdom, which is a small group of people up mostly in Rhode Island and Vermont and New Hampshire. But they've got a few people out in Thousand Oaks, California, and there's a bunch of em in McDonough.

CO: So – but you did say your Mother and your grandMother didn't ever question the Baptist beliefs –

SP: No, nuh uh.

CO: Could you tell me what your religious beliefs are? Or your spiritual values – you can call it whatever you want to.

SP: Well, I go to the Episcopal Church here because I am just thrilled with the people who go. The community there is wonderful, it's just wonderful. But I do not believe the Creed, I do not believe in the resurrection, I do not believe that Jesus is the only son of God. I believe that he was a social rebel and that he had – he's one of those people who was driven to do what he thought was right. And I have no trouble with his values of compassion and justice. Those are my values too, but I get pretty uncomfortable in the liturgy.

CO: Does the Eucharist bother you?

SP: The Eucharist itself is kind of like – I can accept that for some reason, but the saying of the creed and some of the stuff in some of the hymns and all that – no, I just don't believe it.

CO: But you don't – the Eucharist doesn't – I mean like Emerson when he had his fallout –

SP: The Eucharist is a symbol of eating with family and friends. It's a community. It's a little activity that symbolizes a community.

CO: So it doesn't bother you that they bless the –

SP: The body and the blood is – I had to get over that.

CO: So you told me what your beliefs are not. Okay, you told me that what they are are a belief in justice and compassion. Okay, would you consider yourself a humanist in the old, sort of classical sense of that?

SP: I guess so. Um – I've come to have more respect for people who think differently from me than I did when I was rebellious about it. How can you believe such and such, and so and so, don't you have any sense? I've got away from that reaction, thank goodness. And now it's just kind of mumble along – I don't – we were talking about it one day at Wednesday meetings about these people who know, and who define God and who seem to have a fixed universe that they can describe in living comfortably. Not me, I don't know. And I said, I don't know and I never will know and that's alright.

CO: You can handle the mystery.

SP: Yeah.

CO: Okay. And when you talk to your daughters about – I mean, when they – do they try to talk to you – try to convince you –

SP: No.

CO: No. That's gotta be helpful.

SP: (laughs) No they don't, thank goodness.

CO: But do you know what they believe? I mean are they pretty clear about what they believe. And is it – well you described at least one of them as Evangelical, so they believe in sort of the Christian Creed of –

SP: Well they say things like "Thank you Jesus" and "Bless you God. Thank you for blessing me, God," and they want to say grace and I'm uncomfortable saying grace,

but I do it. And I like it when they're here, but we don't do it. I have some attachment to ways I grew up with and that I've outgrown or – but I'm still attached, and I still respect them. Sometimes I envy people who know Jesus. What does that mean?

CO: Well, have you had what you would consider a spiritual experience? And some people get turned off by that cause they think I'm talking about speaking in tongues or something – I am not, I mean any time that an insight – I mean an insight comes from it seems like nowhere. You just suddenly know something is crystal clear to you.

SP: When the tornado hit –

CO: Can you – just before you – I want you to tell this story. But tell this recorder about that experience, can you do that quickly?

SP: When I was helpless, I knew with great certainty that my neighbors down the road were going to take care of us. And I realized later that that certainty that I experienced about that particular thing was unique in my life. A certainty – I don't have many certainties, and I rejoiced that I had that one. Of course the truth was they slept through the whole thing (laughs). But still, I had –

CO: But the certainty consoled you and kept you from probably going into shock.

SP: Yes it did.

CO: Can you say something about the tornado?

SP: Oh, we were in bed, and later we found out that the tornado hit about shortly after 11, and we went to bed at say 10ish. And I realized that Chuck had gotten up, and I sat up to see what he was doing, and then the – we had a Cathedral ceiling in the glass here, and I had this vision – like a stop shot in a movie of glass breaking (claps). All these little fragments were still in this memory – I could see that. My next awareness was that I was being turned left, and then the next awareness – and in between there was nothing. Nothing. The next awareness I was flat on my back, and I had a piece of mattress spring on top of me, and on top of that was a louvred door that was kind of balanced. And it was raining, and I had stuff all over my face which turned out to be insulation. And lot's of lightning. The trees were thrashing and they were twisted, and –

CO: Where were you?

SP: On the second floor of our house.

CO: So you're still in the house, but you could see the trees—had it blown the roof –

SP: The roof was gone. And the side wall was gone. And I said “Chuck, Chuck, Chuck!!” And he said, “I’m here.” And once I knew he was alive, I got – I was calm. And I said, “But you don’t have your oxygen?” And he said “No.” I said “We better not talk.” “Okay.” Later on I found that we were – between the time that the thing hit, and when we were rescued was almost five hours. And I have no – I did not realize that that much time was going by. And I was not aware of great pain, even though – well you can see my scars – still here since April. And my shoulder got banged up, but now I know that my hip got banged up. But I did not feel any pain, but I knew that this arm was bleeding. But I knew that somebody was going to get us, and it would be okay. So finally –

CO: Where was Chuck? Where was he?

SP: He was – it sounded like if I was lying here, he was back here somewhere.

CO: Had the storm done that?

SP: Yeah. The house was totaled. We don’t know how we survived. It was totaled. Boat house was gone, the RV was gone, the boats were gone – 2 cars were gone – well they were wrecked, they were in the garage. A lot of the office was destroyed, and – now see that cabinet over there with the crystal in it? That survived. This clock survived. And they were right underneath where we were. I can’t explain it.

CO: Tell me again, when you had that sort of certainty that your neighbors would take care of you?

SP: When I woke up.

CO: So did the storm wake you up? That woke you up? Or did you pass out and then wake up? Did you pass out from injury?

SP: Yes – Yes, I must have. Cause all I remember was being turned left. And then –

CO: And that was the storm flipping the –

SP: Yeah, mmhm. I guess.

CO: And it flipped Chuck out of bed?

SP: He was over here, and he said he was up in the air. And then that little thing and some lumber pieces somehow pinned him to what was left of the fireplace wall, which – our bed was backed up to the fireplace wall. And –

CO: Now how long was he pinned? Was he pinned that whole 5 hours?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: Were you all talking/communicating?

SP: We talked very little – cause he didn't have the oxygen to talk. And the thing that saved us was that our neighbor over this way, and uphill from us a little bit could see that our roof was gone. They had damage, so they couldn't get out of their house to come see about us, but they did have a phone that worked. And they called 911 and said, "these people's roof is gone and he needs oxygen." So – and then the EMT people started out, and they didn't know what had happened. They just knew that there was this call. It took them a couple of hours to get to us because all of the trees all over the place, and they got me first. And they took care of Chuck – he got oxygen right away, and then they called the fireboat to come get us and an ambulance to be across the lake – cause there was no way we could get through the trees with bodies. The only way out was across the lake. And it's just a fantastic story, and I was amazed – it must have been shock that protected me, because I was not conscious of great pain until I got in the hospital, and then everything started hurting.

CO: Did you feel a sense though that you were going to be okay?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: So you weren't scared?

SP: No.

CO: And you weren't worried about Chuck once you heard he was okay?

SP: No. I think I stopped thinking.

CO: But do you have a sense that a spiritual presence was with you?

SP: No. Nuh uh. The people say, "God rescued you." I don't believe that.

CO: You don't?

SP: Nuh uh.

CO: So you don't believe in a God?

SP: Not really. I think there's something – well God is love. I can get along with that, but there's too much chaos to believe in a God who cares about me specifically, or anybody else specifically. I don't know that that's true, but that's my conclusion from what I do know. But I know I don't know everything and I don't know and I never will know and its okay (laughs). I'll find out, or else I won't – cause see, I was so out in that tornado experience, that I now know such a thing exists as not existing.

CO: You mean the lapses between when you had an awareness – then it was nothingness – then you had an awareness?

SP: Mmhm. And then I had some more nothingness apparently because I was certainly not aware that 5 hours went by.

CO: So you're not afraid of nothingness?

SP: I think it's going to be peaceful rest. A good sleep.

CO: Has that given you a sense of peace?

SP: Yeah.

CO: Okay.

SP: I dread pain.

CO: Would you call what happened to you a miracle?

