

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH SUE KOZEL

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kathryn Tracy Rizzi: This begins an oral history interview with Sue Kozel, on May 6, 2021, with Kate Rizzi. I am in Branchburg, New Jersey. Ms. Kozel, thank you so much for doing this oral history interview.

Sue Kozel: Thank you so much, Kate. I'm very excited.

KR: Can you please state where you are today?

SK: Yes, I'm in Cream Ridge, part of western Monmouth County, New Jersey.

KR: To begin today, where and when were you born?

SK: I was born on June 13, 1958, in Somerville, New Jersey.

KR: What would you like to share about your family history?

SK: When I think about my family, like many American families, it was very dysfunctional. I had a large extended family, and so I had aunts and uncles who I'd spend a lot of time with. I was partially raised by them and introduced to culture and ideas, in particular from my Aunt Mary, who married into the family. They did the best they could, but it was a very challenging childhood, with violence, drugs and alcohol as part of the family. For me, education was an escape; it was my window, the library and education, to get away from reality.

KR: In terms of your family history, is there any immigration history or any military history that you would like to talk about?

SK: Yes. Like everybody, during COVID, at home, I fortunately didn't have it, but we were all sequestered and I said, "Let me do my ancestry." I don't know if you did yours, but I did Ancestry and 23andMe because we never really talked a lot about our background. The grandparents I knew couldn't speak English. They spoke broken English, with four different languages thrown in, so we never really knew who we were. I found out that while I'm overwhelmingly Eastern European, which I thought, I have Greek, Southern European, Russian, and a little Chinese DNA--surprise! What surprised me is I may have Russian relatives, which I didn't expect, the far east side of Russia, so the Bering [Strait] bridge, land bridge, they used to live, so just south of Siberia, which was kind of like, "Okay." I found out about my Chinese ancestry, which was a shock, and we can talk about that--I'm very excited by it--and Greek, which I didn't know about either. 23andMe does like generations four through seven and beyond, the Neanderthal, all that good stuff, and then Ancestry mostly counts on 1800s and above. It's interesting to look at the two profiles and see how sometimes they disagreed in terms of genetic roots.

That brings me to, we really don't know who we are. [laughter] The world is so global that anybody who says, "I'm a hundred percent Irish," or, "I'm a hundred percent Italian," you've got to be kidding me because people moved in global history so much more than I think we can appreciate as modern people. It was kind of both exciting and surprising. I think that's what family history is; you get the little chunk of your life and then we try to put together our

ancestors. In reflection, those "national," racial and ethnic markers sometimes are not true according to family traditions and histories, so I still don't know who I really am!

Part of my family were Polish coal miners in Pennsylvania. We visited some of the family. We played on the coal piles, in the late '60s. There was alcoholism, just a really rough life for those immigrants. My sense is my immigrant family came between 1862--from Eastern Europe, maybe Greece, until I figure out what's going on [laughter]--up to about 1912. That's as far as I've gotten in terms of coming in as that newer generation of immigrants. [Sue Kozel's added to the transcript: Since the interview, I have found there is English and Irish DNA family connections too. Who am I?]

KR: Your grandparents who you knew who did not speak English, where were they from?

SK: From my mother's side, they said that they were from Hungary, and then sometimes documents said Austria-Hungary because that was the empire. Then, sometimes they called themselves Czech. I still don't know exactly where they're from, but I've been able to track down very common names in this tradition, Balog, which is both a Jewish name and a Christian name, and then Kozel, which is Jewish and Christian, with many different spellings, but the common root is K-O-Z-I-O-L and mine is K-O-Z-E-L. So, it just shows how various religious traditions, ethnic traditions, in spite of what is their difference, they still have common roots and names in the communities. I am very surprised that the DNA did not pick up any Jewish roots.

Pogroms were really big in Poland and in Russia, and I never could figure out--why did my grandparents come here? They were flaming redheads. Nobody in my family at least got the red hair, but they were both like Lucille Ball redheads naturally. I did have those strawberry blond red streaks up front with chestnut brown, dark auburn hair--now grey! They never talked about the experience. We've come to associate sometimes silence as a trauma, and we just don't want to relive it. So, I wish I knew more from them, but sadly, I don't. There's no written stories or diaries.

My parents, like many of the first generation, really wanted to be American, so on my mother's side, they didn't talk to their parents about the old days. It was food, curse words in the ethnic language, then the food you ate, and then the church you affiliated with. In this case, they were Greek Orthodox or Russian Orthodox and they couldn't find a church, so they became Catholic. You see, sometimes the religions will also adapt to what's available.

KR: Your grandparents who were from the Austria-Hungary area, were they Jewish?

SK: No. I actually thought I might be Jewish. I did a lot of scholarship on Jewish traditions when I was younger. I was studying, actually, Yiddish at YIVO [Institute for Jewish Research] up at Columbia. No, the Ancestry says no. I still think that may be wrong. The Ancestry says no Ashkenazi in me. That doesn't mean it's not Palatine, it's not Italian, even Greek. And I now know I have Greek DNA. At least the Ashkenazi side, there is no genetic trace of that. But it's possible. I don't close anything out; you don't know. That's what's exciting and frustrating. Genetics and family history, what you think you are, sometimes isn't. How do you approach

that, as a crisis or as an opportunity to look at humanity? Where do I fit in this big human world?

KR: You mentioned your family living in Pennsylvania coal country and you going to visit.

SK: Yes.

KR: What were their lives like? What did they tell you, and what did you witness?

SK: Nobody talked. You know what we did? We ate. I mean, Grandma would make food. [laughter] Everybody would come to the table. The men would drink these little fifty-cent beers in these little, tiny glasses, and everything was around food. I just can't explain it. There wasn't a lot of patting on the head. But at times there clearly was emotion and love.

I remember we came to see my grandfather who was dying of black lung, and that was horrific. I remember after I saw that, I was so happy I didn't live there and didn't work those mines, because, to me--that was probably at age ten--mines meant death. This is not what you want to do.

In the '50s, apparently, all my relatives on my father's side picked up and left Hazelton. One guy stayed behind in Tamaqua. If you look at a coal mining map along Route 309, Hazelton, Pennsylvania, West Hazelton, Crystal Ridge. They all kind of picked up and moved to New Jersey because New Jersey was like the new paradise for Polish people. They all moved to FINDERNE, to the Somerville area. I cannot think of the town that begins with an M that's right next to FINDERNE.

KR: Manville.

SK: Manville, yes, a huge Polish community, like everybody kind of clustered together, and so they moved as a unit. It was very interesting. They were dysfunctional, but family, you hold it together. That was after my grandfather died. The final group moved as well, and they all came into New Jersey, Bound Brook, that whole area.

KR: It was for economic opportunities.

SK: Oh, yes. I mean, the mines were starting to fail. Remember the Centralia mines, there were fires burning. The town was ready to collapse. So, people were like, "We're going to head to the hills." What was in Bound Brook, New Jersey, Union Carbide. Then, you had U.S. Steel in Piscataway. You had a lot of blue-collar jobs. You had paint, making paint, in the area, in Dunellen, National Starch, Sherwin-Williams in Plainfield. This whole region, you had a lot of job opportunities for blue-collar people or blue-collar white men, yes. [Editor's Note: Since 1962, coal seam fires have burned in Centralia, Pennsylvania. After the fire had been burning for years, many residents relocated, and Pennsylvania condemned the town in 1992.]

KR: Where did you grow up?

SK: I grew up in Dunellen. I was very happy in Dunellen. Dunellen, it was like one of those little fantasy movie towns. As long as you weren't different, it was great. We had the one Jewish doctor. We had the one black family. We had one Hispanic family, which was Puerto Rican. Then, you had all these white ethnics. It was like a white, white, white town, but it was small. It still had that intimacy and smallness to it. Because we grew up on welfare, we had food stamps, which made us like outliers. So, we tried not to look different, but we were different. That was some of the challenges in Dunellen. The education was amazing. I love music. I sang in a lot of the choirs. I did a lot of journalism writing when I was a kid. I was into all that, yes. But I was bullied quite a bit, even with people spitting on me, pushing me, throwing pennies at me during lunch, and name calling. So, when I was happy, it was great; then it was not. I hate bullies.

KR: What were formative experiences for you when you were growing up?

SK: Not having money because people viewed you differently. I definitely was white trash, as they would say. I mean, people had no problem saying that. The '60s and '70s were very blunt times, and so I was sometimes called a white N-word. It was crazy. I just thought it was so unfair that you were defined by your class, and for me, that was the critical moment. I wasn't a radical, I wasn't a Marxist, but I saw that class and economics framed the way the world looked at others. Reflecting on the racial experiences now, I can see how closed our town was to diversity.

Music, on the other hand, was very important to me. Music is a way to understand culture. I had an amazing choral instructor, Dr. James Heard, H-E-A-R-D. He had us sing a lot of Negro spirituals and a lot of Hungarian music, which was shocking to me that something from my own background would kind of come out. He introduced us to the world through music, and I thought that was very exciting, that there are ways to connect people. Even if you don't have anybody who is of that experience present, you can connect and be empathetic through music. That was really important to me.

Then, being able to stand up for yourself. A lot of people were bullied in our class. Jocks ruled, jocks ruled. This was like a movie in this town, and so people would be beaten up, me included, and spit on, just insulted by people. You've got to stand up and you fight back, so I had to beat a bully up once. Beyond that, it was mostly through classwork or finding teachers to help me. That was probably the third most important thing: be strong and don't be broken by people, no matter what they do.

I played on a varsity boys' tennis team for four years. We didn't have a girls' team. This was before they had Title IX. So, I literally had to beat every guy. I played, for four years, third singles, first doubles, and that was a really important moment for me. I had guys refuse to play me, "I'm not going to play a girl," crazy stuff. One guy broke his tennis racket. People, including my teammates, screaming that I was a lesbian and hoping to distract me to lose games. I just went out there, and I was pretty good. I was small, short, but I'm very fast, very, very quick hands. I think I was good at the net. I could play like a guy. I had a wicked, wicked cross court, which shocked people. They were like, "What?" That, to me, was another thing, like, you can do anything. If you can't do it this way, do it this way. You can do anything. You just have

to have some supporters, and if you don't, you just do it. You just get through it, and you do it. Then, books were my friend. So, I would say the library, librarians were really key. Those are the five influences that helped ground me as cuckoo was going on all around.

KR: I want to ask you about your class consciousness.

SK: Oh, yes.

KR: How were you treated that it led to this development of your class consciousness?