SP: I don't think so. I think it's just the way the wind blew. I don't think that some God decided to blow the wind so that they'd spare the crystal and me and Chuck and the dogs – we had three dogs and they survived.

CO: Where were they?

SP: Well they were sleeping in the room with us when the thing hit.

CO: Where's the 3rd one?

SP: We had to put her down. She's in box in there in the office (laughs). She was a big black standard poodle.

CO: Have your – I know this is true, but your religious values changed over time. You said something about realizing as early as four, didn't you say?

SP: Six.

CO: Six, okay. That –

SP: It didn't make sense.

CO: But have they changed since then or has it been really –

SP: Oh no, I've thought and thought and tried to believe and listen and read and – it's been – it took me a long time to get here.

CO: But you're satisfied with where you are in terms of your beliefs?

SP: Pretty much. Pretty much.

CO: So do you believe in an afterlife?

SP: Nuh uh.

CO: No. Okay. Well, what single experience has given you great joy? What gives you great joy?

SP: Dancing.

CO: Dancing (laughs).

SP: And I think that's the most joy I've ever experienced.

CO: I love that. How long since you've been dancing?

SP: I can't dance anymore. It's been –

CO: Do you like to watch it?

SP: No, not especially. I don't watch the TV's stuff. They're acting. It's not the same as being one with the music and movement. I was gonna say something else, but it went away – I've had heart valve replacement, I've broken my neck, I had the tornado, and now I've got Parkinson's (laughs). But I'm doing pretty well with the Parkinson's and one thing that I would like to say to anybody who wants to learn something from me is the value of deep tissue massage. I could hardly walk about a month ago, and I had terrible back pain, and part of it is that a good doctor gave me a shot in my back. We found out that I had some sort of anomaly in the base of my spine on my left side, and it has pushed my spinal cord into a bulge, and I feel pretty sure that that happened in the tornado. Cause all my injury is on the left side. But it could have been my face, you know?

CO: Sure.

SP: Or my belly. So –

CO: Well the question was what gives you great joy, and somehow you got to this. And you said dancing, but you also wound up talking about deep tissue massage. Do you enjoy the massage?

SP: Dancing – I'm evangelizing it because it has done me so much good. I've had five sessions with this very good lady, and she has given me my body back. My muscles were all rocks, and for the first time within the last week, I was able to wash my feet properly. I could not get over to bathe my toes – I just had to soak em. And for the first time, I could undo my bra by myself. Chuck says he's lost a job (laughs). But it's really wonderful to get your body back after it's been so damaged.

CO: Well you're preaching to the choir here, but some people don't believe it. I know – I mean I know from experience that it can make – it's better than medicine.

SP: It is! It is.

CO: So would you say you feel at peace in yourself?

SP: Not entirely because I'm impatient with Chuck. He's getting slow, and his reaction time is slower than it used to be, and he can't hear, and he won't go see the hearing lady because he doesn't want to. And his life energy is pretty low, and I'm not nearly patient enough with that. That bothers me.

CO: Cause you're not patient?

SP: Because I'm not patient specifically with him. Because he can't help it, and I just get – And that's because when you don't feel good, you can't be as nice as you can when you do feel good.

CO: Right. Well you know what you didn't talk about when you were talking about romance and marriage and children and all that – you didn't talk about how you all met.

SP: Oh! Through his son. I was going to St. Bartholomew's in Atlanta and I was thinking "I don't have much social life." And that's the only reason I went back to church, and sure enough, they had Foyers Groups there. And so I signed up for a foyers group and Chuck's son was in it with his wife. And I was immediately attracted to Marty – very charming young man. And so when it came my turn to entertain this Foyer's Group, I asked them if they'd be interested in going up to Lake Burton. And they said, "yeah." So they came, and Marty—I knew by then that he was – that he did – I'm losing words. He fixed up houses – I said, "Marty, would you mind looking around and telling me if there's something that I outta attend to, that I haven't caught onto." And he said "Sure." So he went around and he looked and he said "for what you use this place for, I think you're in good shape." Well, sometime later, I was getting the house ready to rent it for the winter, and I was closing up the house and those old awning windows broke, and I couldn't close the windows. So that meant I had to get new windows. So I called on Marty, "Do you know anybody up in this area that I can depend on to get me some new windows?" He said, "Well Sue, let me do that." I said "No you can't, it's too far for you to commute." He said "well I'll get a crew up there and I can work that out." It turns out he got his Daddy to come supervise his crew, and that's how we met.

CO: Were you attracted to him?

SP: The minute I saw him.

CO: The minute you saw him.

SP: Mmhm. But it wasn't gonna work, because he's 8 years younger than I am.

CO: Did you know that to start with?

SP: No, but I found out right quick. But the minute I saw him I said, "oh" to myself. And so when Marty got through doing whatever we were working on then, he said "I'm sorry but I cannot build your corner cabinet for you, but maybe my Daddy could." And I said "Well I would love that." So –

CO: Did he know you were attracted to his father?

SP: No. Nuh uh. So then he goes to his Daddy and he says, "Sue wants you to build her a cabinet." So he came up in his trailer, parked in the back yard, and I said, "Well I'll cook for him if he'll come do it." So we got to get acquainted, and I found out that he had been in the Naval – the –

CO: He had been where?

SP: He had been at DLI – on the Monterey Peninsula when he was learning German for his military career. And we got to talk about living on the Peninsula, and then we got to talking about how we liked not being married, so we could do as we pleased –

-----End of part 3-----

SP: And while he was building my cabinet, it got real hot. And this was the 3rd week of May, and somehow got real hot and he was sweating. And I said, "Why don't you take a break. Go get in the hammock." He said, "you got a hammock?" I said "yes." So I said "here, I'll show you where it is." And went down to the boathouse and got the hammock out and I showed him where we hang it, and he said "okay, I'll get in on this side and you get in on that side." And I jumped right in.

CO: (laughs) He didn't have to ask you twice!

SP: And the minute my head hit – and you know you roll if you're in a hammock. When my head hit his chest, I knew. And he said that's when we stopped lying to each other.

CO: Now how long had this been – building the cabinets going on?

SP: A few days.

CO: Whoa!

SP: Well I had met him originally in November of '98, and then – that's when we found out we had to do some more repair on the house, and so Marty was coming back in April to do that when the winter tenant left. And so when it got time to – it was May – Marty had other jobs, but Daddy could come do the cabinet. So we got married July the 5th. I have a little pillow back there that says, "Married in haste and unrepentant." (Laughs).

CO: Would you say he's the love of your life?

SP: Yeah.

CO: You were – what 71?

SP: 70.

CO: 70. And he was 62?

SP: Yep.

CO: Wow. And it sounds like his son would have been happy. Was his son happy?

SP: I think his son – his son would've made of me a Mother figure to him, but this being a Mother in law didn't appeal to the son, so he didn't like that to start with but he's fine with it now.

CO: What about your children?

SP: My children think that he ties me down too much.

CO: Oh, because of the health.

SP: Yeah.

CO: Did he have those health issues –

SP: No. No, very vigorous and knew how to do everything – built things and improved the lake house so much. Grounds and the house, and it's really hard on him now that he can't do –

CO: Well what happened – was it a sudden?

SP: Uh, he got lung disease, he got pneumonia. And it turns out that when he was a youth, he worked with asbestos, plus he was a smoker – pipe smoker for many years. And then after he got into treating the lung business, he got kidney disease. So he's next door to dialysis. And I have a nurse friend who thought he wouldn't make the winter about 4 years ago, but he keeps coming back. He keeps coming back. It's very up and down, and the pollen bothers him. Diesel gas fumes bother him, dust bothers him –

CO: Now what did he do before? You said he was a physicist?

SP: That was my first husband. He was a military man – Chuck.

CO: Chuck was a military man? Navy?

SP: Army.

CO: Army, okay. Well, under Charles Paulsen I have research physicist, but that—

SP: No, no, that's Fred Dixon.

CO: Okay. So when he retired from the military, did he not work?

SP: Um, he built a house or 2, and he also worked as a manager of paper delivery for the *Journal Constitution*. He had to have something where he could stay home because his wife was very, very ill – she was bipolar, and it was not well managed because they didn't have the medicines then that they do now.

CO: So did she die? Is he a widow?

SP: Yeah, he'd been widowed six years when I met him.

CO: Six? Oh, okay. Well I don't know how we got past the marriage and Motherhood and children and all that and didn't get your current relationship, but –

SP: (Laughs) It's a long life.

CO: But so do your children get along with him okay?

SP: I would say – they are more generous-hearted to him than he is to them. My children are very successful. He is estranged from – he has two other sons that we never see. Marty is bipolar, so he's had this fear that he may get into serious trouble. He's alright now, but we just kind of never know. He might start drinking again. So there's all this worry about *his* children, and not so much about mine. And mine are close, and they like to come, and they feel like where I am is home, and so he feels like he's not part of home to them, which he isn't. So there's tension. That's a problem in our current life, but I've learned to stick up for myself and say, "I can't help it. Where I am is their home." And when his daughter comes here, she's home too.

CO: Do you get along with her okay?

SP: Yeah. She's very helpful.

CO: How old is she?

SP: Nearly 50. We've had a few rough times – Mary Ann and I have – because she is wired to take care of people. So when she comes, she tends to take over and take care of both of us. And that threatens me because I don't want it done that way, and no I am not that sick and – so her overprotectiveness and my independence (claps hands).

CO: Clash, right.

SP: But she means well.

CO: That can still be hard though.

SP: Yeah, it is kind of hard. One time (laughs), oh dear. And she has a problem child – when we got the insurance settlement – it was my house, so I got the money. And I have clung to it. And he has a little resentment because he says, “Well it was my house too.” And I said “you didn't work to support it like I did all those years. It's my children's house, we made that clear before we got married.” I said, “You can have what is mine from now on, but you cannot have the lake. That belongs to my children. I owe that to my parents.” And also to my first husband. I told him, “If you” – before we got married, I called my first husband and said, “the way I read our agreement, you continue to pay me alimony even if I remarry. But I want to be sure that's true.” And he said, “Yes, that's true.” And I said “Otherwise, I couldn't keep the lake. And I consider that you and I are going to give our children the lake, not just me.” So I'm bound by honor to my parents and to him that whatever that lake sells for goes to my kids. But anyway, I got the insurance money, and suddenly I have a lot of money compared to what I used to have. So I decided to give the people who helped me with the tornado so much --- \$5000 apiece. And when I gave it to Chuck's daughter, I said, “There's a caveat here. You may not spend it on your child. This money is for you, and **nobody** else.” Well she didn't like that at first. And I said – we call her Mare, her name is Mary Ann – I said, “Mare, I've watched you all these years. You don't do anything for yourself. Now if you want this, you're going to have to do for yourself.” She wrote me back, she said, “I've got some new jeans and some new tennis shoes and 2 new shirts.” (Laughs).

CO: (Laughs). I hope she didn't spend \$5000 on them!

SP: And then she got herself a propane tank – she likes – she's a potter. And she's getting a new kennel, a new wheel, and a propane tank so that she can do potting at home, instead of going out and paying somebody else to do her stuff for her.

CO: What a great idea! So she was okay with that?

SP: She's reveling in it now that she's done it! (Laughs)

CO: That's great, that could have saved her. She might shift somewhere inside –

SP: I hope so, I hope so. She's a dear person, and she loves her Daddy.

CO: Is she the baby?

SP: No. Marty's the baby – the one that does houses. [And is] bipolar.

CO: Oh the one that introduced you, yeah. Well do you mind talking a little bit about regional identity? Southern Identity?

SP: Oh! That's fun. When I went to California, I realized how provincial we all are. Because when I had landed in California --this girl from Atlanta-- they were pretty snooty. Well, you know, "How'd she get here?" And they were right, I had **pull [leverage]** in a way, that's why my name got picked to go out there – because of somebody I knew higher up in the agency. (laughs) Of course I picked up that I was being scrutinized. Well then we had a little party, and everybody was to bring something. So I fixed my little dish and I took it in, and the strongest person out there in the group had some and she said "oooh who made this?" And I said, "I did", and she said "you did??" I said "Yeah, you'd be surprised how cosmopolitan Atlanta could be." (Laughs). And then I realized that I was just as bad, because my notion of California people was peacock feathers, movie stars, cowboys, strange religions, cults, weird stuff. Debauchery.

CO: (Laughs) If the shoe fits for some of em. But it's not true of all Californians –

SP: No!

CO: Just like we're not too ignorant, completely backwards and foaming at the mouth racists.

SP: (Laughs) Exactly. That's kind of why I asked you about Valdosta women, because I realize that my notion of South Georgia people somehow can't be right, but where did I get it and why does it cling?

CO: Exactly. Well that's the historian in you, cause that's what we want to know – is where these myths – and myths have some truth to it, so where does it come from and why do I think this.

SP: Yeah. I don't know why I think – I think I can remember somebody saying “oh, well that's South Georgia” in a dismissive way, and I've erected all this stuff out of that.

CO: Yeah. Well, but I think defensively people in Deep South Georgia are always juxtaposing themselves and their virtue against Atlanta. You know, Atlantans are just hopelessly – Atlantans are the way you described Californians. You know, this is to the provincial Deep South Georgia people. And there are some provincial deep south Georgia people who've got lots of money, so they never question what they think or believe because they've got money and, you know, obviously they're being blessed by God. I'm being facetious to some degree, but –

SP: No, I hear you!

CO: But then there are some other people in deep south Georgia just as cosmopolitan as anybody in Atlanta. For one thing, because they travel, you know. They don't confine themselves to deep South Georgia, and they're just human beings and they're well educated. So you know, and they kind of – so it kind of balances, except one thing that I do say – and I realize that I'm interjecting too much here – this is your interview – but – cause people ask me this often. And my experience of Valdosta is that it *is* insular – the town Valdosta is insular – but you've got Moody Air Force base, and you've got Valdosta State University, so that adds an element of diversity and in both cases, international diversity. But in terms of this stable element in both of those institutions – Moody and VSU – I think Valdosta manages to co-opt those segments of people, so that instead of that progressive element pulling Valdosta up, Valdosta manages to suck that element into a status quo. And it's not as – I hate to use this word – Valdostans would hate me for this – but it's not that suddenly all those people become backward, it's just that it takes so much energy to challenge that status quo, that you almost just out of self-defense – you just kind of go along with enough of it to be able to survive.

SP: Makes sense, you have to do that here too. It's very insular here.

CO: That's right, so it's probably a very similar experience. And your diverse element here are retired people who come from all over to retire to the mountains.

SP: Mmhm.

CO: Yeah. So well if you were to have to explain to somebody from outside – like at least in California, they've got some idea about what it means to be a southerner, you know. Even if it's totally distorted, they've got an image. But if you were talking to somebody from Asia, say – from an Asian country. How would you describe what separates the south from the rest of the country? What would you say?

SP: I think its history as having lost the war.

CO: And that would be the Civil War?

SP: Civil War.

CO: As opposed to the War Between the States? (Laughs)

SP: (Laughs).

CO: You know what I'm talking about?

SP: Well I don't know – and I'm making a statement here – I don't know – I have not considered the difference in those descriptions. To me, it's the Civil War.

CO: That's right, but southerners – traditional southerners, and this is the historian's take on it – have never wanted to call it a Civil War because that casts aspersion on the South's cause. So if you call it quote "the war between the states", the South appears less culpable. And the South is nothing if not self-defensive.

SP: Well (laughs), I don't see how the South can defend slavery. But they do, I know that.

CO: Because you know that war was not fought over slavery, that war was fought over state's rights!

SP: Oh I know that? (Laughs). Is that right? Well, I can see there would be a component there, but –

CO: No, there still are some students in rural schools who are still told that. Still taught that, and they still bring that to class with them. So we still have to deal with that. Okay so for you it would be – I mean you would explain it through the legacy of slavery?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: Okay. Few people can do that (laughs). What to you does it mean to be a southerner? Was it something your family felt strongly about? I mean did they value the myths of the friendly, hospitable –

SP: I don't think so. I don't really think so – I think they were busy globing the life out of the cotton farm, and the vegetable garden, and busy raising all those children and I don't think they had time to philosophize. And I never got any talks – such as we have engaged in out of any of my aunts, it was always – if you were talking about a child, maybe they needed an enema. Did you still take – what is that terrible medicine they would take in the spring for spring – there was an awful lot of bodily functions that were important in the conversation that just disgusted me.