SK: Class consciousness emerged really in college. I started to understand it based on my experiences in high school and my family, just looking at how my parents divorced and my father gambled a lot. One day, we got a piano in the house, and we're like, "What's this?" Then, the next day, we had to go begging for food, like none of this makes sense. Seeing the sheriff carry all of our belongings out of our house was a shocking thing. I thought about children. Children should not be victimized because of their parents, number one. We don't pick our parents. Number two, why should people who are screwups lose everything? That consciousness came out of just watching all this go on as a child. I knew it, but I started to articulate it, understand it, when I went to Douglass College first and then Livingston College. I transferred in. It was at the college level with [Norman] Markowitz, with [John] Leggett, a little bit with Dee Garrison, with Sherry Gorelick, with Wells Keddie, with Tony Vega, all these faculty that open up all these ideas, why are some people born into a more privileged state than others and how can that change?

KR: You were coming of age just after the anti-Vietnam War movement, the civil rights movement of the '60s, the women's movement of late '60s, and the gay and LGBTQ rights movement of the late '60s. How much were those movements on your radar, and what did you know about them?

SK: I'm going to say when I went to college, it's like I went to a new world, because I went to school with African Americans, especially as I took more classes at Livingston, less so at Rutgers. I met Hispanic students that I hung out with. My husband, when I met him-- Christopher and I are together for thirty-nine years of marriage this year and forty-five since our first date. We met at Rutgers. We mark two anniversaries. So, we'd go to gay bars together with lesbian friends, because a lot of my feminist friends were gay or lesbian, at Douglass, so we'd go out of town. Yes, I was aware in college. I knew the assassination of King. I knew Bobby Kennedy. That was a big deal in our family, Bobby Kennedy, but I wasn't really thinking about all that. All I just kept thinking is, "Based on being a girl, I can't join a team. What do you mean I can't join the team? There's no other team for me to play on. You're not going to create a girls' team, there's no money. Well, then I want to be on a boys' team." That seemed logical to me. It's like living in a logical world illogically constrained, an artificially-constrained reality. I don't know if I really answered your question. [Editor's Note: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee. Robert F. Kennedy was shot on June 5, 1968, in Los Angeles, California, and died the next day.]

As I graduated high school, especially when I went to Douglass first and then Livingston, it was like culture shock. There's this whole world I know nothing about. It's very exciting, and there are a lot of people who think similar to me, oh my. I think I had joined NOW, the National Organization for Women, and when I was a sophomore at Douglass, I was an alternate from New Jersey to go to the National Women's Conference in Texas. So, I had a lot of energy, and I flung into things. I wrote a column at Douglass called "The Feminist Perspective" for *The Caellian*. That came out almost immediately. I helped form a student worker group, saying, "We need to get a minimum wage here. We're being exploited as student workers." I started that up. I always felt you have to do something. You can't always scream and yell, blame somebody else; you've got to do it. If there's a problem, you try to fix it. Yes, I was like a mad woman unleashed because it was a world where I thought I could actually do things. It was very exciting to me. I loved my college experience. It was amazing. [Editor's Note: The United Nations designated 1975-1985 as the Decade for Women and 1975 as International Women's Year. President Gerald Ford signed legislation to establish the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, which planned state and regional conferences and a national conference. From November 18 to 21, 1977, the National Women's Conference took place in Houston, Texas. The UN organized four world conferences on women, in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985, and Beijing in 1995.]

KR: I just have a few more questions about your upbringing, before we dive into your Rutgers years. What role did religion play in your upbringing?

SK: Such an interesting question. It was very important, especially to my mother's side of the family. We'd create the Easter basket that had to be blessed by the priest. I went to catechism after school. It was always there, but I didn't feel really connected to it. I went because I wanted to sing. So, I would sing the descant in the choir. For me, it was the music that got me through it. I loved the music. My Aunt Mary, she was born in Connecticut and married my Uncle Michael, she'd take me to concerts. So, I would learn about religious texts and ideas through the concerts because I wasn't really interested in the programming. I wasn't interested in the Virgin birth; I can't believe people believe that. That's a Greek idea. It has nothing to do with Judaism, which is the root of Christianity. I was kind of like, "No." I didn't want people telling me I was a sinner because I had sex. Ironically, I was a virgin at this time. People assumed you were having sex with everything that moves, no. So, there were a lot of rigid restraints. On the other hand, I think religion is beautiful because it gives basic values and ideas about good and evil. I study Quakers. I've studied a lot of the Protestant side. I love Cyrus the Great, I love him, from Persia. I love a lot of religious ideas, but I don't want to be constrained and be a member of the club and have to think one way and then be an outcast because, "There you go again, you have individual freethought." I like freethought. Religion was important. We had all the ceremonies and all the celebrations, did communion, but I really loved the music and that's what connected me.

KR: You talked about some of the activities that you did when you were going through school. What was high school like for you?

SK: I had some great teachers. I don't know why Dunellen attracted these talented faculty, but we'd have these little pods, they call them pods today, but these tiny clusters. We had honors, we

didn't have AP [advanced placement] prep then, but we had little honors classes. So, I would just glom on to smart teachers. We read Kübler-Ross soon after she wrote *On Death and Dying*. It's amazing that I would have the high school physics teacher teaching this idea of how do you communicate with someone who is dying? I would say my high school experience included men and women of praxis and people who were not confined by labels. I liked this. Is it more about you speaking or more about you listening to them? How do you read what they're trying to tell you when they can't verbalize? That's stuck with me my whole life. How do you have empathy and how, when somebody is shutting down in front of you, you see it and then you try to respond to it? I had some really great teachers. I loved playing tennis. [Editor's Note: Elisabeth Kübler-Ross was a Swiss-American psychiatrist whose 1969 book *On Death and Dying* explores the five stages of grief.]

I had some experiences where I had people throw pennies at me in the lunchroom. It's crazy stuff, and nobody would do anything. I finally went to the principal myself and I said, "I've had it and you have to deal with it." Sometimes, they were school board members' children. So, you learned about hierarchy, power, and, again, do you allow people to change who you are? How do you hold on to yourself?

Then, at my aunt's, I don't know why she didn't talk about this, but I learned--my Aunt Mary, who I adored, who would rescue me--she was the first Catholic president of the YWCA of New Jersey, which is a Protestant group. So, she's like this major trailblazer. I've been doing some research on her now. She was fighting for equal rights, black rights. In the late '40s, she was sent as a delegate to the international convention. Now, she was my rock. She never shared any of this when we were together. I don't know why. She married my [uncle], and it all went away--she married as an older woman--which I never understood. I'm like, "What happened here? Why did you marry him?" She was always the anchor who'd get me books, or we'd talk about things I was reading. So, I think everybody needs that anchor in a grandparent, older siblings, somebody who can help you when the world's crazy and you don't have that stability in your household.

Yes, it was kind of like hit and miss. High school was great sometimes, it was horrible, but isn't that life? To learn at a younger age that it really isn't all about you, it's about people crazy. You just have to kind of steer through it, so somehow you get to that prize. You get there and you do what you want.

KR: I have a middle school daughter, and that's good advice.

SK: Thank God I didn't live with YouTube and the internet because cyber bullying and everything, it could be crushing. To have you as a mother, to have a strong support system and to tell her, "This too shall pass." Nothing stays forever; it constantly changes. Change, change, change. We as historians know that. Change, stability, yet change. Racism, yes, existed from even before 1619 in this country. It's stabilizing, but it changes its form sometimes. So, we have to look at what has changed, what are the changes, how can it change more?

KR: Did your aunt Mary live in Dunellen?

SK: No. She lived in, first, Connecticut, Hartford, and then she lived in Plainfield and finally Warren, New Jersey, near you guys up there, the Watchung area, Warren. She worked at Johns Manville. She commuted all the way down, through Bound Brook to Manville, obviously. She would train--this stuck with me a lot--she trained all the executives, the young executive males coming in, and she made less money than them. They had less experience. They had a college degree, but she trained them on bookkeeping and on accounting procedures. She was an accountant. She was brilliant. She'd always tell me, "These idiots don't know what I know and they're paid more." She goes, "It's unfair, Susie, but you've just got to keep doing it. Keep doing it." When she was younger, she was almost six foot, and she played on women's basketball teams. It kind of was a big deal in the '40s and the '50s. The Y would have these competing women's basketball teams all over the place. She was very popular, very outgoing. She wore glasses, had long, long hair. She never cut her hair. She'd wear it in a long braid. She'd always just talk about, again, "Don't let people define you." She'd say, "Who cares?" She would use the word sell out. She'd go, "You can't sell out because you want to be like them." She goes, "Do you want to be like them? They should be like us." I thought, "How interesting? Why chase after that?" The role model, let's look at ourselves, we can fix ourselves, of course, but why not hold on to our own values? Why not bring our values to the world? That's something; that was like my mantra. I didn't even know that word in college, mantra. That was the mantra that's driven me my whole life. Don't try to be like them. Don't try to change. Change them. Stay who you are; change them.

KR: What were your academic interests when you were in high school?

SK: I love music. Actually, my music teacher wanted me to go to Juilliard. He was ready to go, had set all this up. I like the actual construction of music. I love syncopation. I loved writing music, just writing ideas for scores and stuff. So, Mr. Heard thought that [I should go to Juilliard]. My guidance counselor met with my mother [and] said I belonged in a community college, that this was just out of the question. I think that was because we were poor. It wasn't creativity. Guidance counselors, the schools better do a better job today with that. "Take your typing classes, Susie." There was typing then. I was going to be a secretary, "Take your typing classes."

For me, it was wonderful to have that music. That was a big influence with Mr. Heard. I took a lot of anthology in English classes. I loved stories. I just love stories. Do you know I hated history? I hated it then because it was all dates. I had horrible history teachers, "What date? What date?" I was like, "Can we talk about what they did?" "What date did this happen?" I'm like, "This is not for me. This is just insane."

When Millicent Fenwick came to our class, we had a debate--I was one of the moderators of the debate--between her congressional candidate, I think his name was Bohen. When she came in, I said, "This is a character. This is a pretty amazing woman." She is like, I would say, a weirdo in the sense that she likes cigars. She dresses like a blue blood and then she talks like a pirate. I said, "Wow, you don't have to be one thing." You can be weird and different and do it, and I always liked that. You don't have to pre-package yourself into the hole, like here's the box. I feel that being born in the '60s and '70s, at least for me, it was a time of a lot of freedom and experimentation in ideas, so high school gave me that. It was all these different experiences,

"Oh, that was exciting." Yes, those were the biggies. [Editor's Note: Millicent Fenwick (1910-1992) served in the New Jersey General Assembly from 1970 to 1972 and in the House of Representatives from 1975 to 1983. Fenwick defeated Democrat Frederick Bohen in 1974 to gain her seat in Congress.]

KR: Tell me about your writing when you were in high school. Did you write for your school newspaper?

SK: Yes, I did. I wrote for it. Then, because I was the first girl to play tennis and the second girl in the history of Dunellen to play in a boys' sport--a senior had done that in cross country--there would be a lot of articles on that. Yes, I'd write for the newspaper. I'd interview people. I liked that. That was fun. Then, I found, I ran for student council, so I couldn't write as many articles because you're not supposed to write about yourself and the things you're directly involved in. We weren't doing autobiographies. [laughter] We were supposed to be doing journalism. I did that. It was fun.