CO: Mmhm. And you identified that with southern culture?

SP: Well it was my southern family, so I guess I thought everybody was like that.

CO: So to you being southern – I mean, like some women –

SP: I don't feel southern. I know I am, but it doesn't occur to me.

CO: Okay. One thing that I'm interested in that anybody who studies culture is interested in is when we become aware of cultural difference – not when we become aware of difference, but that it matters. That being different matters about how you're treated, what's expected of you, and your own self-identity.

SP: Yes – when I went to California.

CO: Okay. But before that – okay, I want you to explain that, but what I want to know is when in your life – a native Georgian, native southerner, did it occur to you that it meant something different to be white than to be black? Does the question make sense?

SP: Yes. Um, I was probably 12.

CO: Was it a certain experience –

SP: Yeah. I was on the bus, going home from town in Macon, and when we stopped at the hospital, I could see the driver's face in the mirror. And there was a colored girl who got off in the back, and he watched her. And when the time was right, he closed the doors on her. Deliberate malice.

CO: And you realized at 12 that it was deliberate malice?

SP: Yes. And I was very indignant that there were no schools for black people. Then my Daddy said, "There certainly are. They're so and so" – he was defensive about it, such and such and such and such. And I said "oh, I didn't know that. I didn't think that they had colleges." So I was glad they had some, but I knew that their schools were not like our schools and it wasn't fair.

CO: So do you remember realizing that it wasn't fair?

SP: Mmhm. You know, when he closed the doors on that pregnant girl –

CO: Oh she was pregnant?

SP: Uh huh.

CO: And what happened?

SP: She got off the bus and people laughed, and he laughed. But I didn't say anything – I didn't know what to say. And then when Daddy said, "Well it says in the Bible that black people are supposed to serve white people", I was just – I just shut up. I said, "That's wrong." Then that doesn't got much to say about the Bible. (laughs).

CO: Yeah. So you knew – do you remember how old you were when you realized that black people had a certain set of rules – set of guidelines that they had to observe? Like coming to the back door, like not eating at the table with white people, like you know – segregation. Do you remember that?

SP: Oh I remember white and colored rest rooms, and white and colored water fountains –

CO: But do you remember becoming aware that this is –

SP: Not right?

CO: Yeah.

SP: I can't tell you what age it was. It came to me pretty easily that – well I think – I better think some more about this. There was awhile that I thought "well thank goodness, because they sure don't smell good."

CO: So there's plenty of evidence to support the theories that southerners – there *appears* to be evidence to support the theory of inferiority.

SP: Yeah.

CO: For the –

SP: Oh Yeah. "It says in the bible."

CO: Exactly. Yeah, right, if you didn't have evidence around you, you had the Bible.

SP: Mmhm. And then when you smelled the ones who had been working hard, you – "Gee, they don't smell good. They don't bathe."

CO: Like my brothers smelt when they worked hard and didn't bathe (laughs).

SP: (Laughs). I didn't have any brothers.

CO: But the point being you wouldn't have thought about it if it was a white guy, but because they were black, and there needed desperately to be something to affirm this set of laws, you know. It wasn't just custom, it was law. So I just have pondered it to death in my own life, and so it's interesting to me –

SP: I can't tell you when I really – I remember being rebellious about it when I was in my – 10 to 12 range. It just didn't seem right, just like it didn't seem right to me that all those people that hadn't gotten to know Jesus were going to go to hell, it just didn't make sense. So all about the same time.

CO: Well when you were – the civil rights movements really started when you were a mature woman. Do you remember having opinions about it?

SP: Yeah. Yes, I felt pretty strongly that too many people didn't get a chance, and that they were – you know, like it says, "red and yellow, black and white, they are purchased in his sight." That stuck – Jesus loves the little children.

CO: That's one thing that women of your generation who have a sense of racial justice all –

SP: Remember?

CO: That song, yeah. And it's like – it's sort of like *Amazing Grace*, you know, how people from all over the world talk about that song? Well that one is one that white people in the south – it's kind of like it flipped a switch that they can't turn off, you know?

SP: That's right.

CO: So it's interesting how over and over people will refer to that song as if it made an impression.

SP: Well good, I'm glad.

CO: Oh, me too. So – I want to come back to the Civil Rights Movement – cause history is next – but do you think that having a black man in the white house has changed opinions about race in this country? Has it made them worse, better, have no effect?

SP: My daughter – granddaughter – dated some black men and I did not like it. And I don't like it. And that tells me how deep this stuff is in me, even though up here I'm straight about it. But I do not want my granddaughter having a mixed raced child. That's too hard.

CO: Do you think it's because you have – I'm sure you've pondered this yourself and asked yourself – do you think it's because you have reservations about the race -- a different race? Or is it because you just worry about the difficulty that the child and the family would face? Because the culture is nowhere near accepting.

SP: I think it's mostly the difficulty, but there's a good percentage that is from that old crap. If the Lord had meant for us – birds of a feather fly together. You just don't confuse things.

CO: Yeah. So your head says one thing, your heart says something else.

SP: Well, life's full of confusion, and that's just one of those topics.

CO: Yeah. Are there other things that you feel equal sort of confusion – contradiction even, about like sexuality? If one of your children or grandchildren came out of the closet as homosexual, would that bother you?

SP: I don't think so.

CO: No? So sexuality's not an issue.

SP: I don't think so. Um, I don't think – I always say whatever suits you is your business. But when it comes to picking a black mate, I don't have that same reaction. And I'm sure it's just something to do with my repulsion of the smell.

CO: Have you ever been around black people who do not smell?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: So you can't fathom that there might be a case where –

SP: Oh, if I think about it I can.

CO: You're talking about –

SP: I'm not proud of this revulsion that I feel (laughs).

CO: I know you're not, I know you're not. And I'm probably asking the wrong questions, cause you know, I think most people in the south struggle with this very thing. And the worst thing to do is not – is to hide it. You know, and say – cause I mean, another woman – I asked a very similar questions, and I think it's really – the worst thing to do is to pretend it doesn't exist and that you don't question it.

SP: Well, in my working life, I have run into some very intelligent and competent black people. And one of em I socialized with in California. And I saw a lot of mixed marriages out there, and a lot of em came to my desk – usually it was a black soldier who married a German woman. There were a lot of em. And they seemed to do fine. But there was a time when if I saw a mixed couple, I would shrink inside, but I got over that I think. But I haven't with my grandchildren, no. (Laughs).

CO: What is the most important historical event you yourself has either participated in or lived through?

SP: World War II.

CO: Okay. Well we haven't really talked about that, you want to say anything about that? In what way did it enter your life personally?

SP: Nobody I was related to – cause I had no siblings – was killed, but a lot of the boys I went to high school with were. It was scary, it was very scary. I remember crawling

under our house in Atlanta to get my Daddy's discarded razor blades for the drive to get all the metals we could find, and saving chewing gum wrapping and hearing the news and –

CO: Do you remember if your family – did I ask you this already? Had strong feelings about FDR?

SP: Oh, we were big FDR people.

CO: You were?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: And do you remember anything about Eleanor?

SP: Oh yes, I got to shake Eleanor's hand!

CO: You didn't!

SP: I did!

CO: Well can I touch you?

SP: (Laughs) I did, I was at Miller High in Macon, and we had the -- people who were taking Government – got to go on a trip to DC and we got up there – when we arrived there was snow and when we left the apple blossoms were out. And we got to go to the White House and shake Eleanor's hand.

CO: Oh my. What was that like – well what impression of her did you have before you shook her hand?

SP: Oh, I thought she was a mythic figure.

CO: Oh really?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: So many southerners despised her. Just despised her.

SP: Really?

CO: Oh my God, yes.

SP: Why?

CO: Because she was too – you know – she was too –

SP: Uppity?

CO: She had too many opinions. You know, she was way too active.

SP: Oh (laughs).

CO: Even if they liked him, they didn't like her.

SP: Oh, I liked her. I can't tell you why, but I certainly did. But by the time she shook my hand, her hand was pretty limp (laughs). Cause I was way down the line. I mean what a chore for that poor woman.