KR: When did you start playing tennis?

SK: I started playing, probably not really well, in 1970. I just picked it up. I liked it. You could play with yourself. So, I could literally hit the ball and you'd have those big--I don't know if they exist anymore--backboard walls, some wood. I liked to play basketball too, but I was a little too short at five-two to play on the girls' team. But, tennis, wow, if you could move fast, it made up for height.

Then, when Billie Jean King came on the scene and when she beat Bobby Riggs, I remember watching it. That was an incredible moment. He was all hype, and he was just a big mouth. He tried to--this is where you learn about psychologically psyching people out--he tried to psyche her out. He might have had strength, but she had strength. She had endurance. He tried to mentally beat her. I learned from that experience, only you can beat yourself mentally, like I may not have all the talents, but if I'm equal with somebody, it's my brain that's going to get in the way if I allow it. So, Billie Jean King and coming out, it was amazing, and then Bobby Riggs with his crazy bikini women and the car, like enough stuff. I got a sense that women are not defined by men. That was a formative moment for me; women should define themselves. There's nothing wrong with them, nothing wrong with anything. In fact, I thought I'd never get married. I decided at that moment, "I'm never getting married. All my relatives are messed up. This is not for me. I'm going to be single and happy." Of course, that changed like two years later. [laughter] Yes, that was one of the key moments, Billie Jean King. [Editor's Note: Billie Jean King is a retired professional tennis player who competed from 1959 to 1990. In 1973, she defeated Bobby Riggs in a tennis match known as the "Battle of the Sexes."]

Then, Martina Navratilova, wow, she was powerful. Seeing her, when I say play like a man, I mean really play like a man, physically strong, but she was mentally weak. That was sad to see because she had the goods on everybody physically. She just would break down with Chris Evert. Chris Evert was nothing next to her, but Chris Evert defeated her because she's like the pretty little girl and Martina is big bad Martina and she couldn't handle the heat. It was important to watch this woman just self-destruct. She was such a talented [player] and she was a

major winner, Martina, but, again, the brain controls the outcome sometimes, not the brawn, the brain. [Editor's Note: Between 1973 and 1988, Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova played eighty tennis matches, with Navratilova winning 43 and Evert 37. In Grand Slam Finals, they met fourteen times, with Navratilova beating Evert ten times. They played twenty-nine matches that went to three sets, with Evert winning fifteen matches and Navratilova fourteen matches.]

KR: How difficult was it for you to make the boys' tennis team? Did you face obstacles from the other players or from the coaches? What was that like?

SK: My coach was great. My coach was my math teacher, Mr. Heithmar. I liked him, he liked me, and all he would tell me is, "You want to play? Then play and win." Sometimes, the tennis team was seen as a bunch of misfits to begin with. [laughter] We were not really like the jock material for anything, but when we pulled together, we were pretty awesome at that time. But at first, the guys would spit on me. They wouldn't talk to me. They wouldn't practice with me. The coach would have to come in and scream at them. For me, when I got my first varsity letter, I thought that was a big deal because I never saw myself as an athlete. I saw myself just as Sue. But then you realize, once you move in and get the varsity letter that's supposed to open everything up, it doesn't. It actually made it worse because I got a varsity letter in a male sport, and that drove the other athletes nuts. It was more the football players, the male football and basketball players. Then, a lot of the basketball girls dated them. It was like this never ending, I guess what they would think of as hazing, just never ending. I'd come home and I'd cry. I'd talk to somebody who was there who could listen to me, or I'd call my Aunt Mary and she'd pick me up for the weekend. I'd go, "Eh." She'd say, "Shut up. Suck it up. You can do this. Don't let them beat you." I'd say, "Okay, all right." I got my marching orders. "It's hard." "Shut up. You don't know what hard is." She was pretty tough. She was very generous, but just like, "Stop it. You've cried now enough. Let's just move now." "Oh, okay." "Can I have my meatloaf now?" "Yes, okay, we'll eat meatloaf now." [laughter] That's it, in a nutshell.

KR: You talked about the guidance counselor who tried to steer you towards community college.

SK: Yes, yes.

KR: What messages were being sent to you by your family, by your community, by your friends, about what you could do in your life?

SK: Well, I was always told I was very creative. All my English [teachers], political science, I loved my sociology guy, Mr. Shereshefsky was his name, a wonderful mix of Jews and WASPs that I loved, who taught me at Dunellen. One of the messages was if you want to be yourself, there's a price to pay for it. You'd better get ready to accept that. My guidance counselor told me that I'm too big for my britches, that I overcompensate, "This is not natural. You overcompensate, so you work really hard, but is it natural? Is there something you can do?" That's like, I think, the worst thing you can tell somebody, any student, is they don't have the talent to achieve. I got that message loud and clear. Of course, I didn't swear at that time. If it was me at that time, going back, oh, my God, the pirate, but at that point, I just sat there. "What do you mean you're going to go to Juilliard? You don't have the ability to do it. Who's going to

pay for it?" That was the other thing, "Who's going to pay for that?" I said, "Well, I'll get scholarships." "No, no, you're going to learn how to type."

The other thing was that my teachers always told me I could outthink anybody, but I couldn't write sentences and that was true. I didn't learn until I went to college that I have dyslexia. I just couldn't write. I couldn't spell. Even today, I'll see numbers and I'll reverse them. So, I have to really go back and read everything. I guess she was trying to tell me I was stupid or something. I'm so intense I refused to hear it. [laughter] I refused to hear it. I'd go back to Aunt Mary, "Aunt Mary, they said I can't do it." "You're going to go to college." "Okay, okay." "Not community college." "Yes, okay, all right, I'm with you. How are we going to do this?" She goes, "You worry about doing well. You just keep doing what you're doing."

My mom, to the best of her ability, was always my advocate. She'd always have to call teachers up and say, "You know, Susie was being picked on by someone in your class. Why do you allow this?" So, she was very good, to the best of her ability. She was a single mom with three kids, working under the table while on welfare because there was never money. She was another bookkeeper, super smart with numbers, training everybody, working at all these businesses. She'd be the equivalent of an illegal alien, somebody who a corporation exploits. Nobody likes being there, but, "We're going to use you because we're going to save money on you." My poor mom was just trying to hold everything together, so I couldn't expect her to do a lot. But when you start killing people's dreams, I saw how important that stupid guidance counselor was. If you're not strong, think of all the people she broke, and to me, that's a tragedy. That stuck with me, like, don't let people break other people. If you're a screwup, that's who you are, but don't have somebody else come in and wreck it before you even get a chance. That's a driving thing. All these negatives have stuck with me in the sense of let's fix this, let's change this. Nobody should do this, no matter who you are. Nobody should take away someone's dream.

KR: Were you the first in your family to go to college?

SK: Yes, I was the first on my mother's side of the family, and I might have been the second on my father's side. My cousin Gigi, I think, went to college, but yes. When you're the first, everybody goes to college with you. So, it's like, "Oh, how's it going?" You don't want to talk about it. "Oh, tell us what's happening." Fortunately, I didn't commute, thank God. I lived on campus. I got a full scholarship to Rutgers, to Douglass, and then for Livingston. It was like a new world, but I had to fill in everybody the same story like twenty times. Everybody had to hear it, and they had to hear it themselves. They wanted to know what it was like. I was annoyed then, but I understand now. This was a big deal for the family, a really big deal.

KR: What was your college application process like?

SK: My mom, with the help of Mr. Heard, filled out the financials. I wrote an essay. I don't think anybody corrected it, so God knows. They saw some sparkle in there. [laughter] I was an EOF student, so the Educational Opportunity Fund had opened in the late '60s. I went in '72-'73 to high school. I graduated in '76 from high school. When I went to college, I was an EOF student. I was seen as the bright poor kid who can't write, "She's really bright. We have to fix

some things." That's how I think I got my scholarships, because I was seen as very creative, just kind of a mismatch and, "Let's try to help her out."

KR: Why did you choose Douglass in particular?

SK: Well, I actually liked the idea, the feminist side of me, which was awakening then, of going to school with all girls, all women. I thought it was a safe environment. I thought maybe this would be great because we wouldn't be judged for anything else. We're all women, so maybe this would work. I got accepted at Moravian and Wagner, some smaller institutions that I think needed their poor person quotient, so I kind of fit that. I didn't even think to apply Ivy [League]. I mean, it wouldn't even occur to me to even think about that. Juilliard, that dream was gone at that point. That was not going to happen. Douglass seemed close to home. I could see my family. It was part of Rutgers. Rutgers was great, Rutgers University, and I could live on campus and create a new life.

KR: Did you visit Douglass when you were a senior in high school?

SK: No, no. We didn't go on road trips to visit colleges. I only did that with graduate school. It was kind of like, "Okay, they want to take me, terrific, let's go." I didn't visit at all. I read the catalog because our high school library had a catalog for Douglass. I thought, "Oh, the courses look interesting." I saw pictures of the campus. When I saw the library image, I'm like, "Oh, this is great. This is for me." The library was big, I thought it was vast, and I would find something on everything.

KR: As an EOF student, did you do the summer program before your freshman year?

SK: No, no. I worked. I worked at McDonald's, and then I taught tennis during the summer too. I taught it through our school recreation program. So, I was constantly working. I had to make money in order to buy books and buy a bicycle. I wanted to be able to ride a bicycle up and down College Avenue. I did that once and never rode the bicycle again. I was like, "Are you out of your mind?" No, I didn't come up for any of that. I don't even remember if there was such a program then. All I remember is, "Here's your starting date. Fill out your financial aid acceptance. Do this." I said, "Okay." Then, we came for orientation. It was like, "Oh." I remember going to President Bloustein's house because it was an orientation and I don't know if they did it during your time, but you can go visit the president's house as part of being on campus. I thought, Okay, let's check this out." I'm like, "Oh, this guy does pretty well. It's quite nice." It was just ironic. I didn't go to any of the football games. I had no interest in any of that. I wanted to do well in my classes, so I wasn't plugged into all that stuff.

KR: How big of a group was it that went to President Bloustein's house?

SK: They had buses. They'd have buses of us go. So, I would say there were some buses from Douglass and they were arranged, "Okay, everybody on the bus." "Wow, we're going to get to see the president's house." [laughter] I mean, we'd wander around like herded sheep for probably an hour, ate some food, looked around, and then got back on the bus and went back.

KR: Were he and his wife there?

SK: Yes, they'd greet, "Hello, hello," like little robots, "Hello, hello." He was not a very personable person, as I came to learn. He must have been out of his mind. So, it seemed like thousands of people, I don't know how many, but this was from all over the university's federated system. It was, "Hello, hello." But we felt important because we got the big hello. [Editor's Note: The federated system refers to the undergraduate colleges of Rutgers-New Brunswick: Livingston College, Douglass College, University College, Cook College and Rutgers College.]

KR: Well, we will circle back to Bloustein later and talk more about Bloustein. What were your first days and weeks like at Douglass?

SK: It was a shock. There were all these smart women. There are a lot of smart people in the world. I was in the top ten of my class. Almost everybody was that I met. It was really exciting energy. Then, I learned that many of them were not feminists. Many of them were afraid of lesbians. Many of them were very fearful women. So, I had that one view of, "Oh, God, this is going to be all NOW feminists. They're going to want to change the world, and equal rights for everybody." Then, it's like, "Whoa, women are complicated too." There's not one way to be a woman. I saw one black student. Her name was Linda Garrett and we became buddies. I brought her to my aunt's house. We'd do little sleepovers. I brought some of the students from Douglass. I found a person with a car, of course. [laughter] I said, "Let's go to my aunt's. She said we can come up for the weekend." We all drove. So, I made some friends, and we had a good time.

Then, I looked at some of the faculty and many were men and many were just messed up. It was a different generation. They weren't really open-minded about different experiences. They didn't like to have debates in their classes. It's like really the sage. Learning meant, if you want a good grade, you regurgitate. I said, "This is not for me. This is mindless. I'll do it to get the good grade, but I'm out of here." I was like, "I can't take classes with these people anymore." So, that disappointed me, some of the Douglass stuff.

I got involved in, not in the student government, I was on the student newspaper, *The Caellian*. I got involved with that. I got involved with the Voorhees Chapel Choir. I got involved in an Eagleton poll. I worked there as a student worker. My glorious dining hall job, I'd scrub the dishes. That was my student work. [I thought], "Oh, my God, another greasy fries with cheese I have to scrub." I remember those days.

Then, I'm trying to do the academics. I'm a last-minute person. That doesn't work all the time. So, [I was] trying to learn new study skills, learning, "What do you mean I can't write it the night before it's due? What do you mean I can't have all these cross outs?" You had to have something that actually looks like a real paper. It can't be like Susie inserts. Remember the carrots, insert the word, write it in. My first term was a little rough. I didn't do well because I think I was so excited by the college experience that I was spending less time on the academics, more on living. I could go to the pub. I'd go to every meeting I could. It was just exciting to hear debates and disagreements. Then, after the first term, I settled down. I was just like, "Okay." I got tutoring, in terms of writing sentences. Those were really important for me to

finally learn a little bit better the craft of writing. Creativity was going to get me so far; I had to have some technical to match it.

I had a wonderful Latin teacher. Her name escapes me, but I took Latin for a term. I loved her, a young Jewish intellectual. Why can't I think of her [name]? She just told me, "The key to success is learn basic structure. Once you have the structure down, like learning a language--the sentence, the predicate, the verb--once you learn the structure, then everything is open to you." I took her to heart because she was the only person who said, "You need to get some help here." She was an advocate for tutoring, and I guess the other faculty were just so busy with large classes or something, "Don't you know this already? Just do it." If you're a first-generation person, just like today, you need extra skills help. Sometimes, the student, like I was, was arrogant. I thought I knew everything. They have to fall and then the support system, if they're open to it, can help raise them again. Rutgers was great, Douglass was great with that. Kwaku in EOF, he was the director. Kwaku was amazing and he was very supportive, yes. I found a lot of little angels everywhere who would adopt me, knowing that I was difficult, would adopt me and then steer me, "Okay, let's go."

KR: How was it that you got that tutoring that you needed?

SK: What do you mean?

KR: You talked about the tutoring.

SK: Oh, yes.

KR: Was it through EOF?

SK: Some of it was through EOF. You didn't really have a writing center, but you had English students that were tutoring for free. I guess it was done through the English center. I'd just show up and I showed them what I wrote, and they go, "Well, what were you trying to say?" I said, "Well, why can you say it, but you can't write it?" Then, I went for testing. They said, "Have you ever been tested for writing?" I thought they thought I had a developmental disability or something, and I'm like, "What are you saying?" When I went for the testing, that's when I learned I had dyslexia. Apparently, I hear things. When I hear them, something's off in the ears and it gives me a reversing somehow. There's a connection with the brain and the ears, and then you're unable to write it. If you heard me in a classroom, when I'm lecturing, I'll say, "Okay, everybody, are you ready? I have to spell this one out," [laughter] because I'll literally, in my own mind, see it differently and reverse it when I speak. I think that was a big problem with my writing, just finally somebody paid attention and said, "She should get this tested out." I thought that was brilliant. I finally knew what was wrong. I didn't have any treatment for it, Kate. There was no, "Here's some exercise." It was like, "You've got this." I'm like, "Okay, well, at least I know that." I don't know what they do for dyslexia to help somebody with both hearing and speaking, because once I mess this up, then I mess this up. Thank you, Douglass, you helped me very much.

KR: What were your experiences like in the EOF program?

SK: Now, I understand it better, but there was such racism because I was the smart white kid who was always used as like, "Here's our star in EOF." I was the smart white kid who always showed the program worked. David Burns, who worked for Bloustein, would always say, "You're the reason we keep funding EOF." I'd say, "Thank you, whatever that means." They wouldn't find a black or Hispanic student. I was always used as the example of success. That was embarrassing that diversity was not a theme back then. Then, there was the perception among most whites that all poor people are black and Hispanic and immigrants. So, I could pass as middle class because I could speak middle class. That annoyed me because now you're telling me I'm valuable because I fit your little construct. That was a big word in sociology, constructs. I was always using, "I don't like your construct for that." [laughter] I had a lot of attitude because I didn't want to be anybody's poster child for nonsense. If I was doing well, why weren't the other students doing well? It wasn't because they were dumb, and it wasn't because they were black and Hispanic. Something else was going on. That's something I never really got over, and I didn't like being used as a symbol.

KR: I have a reflection question.

SK: Yes.

KR: Looking back over all the years that EOF has existed and has supported all of these students going to college, what does it mean to you that you were an EOF student?

SK: Oh, my God, thank you, all the people in New Jersey I don't know who paid for my education. That's what it means. It was an opportunity that I probably wouldn't have gotten scholarships without the EOF as the foundation for it. I think EOF is essential for the success of the new generation of immigrants, the new generation of non-traditional students of any race and ethnicity. It's a social responsibility to help people, and I've always felt that my whole life. EOF opened the door for me, so it's important for me to open the door for other people.

KR: Where did you live when you were at Douglass?

SK: I lived in Corwin X and Y. I loved Corwin. That was a fun place. It was a little house. We were all crazy in it. One of the students was Becky Tu. She was the captain of the rowing team, Becky, a super brilliant science major, and she was always trying to bring me in to be on the crew team; I'm like, "No, no, no." We had a lesbian couple who lived on the first floor. We had a mix between freshmen and seniors. I really liked that. So, it was all layers crunched together in this one place, with one bathroom. We all had to wait our turn. When somebody had their boyfriend over, I'd have to sit outside in the hallway and write my paper. We just had a great time. Then, I went over to the Henderson Apartments. I really hooked up with mostly science majors. I loved them. They were like crazy people, the science majors. Then, I went to Livingston after that, transferred, went to Livingston, and lived off campus. I lived off campus with some Douglass women who lived off campus. I still adore them. Then, my next year, I lived with Christopher. I lived off campus with him, yes.

KR: What Douglass traditions did you experience?

SK: I know this is going to offend some of my Douglass colleagues. I thought all those walking across the bridge at night and stuff, that was all elitist nonsense. I mean, I didn't like any of them. I did some of them, but I just felt that we were always trying to make ourselves better than somebody else with these special traditions, like, "Look at me, I'm so important." I loved singing in the Voorhees Chapel Choir, so I'm going to call that a tradition. I just loved that. Passion Puddle, Chris and I snuck a few kisses there, but we didn't do it for the tradition. [laughter] I'm not really into that tradition stuff. I just find it as us-versus-them nonsense to make people feel better. I've always felt that way.

KR: How much interaction did you as a student have with the Douglass dean?

SK: I loved Jewel Cobb. I loved her. Okay, Jewel, don't spin in your grave now, but I did a table against the Hyde Amendment, I did a table and she gave me fifty or seventy-five dollars. She just gave me cash. She just walked up to me and gave me cash one day. I don't even know if she knew who I was. She said, "This is to support your effort." I said, "Oh, thank you, Dean Cobb, thank you." So, she was a cool woman. I didn't know her that well, but I liked her because she was very progressive. I don't think she could show that. She's a black woman scientist- intellectual. Oh, my God, could you imagine what would have happened had people known that she was funding a pro-abortion position, that she took a stand against the Hyde Amendment on the college campus? I love her. So, that was kind of like a surprise. The other deans, Nancy Richards, I think Nancy saw me as a burden. [laughter] Nancy saw me as a wild child, crazy, crazy. [Editor's Note: Jewel Plummer Cobb (1924-2017), a biologist and cancer researcher, served as the dean of Douglass College from 1976 to 1981. The Hyde Amendment is a legislative provision that bars the use of federal funds to pay for abortion, except to save the life of the patient or if the pregnancy arises from incest or rape.]

Then, I ended up working for Douglass. It' was my second job out of college. So, I got to meet Mary Hartman and Louise Duus and others. I found one problem is to try to create an old girls' network like the old boys' network, so always trying to mirror what men do to create your own success path, like, "If we only do this ..." and they're always yucking it up together, all these girls and women together. So, I thought they were obsessed, as middle-class women will be, on that achievement and moving into power structures, but I admire them. They're very smart women. I enjoyed their writing. Again, we would have a lot of debates on that. How important is social standing for success? In America, which is based on a capitalist system and based on social status, it's very important, very, very important. But I thought college was just to think about new and exciting alternatives. I was always in the alternative realm, an alternative way of thinking, but I found that I really didn't get that from Douglass.

When I started taking journalism classes at Livingston and I started hanging out there, taking political science classes, I'd go, "Oh, my God, even if I don't agree with these people, we can talk about Marxism. We can talk about utopian society. We can make our own society." It was very exciting to me. I need to be around that. I need to be around energy, like, "We can change things," not, "We're going to modify so three of us can get through and be the star." We can change the whole society.

That's what I did in all my college classes that I taught for nearly fourteen years, Kate. Whether it was a community college or a university, the final project was an exam plus an essay, where they had to create their own civilization based on the reading, of course. This isn't like Mars, "We're on Mars and shooting people with laser beams." This is how do we look at the current structures we read? What would your role as a leader be? What are the citizen rights you support? Had you been there and knowing the constraints of the time but also knowing your own sensibilities, can you write a declaration of your society? I didn't use manifesto because some people were like, "Communism!" "Okay, let's calm down. Let's do it as your own declaration for your society. Write a constitution for extra credit, but what are your values?" That, to me, is what college is about. How do we take amazing minds and have them see themselves as leading the next generation? They can do it. They can do it. That came from all my experiences at Douglass and Livingston. Especially at Livingston, I'd go, "Wow." People could call their professors by their first names and disagree with them. It was very exciting to me. People'd say, "You're wrong." I'd say, "What about this? No, you're wrong." That was amazing. No one was scared to disagree.