CO: Well, I know, but she was just tireless in her efforts. Do you remember your family talking about or do you remember your own impressions of the Depression? But you yourself were just a small child.

SP: Oh, I have bad business about the weevily cornmeal. It made a big impression on me, and I remember the fear in my grandparents' house when my Mother divorced my Daddy and went back home with me. There was great fear about money – we just didn't have any.

CO: And that was because of the Depression – clearly?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: Okay. I mean, some people say “we didn't know there was any difference. We never had any money, so we didn't” – you know – “we didn't suffer any.” But other people know very clearly that their lives were – more impoverished.

SP: Well, I sensed the fear in my grownups. I don't know that I had it so much myself as I sensed it in them. But if they were unnerved, then I had to be unnerved too.

CO: Sure. Well now you were a teenager – let's see. You were a teenager during World War II.

SP: Mmhm.

CO: So – and you had high school classmates that –

SP: Went to war – I remember I was dating a boy named – what was his name? (Laughs). Oh, anyway, he joined the Navy, and he was so proud – I was so proud of him – I mean everybody was joining. You had to go fight those people – it was a “good” war. I mean, anybody who is burning people up has got to be run away with. Everybody – all of em went – the only thing that was left was 4F’s. And I understood that that was abnormal, but I accepted it because we were at war.

CO: That what was abnormal?

SP: That there were no boys around.

CO: Oh right, okay.

SP: But it was – the nation united. You did – you bought those little stamps, and you accepted the ration cards, and it was a sense of all pulling together.

CO: Did you know any women who went to work for the first time during World War II because of the?

SP: No. I didn’t personally know any –

CO: You didn’t know any Rosie the Riveters?

SP: Nuh uh. I knew about em, but I didn’t know any.

CO: Okay. And so do you remember where you were when the war ended?

SP: Oh, I do. I do indeed. When the war ended – this was just a few days before Fred and I got married.

CO: Oh my goodness.

SP: And I remember feeling very grateful that I got married in peacetime.

CO: Did he – was he in the war?

SP: He was briefly in the Navy.

CO: But he didn't – did he have to go serve in the war at all?

SP: No. He got a medical discharge before he really did much of anything. Which was a bonus for us with the GI bill, but he hardly earned it really in comparison with what other people did.

CO: Well now your early married life was from the end of the war until your daughter was born – I mean your early married life was throughout the 50's too – but your married life – just you and your husband – were 4 years between the war's end and your daughters – what was that like?

SP: Well we were both in school.

CO: Okay. Well was it a good time?

SP: Yeah.

CO: It was a good time?

SP: It was a good time. We were both learning.

CO: Okay. And was he showing any signs then that you could detect of what became his trait?

SP: Nuh uh. No, we were very close. It was a happy time. I think his differentness accelerated as he aged.

CO: But those years were marked by – internationally anyway – you know, the growing Cold War – do you remember anything about that, or was your life taken up mostly with going to school and being newly married and ?

SP: I don't have – I don't think the Cold War impressed me very much except as sort of a sideline fear that bad things were going to happen, but they didn't touch me much because I was focused on what I was doing.

CO: Okay, so the McCarthy hearings and –

SP: Oh that Jackass.

CO: Yeah (laughs), do you remember that?

SP: Yeah.

CO: You do?

SP: Yeah. He was so unreasonable.

CO: Did that sort of Witch-hunt scare you at all?

SP: Yes. Yes it did, as a – yeah. We would talk about that how there's a spy behind every rose bush, and he's Russian. (laughs)

CO: Yeah (Laughs). Do you remember your feelings towards Communism were?

SP: I think I was very disdainful.

CO: Of communism?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: Okay. Did you –

SP: Well wait – no I wasn't. Because I remember Mary Francis and I talking about their Five year plan – how they were gonna make life better for so many people, and we thought, "That's good, that's good." But then, when it got to be fearful – cause there were so many spies and they were gonna steal our secrets and hurt us, then I didn't think about their Five year plan anymore (laughs).

CO: Right. But the threat of nuclear war – were you ever frightened by that?

SP: Yes ma'am, the Cuban Crisis was horrifying.

CO: Okay, cause you had children by then and they were –

SP: And that was right when I got dumped by this affair. And I thought "we're all gonna die and I don't care."

CO: '62, okay. Is that one way you remember the date – because of the Cuban Missile Crisis?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: Okay, your oldest daughter would have been 13, and then your next – your son would have been 10 – or 9 – and the third one would have been 7. You had –

SP: Had my three children, and I was so depressed and frightened, and I thought “might as well not live. It’s okay if we all go together.” It was really scary.

CO: Right, oh I remember it too. Well so – okay, back to the ‘50s, how long did that go on? Did I ask you that? No, I asked you how long it took you to get over it. How long did the relationship go on?

SP: Oh, a couple of years.

CO: Was it somebody – well you weren’t working though, were you? Yes you had gone back to work.

SP: Yes, I was working.

CO: Was it somebody connected with work?

SP: No. It was a neighbor.

CO: Okay, so what – that didn’t involve the 1950’s. What do you recall about the ‘50s? Was that a good decade for you? Had your husband started becoming alienated or preoccupied?

SP: I got out of school in ‘49, and then we bought our house, and I started playing bridge and having the girls to be real friends with. And Fred was at work more and more.

CO: Is that when that started? His absence? Did that start in the ‘50s?

SP: Yeah.

CO: So in one way the ‘50s were okay because you were satisfied with your –

SP: I liked my – I liked having my house. I’d even get out and cut the grass in the boiling sun and take pleasure in it, and I just had – this was in my ‘if I’m cute or smart or sexy or – it’ll be better’. I was trying to make things right by fixing me.

CO: So – but the ‘50s were more a domestic decade for you.

SP: Yes.

CO: And so world events weren't really a big, major issue.

SP: No, it was – taking my children to swimming, and birthday parties up and down the street, TV came in.

CO: Oh, did you all get one early?

SP: Not real early.

CO: No. Did the kids watch those sitcoms and –

SP: *Howdy Doody*.

CO: They watched that?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: Okay. Do you remember anything about the *Brown vs. The Board of Education* court case in 1954?

SP: No.

CO: The Montgomery Bus Boycott?

SP: Yeah, I remember that, but –

CO: Did you worry about the consequences of it?

SP: Yeah, I did, because – we obviously needed to integrate the schools, and we obviously needed to pay according to ability instead of color, and that was just so obvious. And where in the world was – how is it going to work out? But I wasn't like an activist – I didn't talk about it a lot. I just drew my conclusions and kept quiet.

CO: Yeah. Do you remember the Emmett Till lynching? Do you remember that in '55?

SP: I remember that.

CO: You don't?

SP: I do.

CO: You do? Do you remember your reactions to it?

SP: Horror.

CO: What?

SP: I was horrified.

CO: Okay. Not many white people were horrified (laughs).

SP: Really?

CO: Well, I mean – and they wouldn't speak up if they were.

SP: Oh, it was terrible.

CO: So the '50s though – there were some incidents like that. What do you remember about the '60s?

SP: Cuban Crisis.

CO: The Missile Crisis. Do you remember FDR – I mean JFK?

SP: Oh yeah.

CO: And what were your –

SP: Well I thought he was going to save the nation, but he didn't. I remember when he died, where I was, how – it was upsetting.

CO: When he was assassinated? (Dog barks, conversation break till 14:18)

CO: So, you were a JFK supporter?

SP: MMhm. I'm a Democrat. We're Democrats (laughs).

CO: Okay, right (laughs). Do you remember the Freedom Rides? And the – do you remember the murders in Mississippi? The 3 civil rights workers and the –

SP: Yeah, and I was glad they were far away.

CO: And do you remember the Sit-ins?

SP: Mmhm. That was kind of scary. I didn't want to go downtown then, because who knows what kind of –

CO: So the protest part of the movement concerned you?

SP: Yes. But I didn't know – I was just an observer. I wouldn't have anything to do with it.

CO: Do you remember having any feelings about Malcolm X?

SP: I didn't know much about him, and didn't want to. Just kind of 'don't bother me with that'.

CO: Yeah. And what do you recall about Martin Luther King?