KR: I have a very specific question following up on something you said before.

SK: Sure.

KR: You talked about your friends who were lesbians.

SK: Right.

KR: Did you happen to go to Manny's Den in New Brunswick?

SK: No, we went to South River. I don't even remember the name of the place in South River. What was going on at Manny's Den?

KR: It was a famous gay bar in New Brunswick.

SK: No. We went super clandestine. It looked like a burnt-out building in South River. We'd all pile in and drive over there. I mean, that's the other thing; you wonder, "Why does it have to be edgy? Why does it have to be secret?" This is after Stonewall. This is after you have gay tennis players. You have all these lesbians coming out, in strategic roles, and I mean, really, who cares? Why can't people be happy? I think that the pursuit of happiness--I had to memorize the Declaration [of Independence], part of it, in high school--well, why can't people be happy and what does it mean to be happy? "I've got like a million dollars in my bank account." I guess I shouldn't be happy because I don't have that. That's a deep conversation. The lesbian women were like, "Yes, who cares?" We had a good time, we all hung out together, we all ate together. At Douglass, we had lesbian dances in, I'm going to say, 1979 at Corwin X, the big, big center there--I don't even know if it's still there--in the middle of the Corwin complex. We had dances, women's dances. Yes, it was a very exciting time in terms of gay rights at Douglass, and I think that scared a lot of the traditional leaders and even some of the deans. I'm trying to think who the lesbian woman was who ran the Student Center. I can't think of her [name]. She's very tall. I see her face. She was a very, very important role model for gays and non-gays because she was

looking at you as a woman, an intelligent woman, and what choices you want to make. I cannot think of her name, but she helped with *The Caellian* as well. She was one of the advisors to *The Caellian* newspaper, yes.

KR: Were the other campuses at Rutgers, College Avenue and Livingston, as open and affirming of gays and lesbians?

SK: Oh no. Forget College Avenue. Take Back the Night. The Take Back the Night anti-rape marches that occurred there. I remember how thin I was when I looked at that little, tiny t-shirt. I had to finally gave it away. It hurt me to look at it. The fraternities were a mess. The fraternities--I didn't understand their value at all--they were sexist. There were rapes on campus. They were degrading of people, out of control testosterone, just craziness. Now, this is not free speech. [laughter] What is it that would take these institutions [to change the fraternity system]? What, are they legacy kids? We can't upset their parents who give money. Nonsense. There were culture wars going on on campus then, and it was largely Douglass women doing all those marches. They were organizing them. I was just one of the marchers. I didn't organize those. [Editor's Note: Take Back the Night is an annual march to protest sexual assault and violence against women.]

College Avenue, except for the library, I didn't spend a lot of time on College Avenue. I spent time marching on College Avenue. [laughter] [I was] going to the library, meeting some friends to go to the library. I'd go to Board of Governors meetings and then to picket the fraternities. They were just out of control. Deke [Delta Kappa Epsilon] was the worst, Deke. It was *Animal House* but horrible *Animal House*, that movie. It was like *Animal House* on steroids, just crazy stuff.

KR: What was it like being a part of Take Back the Night?

SK: Oh, it was so invigorating. You got to yell at somebody that you couldn't yell at during the day. It was really amazing. You got to scream at these pigs, who'd wave at you every time you walked down the street. I was very attractive back then, and it just was disgusting. You stood up for all the women who had been sexually assaulted by their dates. Date rape, the awakening of that discussion was coming out in that time period, so it was really important to put the institution on notice, saying, "You tolerate this because you guys are doing it? Well, this is a way of life. No more, no more." We were [called] "dikes" and "half-men" and just people constantly screaming things, "Zero." "Did you shave your chest today?" It was just crazy stuff. I thought to myself, "Oh, my God, this is like high school all over again." College Ave was high school all over again, but we're going to win because we're going to show them that, "We're not going to be subjected to you. We're going to fight back. We're going to say F-U to you." I mean, there was some colorful language going on there, physically, a lot of Jersey greetings [sticking up the middle finger] flying around. It could've been a riot at times, Kate. It was very, very angry on both sides, by the way. "What do you mean we don't have the right to sexually assault you?" "Well, you don't." Can you imagine men standing up for rape? I know there are some people still who do that today, but at the same level I would hope would never be tolerated today. Some of those fraternities have moved way off campus, like off, off, off, and then some

were dissolved, if I remember correctly. So, you can make a difference if you're willing to stand up. I was very proud of the women who started that movement and just kept it going.

Now, we have Take Back the Night but in different forms today. In August, there's an annual march for crime victims, for safety. You had RAINN. You have the sexual awareness groups that teach date rape on the high school level. This is where breaking away from family traditions are important. No family should tolerate this, number one. No family should tolerate this. College gives you a chance to realize, "I am a person. I matter. I have rights." That was what was exciting, being around people who just refused to accept conventional norms that physically and mentally hurt people. It was very exciting. [Editor's Note: Established in 1984, RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) is a non-profit organization that offers aid and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and organizes advocacy programs for prevention and justice.]

KR: How did you become involved in writing for *The Caellian*?

SK: I just showed up one day. I said, "Oh, here's a newspaper. I wrote for my student newspaper." I thought that would impress people. Nobody cared. I remember, we'll just say her name was Janice. There were two Janices that worked at the paper. The editor laughed when I wanted to do "The Feminist Perspective," and Kathy and this woman Janice would always ask me what was my gender. I was a heterosexual. I'd be happy to be lesbian, but I wasn't. It's like power to you. I'm like, "Excuse me?" They were crazy haters, and I just decided, "I've got to get in this thing." I had that side of me, which is, "You're nuts, and I've got the time." It's like that commercial, "You've got the time, let's go make money." Well, mine is, "Let's go make trouble." I've got the time. "Yes, I want to write for you. Can I do a column?" "What's your column idea?" "The Feminist Perspective. You know there's a lot of us on campus." "Oh, I don't know." One of them took a picture of my ass and ran that as the photo, and then they ran the editor's ass as a photo, saying that's the feminist perspective. We would do these [satirical editions]. What do you call it? You know how *The Targum* becomes *The Mugrat*, like those issues once in a while. *The Caellian* did it. I'm like, "You guys are such goddammed losers." So, that's the sort of thing. I thought it was going to be a feminist nirvana. It's like, "Oh, my God, these people are like [the opposite]."

They actually sent me to Kent State for the anniversary of the Kent State shootings, and I was the correspondent. I thought we were going to be killed because they were building a gym on that site when we went to cover that. There was a bus from Douglass. There were National Guard tanks coming at us and stuff and all the tear gas going, people were falling down, running away. That showed me that, my God, people hate each other so much. The Vietnam War is over. People hate each other still over the Vietnam War. How could you build a gym where these young students were murdered protesting Vietnam? What's wrong with your institution, Kent State? I had a story about that. That was probably the most exciting assignment I had. But I wanted to be an activist and you didn't really get to cover yourself in the newspaper, so I kind of started shifting gears a little bit. I shifted. [Editor's Note: Following President Richard Nixon's expansion of the Vietnam War to Cambodia, a nationwide student strike commenced in the beginning of May 1970. On May 4, 1970, members of the Ohio National Guard opened fire on antiwar protesters and bystanders at Kent State University, killing four and wounding nine. In

1977, months of protests occurred after the university began the construction of a six-million-dollar gymnasium annex located near the site where the students had been killed and wounded.]

KR: Tell me a little bit more about going to Kent State and covering the anniversary of the shooting. The shooting happened on May 4, 1970.

SK: Yes.

KR: What year were you there?

SK: I think it was '77, because the Kent State Board of Governors [Board of Trustees] voted to build a gym on the campus. There was a large protest from all over the country to come in, and the National Guard were brought in because I think it couldn't have been more than two thousand people, but they were afraid of mass rioting, that people wanted to break down part of the construction site and everything. It's like an awakening of social justice. It would be like me mowing down the Paul Robeson house and saying I have to build an Andrew Jackson center on it. It has nothing related to it, it's just so offensive. Find another spot for your gym. You don't have to try to erase history. This was really important to me. So much of the teaching I had when I was young was about erasing history. I had no idea the details of racism, enslavement. All of that stuff growing up, it was like the great white man's history, "Yes, George Washington was great." I came to college, and it's like, "What do you mean all this happened? What do you mean it all happened? Oh, my gosh, what do you mean we're not all equal? What do you mean we're still struggling for this?" For me, that Kent State moment--Chris didn't come with me that time, we all rode a bus, one of those school buses out there--I remember, as soon as I got home, it was like three in the morning and I called Chris and said, "This was the craziest experience of my life, and we can't let people ever take our history away." That's what I took from that. Those four people mattered more than the Board of Trustees.

KR: What were the protests like at Kent State? You said that the National Guard was called out in response.

SK: Oh, yes. There were tanks, at one point, a tank coming down and stuff. Well, it started with people singing. When I got there, it was already going on. People were singing or hanging out, they were holding hands. They were trying to block the construction site. This is the case of when private property matters more than human beings. Something happened. I don't know if somebody pushed somebody. There's always that one flicker that happens. I still don't know what happened that day, and then all of a sudden, all these canisters start being thrown and this tank comes down from the hill. Like everybody else, we all ran back to buses, "Let's get the hell out of here." Then, we stayed on buses, if I recall correctly, it seemed like hours. Now, Ohio's quite the distance. I'm going to say that was an eight-hour bus trip or something. There was a hotel. We got on the bus, went to Kent State, we were supposed to come home. When I came home, I felt like I had been through a war. I had never been to a violent protest before in my life. So, it's still unclear how the violence started, Katie, but I just remember, as soon as I saw canisters flying, the whole area became gray. I said, "I've got to get the hell out of here." I went from student-journalist to, "Oh, boy, we've got a problem here. Get back to the bus," like the bus was going to save us.

KR: The irony is just astounding to me.

SK: Oh, it is, but, again, the consciousness of people versus things because this country is founded on property rights, and it really is. The property rights come to middle-class white men who were Protestants who own property. We don't have the Jeffersonian-Jacksonian revolution for universal white suffrage until the 1820s and '30s. Even South Carolina is still hanging on to property rights. Property is at the core of what's important in this country, and that crystallized it for me. Of course, enslavement and human beings are property and continue to be so until the Civil War ends, it's like, "Oh, my God." Amazing.

KR: When you were covering Kent State, were you aware of what had gone on on the Douglass and Rutgers campuses in 1970?

SK: No, not at all. I had no context. I know that we had some of the students from Livingston, a little bit later, in the '80s, with Blacks United to Save Themselves, who talked about student-led rioting, student-led rebellion on campuses. But, no, I did not have that historical background, yes.

KR: What else did you write about for *The Caellian* and for your column "The Feminist Perspective"?