SP: What do I recall about Martin Luther King? I remember his voice, and I remember how influential he was with the black folks. And I remember the day he died, how scary it was when if I was driving to work and all these people, every window in every building was people hanging out watching to see if something was gonna happen.

CO: This was in Atlanta?

SP: Mmhm. No – I was working for Social Security over in the black area then.

CO: So you were scared of what was gonna happen?

SP: I was scared.

CO: Well there were riots all over the country, so it was –

SP: Yeah, a reasonable fear.

CO: Yes. I interviewed one woman who watched in '67 – she was in New Jersey and watched a sniper take out somebody in Newark when those riots took place.

SP: Oh!

CO: She's a black woman, so she recalls it with –

SP: Are you interviewing some blacks?

CO: I'm trying my best. Trying to get the names of – I've interviewed six black women, but I just can't get names. So if you know any anywhere in the state who might be interested, I would certainly like to know –

SP: I bet Nancy would.

CO: Nancy Fichter?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: She doesn't actually – I've already asked her. In fact, I ask everybody I talk to.

SP: Well there's a woman that works – that cleans house over at the Center.

CO: She said she wasn't old enough. And she said she just didn't think she'd be –

CHUCK: How old do you need to be?

CO: 75.

SP: No, she's not that old.

CO: Yeah, so. But do you remember – well you already told me that you went to work so that you could pay for your children to go to private schools. But do you remember the experience of desegregation? Do you remember how you processed it in your family and? So you were in Atlanta.

SP: Yeah, I remember – this is I guess significant. We went to a swimming pool somewhere over near Chastain – it may have been that pool. And when we got there, my Laura said, "Well this must be a nice pool. There's a little black boy." And I was so proud of her that she reacted that way.

CO: Had they integrated the pool?

SP: Yes.

CO: Oh my goodness!

SP: And there was a little black boy in there swimming around. And so my kids just jumped in.

CO: Yeah, that is – how children react at times like that is telling. Because that is a – to some extent – a reflection on what they're hearing at home.

SP: Well that's right.

CO: Okay, alright. So the '60s was a – well, the '60s was a tumultuous decade, there's no doubt about that. Do you remember – you recalled Martin Luther King's assassination, and then 2 months after that, Robert Kennedy was assassinated. Do you remember that? Do you recall that –

SP: Sure I do.

CO: Do you remember what you thought about that campaign going on at the time? '68 was a rock throwing –

SP: I was just grateful that I was not in the middle of it.

CO: Did you have strong feelings about the candidates running? Did you have strong feelings about Robert Kennedy?

SP: I don't remember having strong feelings about him, I was just – I was dismayed that he got shot, but it seemed like – at that time in my life – it seemed like all that stuff was somewhere else. Not where I had to attend to it.

CO: That's what was most people's experience – unless you were on the – I've talked to 2 or 3 people who've had a different experience, but for most women, that was their experience.

SP: It was somewhere else.

CO: It was happening 'out there.' Even though you lived in Atlanta, and it was certainly a – there was certainly some –

SP: Yeah, most of our clients in the Social Security office – I was working – and were black. But they looked to the Social Security people for help, they didn't – at that time, there was – now a days, they have policemen in Social Security offices. But back then, we were a good place to go.

CO: So even militants didn't touch you there?

SP: No. When I was running in '70 decennial of the Urban league called me up about every day, and they wanted to know "how many black people have you hired?" And I said "we've done all our hiring." "Well how many did you hire?" And I said "none." And they said, "Why didn't you hire black people." And I said "I guess they didn't pass the test. I don't know, they don't tell me the scores of people." But it was true – we had all white people. And they'd call me the next day and ask me the same questions.

CO: Were there black applicants?

SP: I don't know. There weren't the day I went to apply, but where I went was not in a black area. Where I went to apply was not in a black area – it was on Peachtree somewhere.

CO: Okay. Do you – you've already been candid with your thoughts about race relations when it comes to personal – you know, when it gets down to the personal fear. And you've said even at the age of 12, you recognized injustice. Do you think in your adult life, your opinions on race have changed? Or have you been pretty steadily aware of the sense of justice/injustice? Has that always been? I guess I want to know what to you – in your mind, has the legacy of the civil rights movement done more to change people's opinions about race in a positive way?

SP: I feel differently, but I don't know about people in general.

CO: And how differently do you feel?

SP: Well, when *The Help* was being screened, I have a good friend who was born and lived in the county where they did a lot of the filming in Mississippi. And we've talked about Hilly, and she said "they're not many Hilly's, but there were a few." And we got to talking about our relationship with our help in the past, and I remembered my Beulah. I expected Beulah to do whatever I wanted her to do. And I heard myself say that, and I thought (laughs) oh boy. But I did. She was a paid slave. It took me a long time to realize that.

CO: You won't believe some of the things I've heard – some of the most enlightened people I know say about what their experience was back in the day. And these are pretty– I mean relatively speaking, pretty enlightened people, so it's – did you read *The Help* or did you?

SP: Both, I read it.

CO: Yeah. What'd you think about it?

SP: I thought it was a very good expose. Although I remember seeing awful treatment – I said my Daddy never made me ashamed, but now I remember he did make me ashamed. When he would walk down the street and see a black man, he would say, “Hello Sam.” They were all ‘Sams’. And I didn’t like that – that embarrassed me.

CO: So you knew that that was derogatory?

SP: Oh yeah. ‘That’s not a person, that’s a Sam.’

CO: Yeah. Was your Mother that way generally?

SP: No. I don’t think so. When we were in Augusta, some black lady showed up one day at her door and she says “ma’am, I’ll work for you all day for 50 cents.” And Mother said, “Okay.” And so she came – I don’t know how long, I don’t remember – but I know Mother gave her stuff to take home. She felt sorry for her. And her – what I learned on that was that this is not right – for people to have to work for 50 cents a day. She said her children were hungry. And of course Mother immediately started giving her groceries (laughs).

CO: When people experience – like probably maybe some people who see *The Help*, read the book – might – I mean you want to think that nobody would be shocked by that today. But what do you think is the catalyst for people when they do change the way they think? What do you think it takes to do that? Have you ever known somebody who had strongly racist opinions and then –

SP: Changed?

CO: And then changed, yeah.

SP: Nuh uh.

CO: No?

SP: Nuh uh. Nuh uh. I don’t hang out with strongly racist people.

CO: But what do you think it takes to change a person’s mind?

SP: I don’t know, maybe if they are given blood from a black person –

CO: (laughs) and it saves their lives?

SP: And it saves their lives. Then they surely would change their attitude. Or if they're rescued by a black man – I remember one of my babies – a black person came to take me to my – a man. And he says "Ma'am, I need to take you to your room. Would you please put your arms around my neck?" And I said, "Okay." (laughs).

CO: Yeah, cause – yeah. And so what about your first husband? What were his ?

SP: He was not racist at all.

CO: So did he come from a background that was more open?

SP: I don't marry anything but Yankees. (Laughs).

CO: Is he a Yankee?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: And is Chuck? Get out of town!

SP: Mmhm (Laughs).

CO: Where was the first one from?

SP: He was born in New Jersey.

CO: Oh my God, you really do. And where's Chuck from?

SP: He's from upper New York State.

-----End of part 5-----

CO: That's different.

SP: (Laughs).

CO: Well okay, the '60s was largely solidly about race relations and the civil rights movement. And it spawned all these other movements – the Red Power movement – well it spawned also the Black Power movement, which was –

SP: That was scary.

CO: Yeah, okay – you said you had sort of a reaction to Malcolm X. What did you think about all these other – like Native Americans, Gay and Lesbian, the ecological awareness and of course the Women’s movement?

SP: Well, they’ve all been positive in my mind.

CO: Okay. So –

SP: I mean, let’s talk about justice. That’s what the aim of those were to me.

CO: So and have you ever had – well, it sounds like you have not had an issue with sexuality at any point. Was that ever a challenge for you to accept?

SP: It’s good stuff.

CO: So you don’t – that’s not – and how are you with the environmental?

SP: I think it’s a crime what we’re doing to this planet, and I don’t know how to fix it. The waters, the air, the dependence on oil – somebody else’s oil. If we could be friends about it, it would be great. But the money gets in there and the greed gets in there and it’s very discouraging. I don’t feel good about America’s future. I think we’re going down, and if they don’t fix this corporate stuff, there’s gonna be a revolution. The little guys are going to get tired of it.