SK: It was very basic, like what is a feminist? Do feminists kill people? Essentially, I did a satire, like, "If you met a feminist, what would she be like or he be like?" The first thing was people couldn't believe men were feminists. Well, I married a feminist. Of course, they are. I tried to debunk what it meant to be a feminist because that was a bugaboo, "Oh, feminists are ugly. They're lesbians. We don't like them. They're scary. They want to take away our differences." Then, I wrote about the Equal Rights Amendment. I also wrote about privilege. What does it mean to be a mother, and what if you don't want to be a mother? What choices do we have as women? "Well, it's okay to be a feminist, but you're going to be a mother, right?" "Well, no, I don't want to have children. Does that mean I'm less of a woman?" This is very basic, consciousness-level, what-it-means-to-be-a-woman stuff. It wasn't earth shattering. Apparently, it was for Douglass, but it wasn't earth shattering. I thought it had to be the most basic questions, and from the most basic questions would come bigger issues. "What about the Hyde Amendment?" That was like, "Oh, are you sure you want to write about that?" "Yes, yes, you can't say you have the right to abortion but not for a poor person." It doesn't work that way. Because somebody's poor, they had to carry the child you want them to and then you won't support them with tax dollars. No, it doesn't work that way. I wrote about that, yes, things like that.

KR: How much were anti-feminists like Phyllis Schlafly on your radar at that time?

SK: Well, they were on my radar in the sense that they were trying to take away my rights, and I think that Douglass was not as progressive as people think that way. I think that there were many more anti-feminists on campus. Yes, I didn't write about orange commercials or anything with Phyllis, but just in context of the Equal Rights Amendment, who should decide what rights

we have? Should we have to vote on giving people rights? That means you get to vote no, and what happens to a person? Remember the gay rights ballots in New Jersey? Outrageous. People have rights or they don't. You don't get to vote and say, "I'm taking away a right that you had because I don't like you." Something crossed through my mind as we were speaking. I can't remember what it was now. [Editor's Note: Phyllis Schlafly was a conservative author who led the campaign against the Equal Rights Amendment, arguing that the amendment would rob women of gender-specific benefits, such as separate restrooms for women and men and exemption from the draft. Anita Bryant, a singer and performer, served as a spokesperson for Florida Citrus from 1968 to 1980, when her advocacy of right-wing political positions, including opposing homosexual teachers in private schools, led to boycotts of products that Bryant was involved in marketing.]

A lot of the students were frightened by these discussions. They didn't want to go into it. They had been taught like I had been taught: you don't talk about politics in public. Always make sure you have clean underwear on. [laughter] All these stupid things. "In polite society, we don't discuss that." "No, we do discuss it. Polite society wants to take away your rights. We have the right to discuss those things. Sorry you're offended. Don't listen. If you don't want to hear it, go walk away." We had exciting debates, but I was often surprised how conservative colleagues were. I decided at that moment, I've got to get to Livingston because there's this core of people just like me, wild and crazy, they want to do things. They want to study. They want to do their academics. I've got to go where the energy is. Here I come.

KR: What was that process like transferring to Livingston?

SK: Well, you mentioned Gerry Pomper. Gerry Pomper wired it. I can't believe it. He and I are so opposite; we're so opposite in many respects. My husband knew him well too. Chris had classes with him. He didn't always like what I said, Gerry, but he liked my energy. He said, "Oh, my gosh, you belong in our political science program. Why don't you come over here?" He hotwired it with Dean Jenkins, and it was like a week later, here I come, Livingston. Next term, I am in. I never understood why he took a shine to me, but whatever. [Editor's Note: Gerald Pomper is a Professor Emeritus of Political Science at Rutgers University. His oral history resides in the collection of the Rutgers Oral History Archives. William Robert Jenkins served as the dean of Livingston College from 1977 to 1990.]

KR: You did your junior year and senior year at Livingston.

SK: Yes. I actually took five years. I could have graduated in '80. I had three credits short for some reason, and the president's office kept telling me I had my credits. I'm like, "No, I don't have my credits. I'm short." "Don't you want to graduate? You've got your credits." "I'm short." So, I actually have two majors, two full majors, double major. I stayed a fifth year, so I was at Livingston an extra year. That was my play year. I had a lot of fun that year. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Sue Kozel earned a B.A. in labor studies and political science from Livingston College in 1981.]

KR: Tell me about Livingston College. You were at Livingston and this was not even ten years after Livingston's founding at that point. Describe what Livingston College was like when you were there in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

SK: Well, it was just very, very exciting. I mean, I'd go into the student center, there would be a step show. I never saw a step show. I had no idea what was going on. I love music and I love rhythm. I'm saying, "Oh, my God, this is exciting." Tito Puente would be playing one night. I'm like, "Wow, I've never heard this. I've never heard rhythm that way. This is very exciting." I'd show up, somebody would be screaming about something. There would be a soapbox and people would be talking. I liked the fact that the faculty actually cared what the students had to say and encouraged them to develop a philosophy, a personal philosophy. The students had so many different clubs. There were radical clubs. I mentioned Blacks United to Save Themselves. Casa Boriqua had many of the Hispanic, in particular, Puerto Rican students, from Livingston being a part of that. It was a very active Hispanic community. Some people said to me, "Why are you going to the black college?" I thought that was such a strange comment. It was a smaller percentage than I think blacks in the population, but for some whites, if there's one black there, it's like a black college. That showed me racism. The other thing was, people questioned whether it was quality because it had such ethnic and racial diversity. I found that extraordinarily offensive. Then, you had faculty who were doing real-world things, were trying to change institutions of racism and sexism and labor rights. You had people who were actively engaged in movements. I found that very exciting. Livingston, for me, was like a living experiment in democracy. You could create your own world, and nobody thought you were strange. The sectarian debates between all the different layers of Marxists I found fascinating. I didn't want to get involved in any of them. It was just all these levels of debate and contrast, something I had not experienced anywhere else. That was intriguing to me.

I got involved in the Livingston *Medium*. I ended up being the news editor there, and then I got very involved in the student government there. I was quite popular at Livingston. [laughter] I got elected to the University Senate. That's where I served as the student rep to the Board of Trustees my final year at Livingston. I saw that being involved in student government wasn't like this placating [act], like, "Yes, yes, yes, I'm trying to build my resume." You could actually get in there and try to change things.

The Alliance for Rutgers Federation was born in '79-'80 to try to stop reorganization, and Livingston was a hot spot for the intellectual. My husband Christopher was involved there. The student coalition in support of South African liberation [Coalition in Solidarity with South African Liberation (CISSAL)] was very involved--that's one of the reasons I met Chris--at Livingston. We would go to protest all over campus. It was like a lot of energy, saying, "I'm not trying to be on the board of directors of Prudential. Let's try to change our own home here. Let's try to make the Rutgers Board of Governors responsive and accountable for the policies they have in certain areas." Chris was a mastermind at numbers. He did all the analysis of the stocks held by Rutgers. Now, I think '85 was when divestiture occurred, so that took another, let's see, four or five years, but the seas of change were at Livingston for that. Livingston was like an instrument to force debates.

I felt that the faculty really wanted to work with students who were engaged, so we became colleagues. John Leggett and Dee Garrison, we watched their house for them. We would join them on vacations. People, of course, assumed, there was wild crazy sex. No, there wasn't. We were like colleagues in the traditional sense, and we would debate. Wherever we'd go, we would have these great intellectual discussions. It was very exciting. Then, we'd talk about what are we going to do practically. For me, Livingston was like I stuck my finger in a socket and I survived. [laughter] It was very exciting.

I feel that Rutgers, even to this day, tries to erase some of that. Even with the fiftieth anniversary celebrations [of Livingston College], "We're going to pull out our one Hispanic student and our one black student leader." It all didn't just happen in 1969. There were many movements, cross-racial movements, that occurred in Livingston. I'm still here to say I remember, and those experiences made Rutgers University a better place because of those movements and those students, those student relationships.

KR: How did you first meet Chris?

SK: Yes, I'd see him at the Eagleton Institute. He was a supervisor. I remember he told me then--I was looking at Cliff Zukin, who I adore, but he was the director of the poll, the Eagleton Poll, I was just like, "Is this ever going to end?" Chris said, "Oh, she's going to be a problem." It was my freshman year at Douglass. I had first met him at the poll, and I had cut my hair off because of a bad perm. I had a bad perm. My hair smelled like somebody had set it on fire, and I couldn't stand it every time I touched my hair. I always wanted curly hair. Now, menopause, it's wavy. I just got scissors, and I cut my hair. I was like punk before there was punk. Chris said, "What happened to your hair?" Anyhow, he's my supervisor, who cares. It's like, "Okay, great."

At first, Chris and I did not have much interest in each other. Then, I ran into him at Oktoberfest, because I lost my sweater. I'm like, "Can you help me? Can you help me find my sweater?" We spent an hour looking for this sweater, which was gone. It was my sweater I bought with all my McDonald's money. I loved that sweater. Then, I said, "Do you want to come back to the house for some tea?" We had some tea. I said, "I'm having a Halloween party, our whole house. Do you want to come?" Then, he came to that, and then we started dating after that. Then, I guess, the fates said, "You two are meant together." Then, the rest, we've been together ever since.

KR: Let us talk about the divestment movement from South African apartheid.

SK: Yes.

KR: You talked about Chris and his role in calculating the numbers in terms of Rutgers being invested in corporations doing business in South Africa.

SK: Yes.

KR: For you, what propelled you into getting involved in the divestment movement?

SK: Well, I'd read about Stephen Biko. We didn't talk about this in any of my classes until we got to Livingston. So, I got to Livingston, but this was before that. I just couldn't believe you would make money off people's suffering. The university, which claims to be a place of great thoughts and ideas, and all these corporate leaders on it are only thinking about the bottom line. This system has a small minority of whites controlling the majority of blacks. I saw it as slavery in America. I saw those parallels. I just felt, "I wouldn't want to be treated that way." For us to say that we have to have all those investments so the university is financially sound, that's ridiculous, ridiculous. Then, I started reading about all the other Ivys that began divesting or student movements trying to divest. Christopher was on top of talking to all these people around the country, and the more I heard him speak, the more that I read, I said, "Oh, my gosh, we can have a national movement," which is what it was. It was a national movement. We can be part of something that will have international ramifications. With [Nelson] Mandela, who was arrested because he was seeking to have equality, I knew from Dr. King, all my reading about Dr. King, that King had inspired Mandela, and I said, "This international movement for equality, I want to be part of that." I think it's wrong; there should be social investing. Remember before social responsibility became a word and it was usually tied to environmental policies, this is the first social investment movement. They were also calling for a consumer boycott of stocks, and I always read about that in history, the consumer boycotts of slavery, the consumer boycotts in other challenging issues. What do we have to do? What do we have to do to get this going? [Editor's Note: Steve Biko was a founder of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. In 1977, he was arrested while protesting, and he died from injuries suffered while in police custody. Nelson Mandela was arrested and imprisoned in 1962 for revolutionary anti-apartheid activities. Due to international pressure, Mandela was released from prison in 1990. He went on to negotiate an end to apartheid and the establishment of democratic elections in 1994, in which he was elected the president of South Africa.]