CO: Okay, one more ‘60s and ‘70s cause. Where were you on the Vietnam War?

SP: Harold Martin wrote a column that I read about how we had no business in Cambodia and – generally the negatives about it. And I thought Johnson was wrong to keep it going, and I think we ought to get out of Afghanistan too.

CO: What about Iraq?

SP: Oh, what a wonder. Don’t get me started on that idiot president.

CO: So do you consider yourself a pacifist?

SP: Yeah. I don’t think war solves anything.

CO: Do you remember the book, *The Feminine Mystique*?

SP: I never read it.

CO: You didn't read it?

SP: Nuh uh.

CO: So what was your relationship to the Women's Movement?

SP: I guess I was comfortable enough with where I was – in being accepted – that I thought it was just something that was going to evolve and take care of itself, and it did.

CO: So you don't feel like there's – do you feel like it's achieved enough – the Women's Movement?

SP: Oh, there's still a glass ceiling.

CO: Okay, so it's mostly about pay – you don't think there's a moral double standard anymore?

SP: Oh, I'm sure there is. I'm sure there – well, I get global about this. There're so many places in the world where women are breeders.

CO: Yeah. What do you think has been the legacy of the Women's Movement?

SP: I don't feel qualified to say. I know that – and there are cases where there's equal pay, and I also know there are cases where there's not.

CO: Does the word 'feminism' bother you?

SP: No. I just don't feel involved in it.

CO: Did you ever feel yourself discriminated against because you were a woman, or treated – do you ever feel like you have been in any way disadvantaged because of your gender?

SP: I don't think so. But this is because I was not driven to accomplish anything – I was a floater.

CO: But do you have a hard time accepting that some women did have a hard time based on genuine discrimination against them?

SP: Oh, I'm sure they were discriminated against. And I didn't like it, but I didn't feel that it applied to me personally. I think that's the lack of drive – plays a big part in that. I've usually had enough going on that I didn't have to go outside very far.

CO: Well, that's understandable. We're on the last category, can you make it till the end?

SP: Sure. (Talks to husband, non-interview topics)

CO: Well, these last questions are real open-ended. They're just – but they're all kind of summing up kind of things. The first question is about – it's one of those kinds of questions that – oh my goodness, I get such a broad range of responses to this. Like you know, the unanswerable question of whether or not it's more nurture or nature that determines how people come out? You know, turn out?

SP: Well, I think we talked about this at lunch a little bit. I said sometimes its nurture, and sometimes its nature.

CO: Right, but in terms of cause and effect – I mean, we're always trying to figure out how things come to be the way they come to be. If you had to say in your own life – because we all know that our lives are circumstances beyond our control, and they're also a part of decisions we make. For you, which do you think it's been most of? Has it been mostly – has it come to be what it is based on circumstances beyond control, or mostly based on your own decisions?

SP: I think it's been on my decisions, like when I decided to go out to go academic. I did that all by myself, and why I don't know.

CO: When you decided to do what?

SP: Take the academic track in high school. And why I perceived the wrong of racism as young as I did – I don't know why.

CO: But you see those as personal choices that you –

SP: I do. Because they weren't coherent with my family culture.

CO: Right. Now I asked you earlier what age you know, that you look back on most nostalgically. And you said the years that you went out to California, so would you consider that the happiest, most gratifying, most rewarding time of your life?

SP: Nuh uh. The best time is since I married Chuck.

CO: Alright, so what was the hardest part?

SP: '60s.

CO: Early '60s? Okay. What about the saddest? What has been the saddest time? Or maybe you're not a person bothered by sadness, some people are not.

SP: I think my saddest was when my daughter divorced her husband. Or he divorced her – whichever way it was. I hurt for her.

CO: Was this Teresa?

SP: Yeah, but they remarried – they fixed it.

CO: Wow. So they're together now?

SP: And when he was – before they got back together – he was an arrogant, defensive, pain in the ass. And now he's one of my best friends.

CO: Aw, so he really changed?

SP: He changed.

CO: So that gives you hope that it's possible?

SP: And he did it, he says, because he got on his knees and begged for forgiveness, and to please let him have his wife and family back. And God helped him, and he believes that –

CO: You don't mind him believing that, do you?

SP: I respect it. If it's real to him, it's real.

CO: And he apparently has had some sort of inner transformation from that. Do you believe that's real? That he's really changed?

SP: Mmhm. I saw it. So some people can.

CO: But that was sad when they broke up?

SP: Oh –

CO: When was it?

SP: I was in California. I don't remember.

CO: Well no, that's okay. And what has been the most crucial decision you've made in your life?

SP: Going to Agnes Scott, marrying Chuck, taking the academic track, moving to California. That was surprisingly easy for me because I was leaving my home, my husband, my neighborhood, my life.

CO: Yeah, that was really a big decision even though it was easy, it was still a big decision.

SP: Yeah.

CO: And okay – if you had to choose the 3 most important turning points – like definable moments in your life, what would they be? You just named crucial decisions, but turning points – after which things are just different.

SP: Well, the tornado. It's very different now from our life on the lake.

CO: Can you say what about that? Can you say how?

SP: There was so much history at the lake – Daddy bought that place in the late '50s. My children grew up going there – summers there. Time with Mother there – she was very happy there.

CO: So does that feel like a big hole missing?

SP: It is a big hole missing. But this is good too – as Chuck said, it was about time we downsized. (laughs)

CO: (Laughs). How big was that house?

SP: Well, it was – 1 wing of it was 2 stories, and it started off as a little fishing cabin. And then Mother and Daddy added a wonderful, big kitchen they made out of the carport. And then they also added on a bedroom and a bath, so it had 2 baths, and it had what Mother called a preacher's room – which was a little room with a door like in

the country, if you had a preacher that's where he slept when he came on his route. And she had a cot in there – she fixed that place up for her grandchildren, so they had their room and their bathroom, then there was the cot room, and then the former kitchen was another cot room. And then later they added on a front – she called it a sun room. It was closed off with sliding doors, and she had 2 beds in there. And there was another bedroom. So there were – 5 places where somebody could sleep. They weren't very big rooms. And then when Chuck came along, we decided when we sold the Atlanta house – we decided to – we had so little closet space, and so we added another wing which was two story. And so the front of it was what we called the library, and that's where we had all of our books and where we had the TV. And then upstairs was our bedroom and a much bigger bath and some closets. And the old part of the house was most damaged – the whole place was damaged, but a lot of the original part of the house just blew away. But our – strangely enough, the second floor was probably the safest place to be cause we survived it there. Okay, the tornado – turning points. When I was the boss at the census -- that did a lot for me.

CO: A lot by way of giving you confidence?

SP: Mmhm. Coming back home to take care of Mother, leaving California. Those were big turning points.

CO: So '80? 1980?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: Okay. Are you satisfied with the life choices you've made?

SP: Mmhm. I'd do some things differently if I could go back with what I know now, but who wouldn't?

CO: Right. Well the next question is do you have any regrets?

SP: I regret I didn't more fully comprehend my Mother's good qualities.

CO: Which were?

SP: She was full of life. And she was very caring about people – and especially children. She could get on the floor.

CO: (laughs) You just can't get away from that, can you?

SP: Nuh uh. I feel that's a lack.

CO: Is there anybody that you would like to make amends to, or anything you'd like to make amends for?

SP: (Sighs). When I was in the 6th grade, and we had just moved to Lincoln, I stole a pack of cards from (mumbles)– and it has bothered me.

CO: So would you like to pay for that deck of cards?

SP: I feel like I should (laughs).

CO: If you could do it all over again, besides paying for the deck of cards, what would you do differently?

SP: Take the GRE and get a Masters in something.

CO: But what? What would you like to have a Masters in? You got your degree in English.

SP: I just want the status.

CO: But would you like to learn what it would take to get a Master's degree in English? Write a thesis?

SP: Not now (laughs).

CO: Not now, okay, but did you ever like to write?

SP: I was glad I got more comfortable at writing papers for the English classes I took, but I didn't really enjoy doing it – it was something I had to do to look good.

CO: What do you consider the most valuable lesson you've learned?

SP: Not to be afraid to die.

CO: And did that come with the tornado?

SP: I think it has come since the tornado.

CO: That's a huge lesson. Has there been a single individual – or you can name more than one – but who has had the greatest influence on you in your life?

SP: Hmm. I don't know how to answer that.

CO: Well it sounds like your Mother has since her death.

SP: Well yeah, she's influenced my life alright. And I think about her a lot, and my children think about her a lot. So she's a pretty big figure in my life. I think her marrying my stepfather probably made all the difference.

CO: And why is that? You think she was happier because of it?

SP: We went from – I could have been picking cotton if she hadn't met him.

CO: Okay. So he provided economic stability.

SP: Mmhm.

CO: Okay. So would you say he had an influence? If not on –

SP: Yes he did. He was a gentleman. And something we haven't touched on – my birth father was – as they put it to me, he drank. And I later found out he gave my Mother gonorrhea.

CO: Gave her what?

SP: Gonorrhea. And she couldn't have any more children because of that – she was so scarred. Okay, so I've had a certain amount of shame in the past that I was related to this person – it was so terrible. And I must have been – I had to work to get over that.

CO: So you don't remember anything about him?

SP: I do. I don't – I have this vague memory of when I was a child – I was lying on the bed and he was standing over me, and it might have been he was going to hit me, but he didn't. And Mother was standing there saying something – whatever he was up to, she stopped it. That's a very vague memory. And then the other thing is, when I was working for one of those surgeons, I told his scrub nurse – she asked me about my – I had family and all and I said that I didn't know my father. And she said, "Well, he gave you life." And that started me thinking that I'd like to find him, which I eventually did. Now I had this picture of him holding me – little tiny, about that square picture. And I

put it in my pocket, and when I found out where he lived – this was after Daddy died – I went over there and knocked on the door, and I said – this woman came to the door, and I said, “Is Mr. Reeves here?” And she said, “Yes.” I said “may I speak to him?” And he came to the door and I handed him the picture. And he turned and said something to his wife – I’ve forgotten her name. He says, “It’s Janey Sue.” And he invited me in, and he -- and I and the wife talked a little bit, and he watched the TV.

CO: Did he have other children?

SP: He had a son, but he was killed in Germany. So –

CO: Now what did that do for you or to you after that?

SP: I just felt like I can let go of that. He’s not interested in me, it’s too long ago. He’s got a new life, I’ve got a new life and I just let go of it.

CO: Now you never told me when your stepfather died, when was it?

SP: ’72.

CO: So was this in the mid ‘70s then?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: Okay, wow. Was that a turning point? I mean, was that –

SP: Not a big one. It was just kind of a cleaning up.

CO: But it was a good thing to get behind you?

SP: I thought so.

CO: Did you tell your Mother about it?

SP: I don’t think so.

CO: What sort of economic situation was he in?

SP: Not very good. He lived in a very small house – he was a house painter. The way I found out about that was I went to see my dentist, and I said, “I may not be a good patient today, I’m pretty upset.” And he says, “Well honey, what happened?” I said,

“Well I got this phone call last night from uncle Earnest” and I said “I didn’t even know who Uncle Earnest was, but he was married to my real father’s sister. And Uncle Earnest wanted to know did I remember him?” And I said, “No.” And he says “well.” And I said, “How did you find me?” And he said “I happened to see your Mother when I was laying a floor over on so and so where she lives, and I went to the City Directory and looked up who lived next door to her house, and called them and asked them where you were.” Nosy!! He tracked me down. And he said, “I talked to your Daddy today.” And I said “you did?” He said “Yes, and Hon, he doesn’t live very far from you.” “Well where does he live?” And he told me, and I thought I’ve been by that house a million times, and I saw the name on that mailbox but it never occurred to me to be him. Finally the man caught on that I was very uncomfortable, and he says, “Well I didn’t mean to disturb old soup.” Of course he did, he stirred up a lot of old soup. So I went to the dentist and I was telling him this story, and I said “I understand he is a house painter.” And he said, “Well honey, what’s his name?” And I told him, and he said “good God, he’s painting my house this minute!” (Laughs).

CO: Oh my goodness. What a small world.

SP: And this illustrates how distant Fred was – I went home and told him about it and he didn’t even look at me. He was busy doing something else. And that kind of thing made me know that it was not the way I wanted to live. So when I had an opportunity to go to California, I went. (Laughs).

CO: Now you say your daughter Teresa is in touch with him, and does she feel bonded with him?

SP: Mmhm.

CO: So you think he’s found a way –

SP: She’s pretty realistic about it all – she asked him to come to their house for dinner for what was it, Thanksgiving? No, it was something else she was trying to get her family together – not us, but the locals down there. And she said. “Dad, we want you to come have dinner with us.” And he says, “No, I don’t think so.” And he said “People here would miss me.” And she said, “I’ve got two things to say about that. And one is why don’t you ask your little group what they think you should do.” And he says, “Oh, I don’t need to, I know they’d tell me to go.” And she said, “The other thing is, this is what you’ve done all your life, is put other people in front of your family.”

CO: What did he say?

SP: He says “I’ll come.”

CO: He needed to be confronted. I'm sure you had, though.

SP: I remember telling him one time – I said, “You know Fred, I feel like you got these lists of people to deal with, and if you call this one and they're not there, then they go to the bottom of the list. Even if it's me.” And he says, “Yeah.” He was not easy to live with, but he was a sweet man and a very smart man – in physics and math. He gave me three wonderful children, and he gave his second wife two wonderful children. And now Terry's the only one that goes to see him.

CO: So what gives your life purpose or meaning today?

SP: That man. (Chuck). And they do [her children], but they all got their own lives, and I can't live their lives. And I'm kind of busy living mine. I've got books to read. What's her name, Luke?

CO: Helen Luke. Yeah, I think you should start with that one that you saw in my car.

SP: I better write it down, because I won't remember.

CO: I'll get it for you, we're almost done. What is the greatest source of inspiration for you? What inspires you?

SP: (Sighs). I don't know, I just float along.

CO: I don't think that's true – I think you're inspired, but that's okay.

SP: (Laughs).

CO: What are you proudest of in life? I don't mean that in the “sinful” sense, but –

SP: That I managed to finagle my way into Agnes Scott. I wouldn't take anything for those years. They really made a big difference in my quality of appreciation and – the things that I appreciated were in better taste. I told Dr. Hayes – who was my English prof – I said, “You know” – - because I was friends with him after we graduated – “I've forgotten so much of what I learned there.” He says, “Yes, but it gave you a caste of mind.”

CO: Right. And I think the change was permanent – that change is permanent.

SP: Mmhm.

CO: Whether you recall all the details or the – the change, it's transformative. Yeah. So how would you like to be remembered, or what do you want your legacy to be?

SP: It is what it is – I can't control that, I don't know.

CO: Okay, so you don't particularly care how you're remembered?

SP: Well I would like to be remembered affectionately. I would like to be remembered as I *came to be*, rather than the way I *was* when I was struggling with my anger.

CO: Okay, well I think that's pretty worth noting. Is there anything that your children or grandchildren or your husband or anybody you care about, does not know about you, but you wish they did?

SP: Nuh uh.

CO: Okay. Is there anything we've left out?

SP: I don't think so (laughs). I even told you about the pack of cards.

CO: There's plenty we've left out, but –

SP: Yeah there is, but I think it's a pretty good coverage you're doing here. And you're very interested in the Civil Rights thing I can tell.

CO: Yeah I am.

SP: Well, it's a biggie.

CO: But finally – everybody hates this question. Everybody hates it, so it's okay if you hate it. You don't have to answer it – but and I mean it's not like I'm necessarily going to use it, but it is an interesting exercise. What would you title the story of your life? Titles are supposed to capture the essence of something, so what would capture the essence of Sue?

SP: "A little girl's trip from a cotton farm to not being afraid to die."

CO: I think that's a powerful title. I love that. Most people balk – they won't come up with something. Some people come up with goodies like that one, so (laughs) you're good company. So that's good. I'm going to turn this off, but you still have another assignment. I totally forgot to tell you that I need some pictures.

-----End of part 5-----

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