It wasn't done while we were students at Rutgers, but then the next generation of students came up. As an alum, I was an alumni leader when I was twenty-three and I did a lot of alumni work through my twenties, through my thirties, and then I had to do other things with my time. I chaired the University Senate's Investment Advisory Committee. I was the first person who wasn't a business faculty member to chair that committee. We kind of shepherded through the internal Senate, while the students on the outside and pressure from politicians were coming in so great in 1984 and 1985. Movements take time. They don't happen instantly. This is not today's internet, and we can snap our fingers. So, I saw that if you can stay with something overall, we can have an international impact, which we did. It was a big deal when Rutgers divested, a big, big deal. [Editor's Note: In 1985, the New Jersey State Legislature approved a divestment bill that was signed into law by Governor Thomas Kean. Following this, Rutgers University announced its total divestment from more than ten companies doing business in South Africa.]

KR: How much of the influence to divest came from within the university at that point in 1985 and how much of it was that that state legislature voted to divest?

SK: Well, of course, the state legislature voted, and I reached out to Alan Karcher. He spoke at that board meeting, along with me and Sister Souljah. We were all there, a dynamic trio. Yes,

so, the legislature was important, but the legislature responds to political pressure and the political pressure was mounting as well. I mean, it was like the perfect storm of synergy, all of these things finally coming together, finally coming together. Al Karcher was like a wild man. He was an amazing speaker of the Assembly, so he was always willing to take big risks because sometimes his caucus wasn't. So, all that's kind of moving together. Again, I don't want to ascribe it to the great white men of the legislature, but a handful of blacks made this happen, because they are political and they respond to pressure. More and more of the university community, including alumni, said, "This is a nightmare." The alumni were like, "This is a nightmare. This is bad for Rutgers. Do we really need to make this money off investments in fossil fuels, blood diamonds, other things? Is this the best way to invest in South Africa?" All these factors spoke a different language, and they all came to the common goal, get out, divest. [Editor's Note: Alan Karcher served in the New Jersey General Assembly from the 19th District from 1974 to 1990. From 1982 to 1986, he was the Speaker of the Assembly. Born in the Bronx in 1964, Lisa Williamson, known as Sister Souljah, grew up in Englewood, New Jersey, graduated from Rutgers, and went on to a career as a hip-hop artist, activist and author. She was a leader in the Rutgers Coalition for Total Divestment.]

KR: Going back to the late '70s, when you were a student and involved in the divestment movement, what group or groups were you involved in, and what were you doing at that time?

SK: CISSAL was the Coalition in Solidarity with South African Liberation. Chris was a cofounder of that with students from Livingston. So, I came into it because he was so passionate and then I said, "You know, this kind of parallels everything I'm thinking, I'll come join you." We organized tables. We did a lot of tabling, as we call it. We'd hand out literature, mimeographs. We'd say, "Are we done yet?" ten thousand pieces later. [laughter] We'd go all over campus and do that. Chris was in the University Senate at that time. I was still involved at *The Caellian* at that time, and I was involved with the student workers organization [Committee to Organize Student Workers (COSW)]. We'd sometimes share tables together and then hand out some of our literature. I wrote about it for *The Caellian*, less as a feminist perspective, more as a human rights issue. Human rights as a language resonated deeply during that time too. You were looking at Jimmy Carter in that time period as well. We were looking at all these pressures coming in, in a new language, a new way of consciousness, looking at black rights, looking at black rights beyond the United States, looking at do corporations have a responsibility to change the world, not only to put money in their pockets? I had studied business issues and studied labor studies, so these were big issues for me in labor studies before I transferred to Livingston and continued in that area. Yes, I was just a supporter. I was very good at a phrase. I was really good at coming up with old chants and then coming up with strident headlines and coming up with my punchy phrases. Chris was a deep intellectual who did the research that laid the foundation for going around trying to build support for divestiture. We were like a little tag team.

KR: How diverse was the membership in CISSAL?

SK: Oh, it was very diverse. It was many students of color, and it was not only whites. You've seen this, but is the photo that Rutgers chose to have as its centerpiece, which shocked me. This is CISSAL. We're looking at this, this is from, I believe, 1981. I think this says 1983. They

have the wrong date on it. They list it as '85, but, no, this was when I had my little green coat at Douglass College. [Editor's Note: This is referring to a photograph that is featured on Rutgers University's timeline (<https://timeline.rutgers.edu/#event-students-occupy-student-center-to-protest-apartheid>), entitled "Students Occupy Student Center to Protest Apartheid." Sue Kozel is holding the megaphone and speaking in the photograph.]

KR: Is that you?

SK: Yes, that's me.

KR: I have seen this photo. I have actually used this photo in presentations I have given. That's amazing.

SK: Oh, yes, this was a youthful me, in my better days.

KR: Oh, wow.

SK: Chris was right over here. Sadly, he's not in the photo.

KR: Okay. [laughter]

SK: This was at the Douglass Student Center. We came over to table, but this is '81. Most of these people are Livingston people here. Very diverse. I have to tell you, the alumni and I haven't always gotten along at Rutgers, and so to see that photo, and I think it was Frusciana, who was the archivist. That was his last act as an archivist, to put the photos together for this. I think that was his little gift.

KR: Tom Frusciano. [Editor's Note: Tom Frusciano served as the Rutgers University Archivist from 1989 to 2017.]

SK: Oh, Frusciano, I'm sorry. Frusciano, yes, that was his last act. He snuck that in. [laughter] That was like what we would do. We'd have the tables. I always had the megaphone [makes beeping noise]. [laughter] It was a beautiful thing because it was people from all backgrounds. We didn't look at each other, like, "Oh, you're privileged. You're not privileged. You should speak on this only because you are black, or you shouldn't speak on this because you're white." It's like, "Let's get rid of this stupid apartheid system and let's build awareness." It was a beautiful thing.

KR: You are probably aware that *Scarlet and Black* Volume III is coming out this month. [Editor's Note: The Scarlet and Black Project is a three-volume research project exploring the experiences of African American and Native American at Rutgers. In Volume III, Chapter 10, written by Tracey Johnson, is entitled "Fight Racism, End Apartheid: The Divestment Movement at Rutgers University and the Limits of Interracial Organizing, 1977-1985."]

SK: Oh, yes.

KR: There was a Scarlet and Black Virtual Symposium last week. One of the things that they studied in Volume III was the divestment movement, and some of the researchers reported that there was a lot of racial tension within the groups.

SK: Yes. That was Sister Souljah. She was one of the most destructive people in this movement, almost breaking it, and she actually told me she didn't need a white mama. I was just a few years older than her, so this comment was bizarre. Such a powerful speaker and mobilizer, nevertheless, she would say things like that. So, this was, I think, when I was an alum, and all this exploded right before the Board of Governors meeting. I felt, "Oh, my God, we are going to destroy our own movement. We are going to destroy all this." It wasn't pretty. I wasn't contacted about the panel or anything or how it was discussed. But Sister Souljah has a perspective, a Black Nationalist perspective, and I admire that. It's not my perspective; I believe in multi-racial coalitions. At one point, she wanted to purge all Caucasian people from speaking on this issue. She came into it with a new generation of student leaders, after, I guess, I graduated and Christopher graduated. Then, we came back, Chris and I, as alums. Yes, I'm not quite sure what all the anger was always about because the issue is, "How do we end it?" What had emerged before was there was a coalition of people from all different races there and then all different religions present too. I can remember the night before the board vote, I was sleeping outside with many of the students at the Student Center. We were laying on our little sleeping bags. She would never participate in any of this stuff. I always saw her as smart and as isolationist. What else did she say from the past? Did she talk specifically about any instances?

KR: I have not read Volume III yet.

SK: Yes.

KR: I am not sure of the specifics.

SK: Yes. The researchers were not extensive in their research. They used our library collection, but they didn't reach out to some of us to interview, including me, Chris--there were several pockets of leadership, and it is important to hear all the perspectives. They didn't even get the name of the collection correct. I know that when I write something I may not agree with the perspective, but I always try to include a diversity because not everyone's of the same mind. But I'm excited about reading about it in Volume III. Sister Souljah clearly was a very, very important voice in the anti-apartheid movement, and there are sections in the book about different periods of activism. She was not an undergraduate when I was there. She came later. [Editor's Note: The library collection to which Ms. Kozel is referring is the Rutgers Grass Roots-Progressive Activists Files, a collection amassed by Sue Kozel and Chris Berzinski and donated to Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries. Section III of the collection contains materials related to Divestiture, 1969-1989. The guide to the collection can be found online at <http://www2.scc.rutgers.edu/ead/uarchives/rugpaff.html>]

KR: What happened in that explosion before the Board of Governors meeting?

SK: Well, this was coming on for a while. My attitude, when somebody gets in my face, is to just kind of laugh at them, "Okay, thank you." People see things so oppositely, you won't be able

to change it. But I did feel, intentionally or unintentionally, her actions almost destroyed the student leadership. There were a number of white students who were involved at that time, Geoffrey Herzog, among others, and I'm grateful that I hung in. I'm grateful that it hung together. I was grateful to speak along with Lisa and Alan Karcher. We were chosen by the students, all of us, to speak. For me, it's one of the most important moments in my life, to see how sometimes ideas are bigger than the personalities and to always make sure that the cause wins.

KR: You talked about being chosen to speak. Where did you speak?

SK: Oh, at the Board of Governors meeting, when they divested. That was the day, yes.

KR: What did you talk about in your speech, in your portion?

SK: Well, I was chair of the Investments Advisory Committee for the University Senate, so I just talked about the meaning of money and, as an alum, money isn't red, it's green, but their investments are red. It's blood money, how ashamed I was of being at Rutgers University and seeing that money mattered more than human lives. I don't think I have a copy of the speech. It was all off the top of my head. What a proud moment that we were going to take back our civil leadership as a moral institution and I think I talked about something with slavery. My memory says I asked something about, "This reminds me about enslavement. Does money always matter more than human lives? This is a question that's been asked throughout time, and this is your moment to lead." Yes, Lisa Williamson, she's an amazing young woman and she's a great writer. She's very prolific. People can disagree without being demonized, and I think that's important, especially when you're in a coalition, that what makes a coalition work is all the different perspectives and then the question is when disagreement comes, how committed are all of us to an end result. Successfully, we all were committed to the end result.

KR: You alluded to the different pockets of leadership.

SK: Yes.

KR: Who were the different groups? Who were the different leaders?

SK: Well, there were a number of student leaders, and if I recall correctly, Lisa was one of them. There were students that were involved in elected positions on campus in their student governments. There were also student activists that were involved in organizations that continued after CISSAL. Blacks United to Save Themselves was one of those groups from Livingston College, and Jack Brit had been involved in that group while we were undergraduates at Livingston College. There were different tiers of interest. I thought it was amazing that we could actually have a group that felt more diverse than Congress, that felt more diverse than our state legislature, that felt and was more diverse than our Board of Governors. I felt it was one of the few times I was involved in an organization that felt like New Jersey, that was racially and ethnically balanced. Memory changes the way we look at history. You know that and I know that, as historians. So, I still think very fondly on this, that in spite of everything, the movement

succeeded, and that shows there was a commitment to ending apartheid in South Africa and stopping Rutgers from investing in a racist institution.

KR: You were involved in the divestiture movement over a very long period of time.

SK: Yes, probably six or seven years.

KR: What faculty and administrators were involved?

SK: Al Howard was very involved. Allen Howard, he was a scholar of African/ West African history and he was very involved in the statewide coalition to end apartheid. Several of the unions were very involved, the AAUP, the AFSCME unions were very involved in supporting the end of investments. Allen Howard was involved. John Leggett was very, very involved in that movement. Sometimes members of the dean's staff at Livingston were involved, even though they weren't supposed to be, but people would get information. Librarians, I had a very close working relationship with the Rutgers librarians. I'd always get things given to me that they would get access to. People were often very afraid to be publicly involved in things. When we think of Africana Studies, several of the faculty in Africana Studies were very, very involved. Each person who came in brought either a skill or a talent with them that added to the effectiveness. Sometimes, groups just moved on their own. A lot of times, you might have a central group, but then people did their own thing. People did their own thing. I don't know how to explain it other than that way. The University Senate was very involved. Ashby Foote, who was the head of the University Senate from University College, was very, very involved, Ashby. Yes, student governments were involved, very, very much so. [Editor's Note: AAUP is the American Association of University Professors. AFSCME is the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.]

It's really interesting because you're bringing me back to think about the discord that the authors are choosing to focus upon in the forthcoming text. Now, I can't wait to read it. You can always look at the discord and you can always look at the optimistic side, and I think the truth is both of them together. There were tensions and there were issues, disagreements on strategy or who's speaking or what type of research is being done or who has the authority to speak on issues.

I happen to be a humanist first. I like William Lloyd Garrison's idea that I'm a citizen of the world. Now, I'm not really an American per se, but I am a citizen of the world and I see myself as part of something much bigger than just the United States of America and my race. That, to me, has always influenced and continues to stay in my own writing because I research African American history in Central New Jersey. A book project that I'm working on now is going to take me out to Kentucky and Ohio with a New Jersey family, one of whom murdered one of his slaves and the family then went west with the other slaves. I don't think any of us owns the right or does not have the right to comment on issues. I'm very excited when I go back to Livingston College because most of us hardly agreed on anything together, but we still discussed things and debated them together. That was one of the greatest experiences of my life to be part of an institution and the groups of students who were willing to debate, declare, debate and disagree and sometimes agreed and move in directions to change.

KR: Your activism in divestiture spanned your undergraduate and your graduate years ...

SK: ... And my graduate.

KR: ... And your alumni years.

SK: Yes, yes.

KR: What did it mean to you when the state and Rutgers divested? Take me into when that was accomplished and what it meant to you.

SK: Well, the first thing I thought was, "Okay, what's the next battle?" [laughter] It was like exhilaration that human beings may have a better life, that Nelson Mandela might get freed from jail at some point. I saw it as not only ending but a new beginning, like, "What's going to happen now?" How can we see ourselves as part of a change that becomes a prototype, if you will? This is a major deal that college students all around the country woke, to use that language, and now are empowered to say, "Money can be used as an instrument for social change. What's the next battle?" That was something I felt then, "Wow, what do we do next? This is amazing." Then, it's like a culmination, like you're in shock it actually happens, it's been going on for so long, wow. Humbled to be just a tiny little part of it, humbled to be one of thousands of people who cared about it. Then, the other thing is that institutions can be broken. You can force change on institutions, and you can do it nonviolently. Nobody had guns. Nobody was picking up bombs and throwing it at people. This was all a community-organizing argument in history, and so nonviolence can produce change and that Rutgers was participating in violence when we funded those companies because those companies were living off apartheid. They were living off segregation and dehumanization and violating human rights. For me, it was like an awakening as to the power people can have when all the different layers get involved and work for change.

I have never said, and I think this is important, for a lot of us who have leadership roles, we never walked around saying, "We are the leaders of something." Absolutely not. In the '70s, at least the perspective I came from, leadership was a temporary thing. [laughter] You come into it. Somebody else will have a better idea, and then they come into it. Then, there are multiple layers. To think there has to be one supreme leader of anything is ridiculous because in the real world, there never are. I think that with the internet, it's so easy to think that only one person makes all the change. It's ridiculous. I played a big role in something, and I'm very proud to have used my skills in certain ways to help in a social movement that changed not only Rutgers but changed the world, as students and their allies.

KR: What was the occupation of the Student Center like in 1985?

SK: It was more of a fun thing. I mean, I'd been part of occupying President Bloustein's office that were a little bit more crazed, but this was like a celebration. It was people coming together and sleeping outside. We just adored this group of students. They had their drums, and they were playing their drums all night. The music was going on. It was a festival of love and celebration because I think too often, people on the left mire in, "We have to defeat." We have

to celebrate when something good happens. You have to really feel joy because I think humans are more joy oriented than pain oriented, and that makes you want to do more. That makes you want to look at your own life and see how you can have a long-term impact on other things. So, it was a fun night. It was really crazy and fun, and Chris said, "I'm not laying on that cement." I slept with the kids, who were only like a few years younger than me, and then went home and changed my clothes because I was a little rank after that experience. People spilled beer everywhere. There was soda, beer, food. Then, I came back for the board meeting. It was fun.

KR: Is there anything else that you would like to add about the divestment movement?

SK: It should be heralded as an example of what happens when people work for change. We all work with people of another perspective that can open our minds or it can close our minds. It's just how you see it, but it was one of the greatest things I've ever participated in in my life. I thank all the people who I never even met who were part of it. So many people were involved, you just can't know, petitions were signed. Thousands of people were involved in this at one level or another.

It reminds me a little bit of Our Revolution. I'm a big supporter of Bernie Sanders, and I know that some people will be offended by that, too bad. I feel that when you build community, a lot of things can happen, and when people try to trust each other, understanding that there's always going to be problems, but when you get past, "You're right. No, you're right. No, I'm right. No, I'm the best. No, you're the best," when you come down on a very human level, amazing things happen. CISSAL was going on. The South African movement was going on. All these other student movements were happening on campus. It's not like one thing happened. There were multiple layers of so many different movements, each giving students an opportunity from a different perspective to get involved. That's what's exciting to me. There's not one right way.

KR: We have been recording for over two hours today.

SK: Yes, time flew, Kate.

KR: How does it sound if I just ask you one more question?

SK: Sure, yes, that's okay.

KR: Then, we can conclude for today, and then we will talk off the record.

SK: Yes.

KR: I have a reflection question. How do you think the divestiture movement from South African apartheid has served as a blueprint for future divestment movements at Rutgers and elsewhere?

SK: Oh, that's such a great issue. In the '90s, I started moving into environmental divestment, social responsibility, social investing issues. Those things really moved me. Don't fear controversy. Controversy is going to come no matter what. In fact, things you don't even expect

to be controversial are going to come out. You have to be open to hearing that issue in a battle like this and then trying to resolve the differences, and if the differences are too great, looking for what is common, what is common that holds all the different views together. I don't think any movement can be of one race and only of one race. I think that everything has to be multi-generational, multi-ethnic and multi-racial. That's a lesson I learned from South Africa. To not apologize for who you are and stand up for what you believe, I think that's so important. The South African movement, seeing it over time, teaches us that there will not always be kumbaya, everybody happy together, joy. Sometimes people come to experiences with different backgrounds and you have to decide from the beginning if you care about that or not. A successful movement tries to build on listening to people talk, hearing disagreement, and finding commonality. If there is an obstructionist element, which always emerges, I always try to listen to somebody who tries to be an obstructionist because I wonder, at some point, if somebody actually wants to make the difference or not and then my feeling is, "If you're going to obstruct something, terrific. I'm going to roll over you and we're going to continue." I've been in so many organizations to this day where a person joins something and then all they do is complain. It's like, "Do you want to do anything? What role would you like to take on besides being the leader of everything because that's not going to happen?" [laughter] I think that another prototype is not to allow negative energy to just take you off course.

I think, for me, the most exciting thing about Black Lives Matter today, and I draw a direct parallel to my experiences at Livingston and then also even in the South Africa movement but beyond, is, as Reverend Sharpton says, what started as only a movement of black people, when he goes to Black Lives Matter protests today, there are more white people sometimes there. It's kind of looking at issues and saying, "How can we all work together? How can we all work together?"

Now, should there have been reparations for all the South Africans? I'm in favor of that, by the way. I think those corporations should have paid out the wazoo, everyone. As somebody who supports reparations for African Americans, as I do, I have no problems with those issues. The issues are how do we get to the form with the funding? How do we arrive at what is the best instrument of reparations? I think in many ways, the South African movement gave me a lot of insight to better understand Black Lives Matter's movement.

I'll just say that I have Breonna Taylor's name on my Twitter page, for the handful of people who read my Twitter. I'm not there to be the queen of the world, but I have a right to choose whoever I want to list on my page. You can ignore it. You can condemn it. You can support it. I think the exciting thing about today, whether we look at race, whether we look at gender, whether we look at religion, immigration, ethnicity, class status, all of them put together, is we get a chance to say, "This is who I am. Will you help me be who I am? Will you stop me from being who I am?" I think the South African movement, for me, was like a master class with all the problems and all its strengths in how to get something done. I think it's a prototype in the sense that it had its problems, it had its strengths, but it accomplished something and what can we learn from that as new movements are built that hopefully draws on the talent of everybody. I know the tone of the interview has changed a little bit since you let me know about the criticisms of the movement. I'm sure, when I read the book, I'll probably find some of the same criticisms. So, I can't really comment on something I haven't read yet. I just lived through some of it and, yes, I

remember all that. March on, march on. I hope I answered your question. I kind of went off base there a little bit.

KR: You did answer my question, thanks.

SK: Oh, good, okay, yay. [laughter]

KR: Let us conclude the interview for today.

SK: Yes, please.

KR: Thank you so much for taking the time today to do this first interview session.

SK: Yes.

KR: It has been so fascinating. I have learned so much.

SK: I enjoyed listening to you, as you're very skillful in your questions, how you pull it out. So, kudos to you. I learned a lot from you too.

KR: Well, thank you. I really appreciate that. I am going to stop the recording, and let's talk off the record.

-----END OF TRANSCRIPT-----

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