RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH SHARON P. SMITH

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

CAREFREE, ARIZONA
JULY 30, 2021

TRANSCRIPT BY

JESSE BRADDELL

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an oral history interview with Dr. Sharon Patricia Smith, on July 30, 2021. I am Shaun Illingworth. I am currently in Hightstown, New Jersey. Dr. Smith, first, thank you for joining me, and can you just let us know what city and state you are in now?

Sharon P. Smith: I'm in Carefree, Arizona.

SI: Okay, great. Arizona is really in the news now, so it must be an exciting time to be there.

SPS: Yes.

SI: To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

SPS: I was born in Jersey City, New Jersey, in 1948.

SI: Can you talk a little bit about your family background? Can you tell me your parents' names?

SPS: Sure, my parents were Vincent and Dorothy Smith. My mother had been a secretary and was an artist, and my father was vice president of sales at a ship repair company in Staten Island. I have one brother, an older brother, we're best friends, and he went to Rutgers also, so I followed in his footsteps.

SI: All right. Starting with your mother's side of the family, do you know anything about the family background, if there was an immigration story there, that sort of thing?

SPS: Well, I know my mother was half-Irish and half-German. Her father was Irish. Her mother was German. I believe that her father's grandparents came from Ireland. Her mother's parents came from Germany as teenagers or in their early twenties.

On my father's side, my father was a hundred percent Swedish. His grandparents, on his mother's side, came from Sweden. His father went to sea as a small boy in Sweden and then settled in the United States as an adult. And, you wonder about the name Smith.

SI: Yes.

SPS: My grandfather changed it to Smith because he wanted a more American name when he came to this country. Unfortunately, he picked one of the most common names.

SI: Did you ever hear from your parents, how their early lives had been, particularly growing up during the Great Depression and World War II, how those events affected their lives?

SPS: Well, basically, both of them had very happy childhoods. We used to kid and say they're children of the depression because they were in their teenage years in the depression and appreciated the impact that had on everyone's lives and on their expectation for the future. At the same time, there were happy compensations. They lived in Jersey City and all the churches in Jersey City had what they call, I think it was, nickel dances with live bands. That was the era of

the American songbook and the great bands, and both of my parents were superb dancers. They would go out dancing every night of the week, so there was the happy side of growing up in those years.

The unhappy side of it was that while both of my grandfathers continued to work during the depression, they were affected financially. My mother would have wanted to go to commercial arts school and couldn't. She became a secretary instead. I mean, they couldn't afford that, to have her go to art school. My father was kind of a rambunctious teenager and he might have gone to college--well, he had a football scholarship, but his father was afraid he would just party--so he worked instead and wound up doing very well. He was, shall we say, a late bloomer in terms of becoming more mature about your opportunities, something that we all have seen among many students in school then and now.

SI: Was he working for the ship repair company during the war?

SPS: Yes. He was not in the service. He was deferred. They were building PT boats, but he had been working for the shipyard before the war broke out. My parents were married just after the war started. They were married in February of '42. They had been going together for years and couldn't afford to marry until my father got the job at the shipyard, but he started off as a carpenter's assistant. My grandfather was the carpenter foreman and worked for the same shipyard where my father continued to work and ultimately became vice president.

SI: Okay. That was his father who was the carpenter foreman.

SPS: Yes. He was the one who went to sea and had become captain of a whaling ship, and then when he settled in this country, he went to work in a shipyard.

SI: Okay. There is a long Swedish seafaring tradition.

SPS: Yes. His father was lost at sea before he was born.

SI: You were born in 1948 in Jersey City.

SPS: Yes.

SI: Did you live there? Did you grow up there?

SPS: We moved to the suburbs after first grade, and I grew up in Union County in New Jersey.

SI: Do you have any early memories of Jersey City?

SPS: A few. I had relatives who lived there after we moved out. My strongest memories are just of playing in the parking lot of Saint Peter's University, which was across the street from our apartment house. My strongest memories of my childhood are memories of the summertime. We always spent the summers at a bungalow my father had built in Morris County in northern New Jersey.

SI: Where in Union County did your family live?

SPS: I lived in Fanwood and went to Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School.

SI: Okay, all right. What was your neighborhood that you grew up in like?

SPS: Well, a 1950s suburban neighborhood. A split-level house, my parents bought it new. You'd play in the street. You'd ride your bike, very, very much like something out of *Leave it to Beaver* or one of the other old TV series, the Nelson family, that kind of a neighborhood. [Editor's Note: The Nelson family refers to Ozzie and Harriet Nelson who, along with their children, starred in the radio show *Ozzie and Harriet Show* and the television series *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*. Ozzie Nelson graduated from Rutgers College in 1927 and Rutgers-Newark School of Law in 1930.]

SI: What did you think of your education there?

SPS: Oh, it was a good high school. I had gone to Saint Bartholomew grade school, and so I had an excellent education from grade school, particularly in arithmetic and English. The Catholic schools in those times were known for how good they were with grammar and English and basic arithmetic, and my high school, I thought, was excellent.

SI: Were you taught by nuns?

SPS: In grade school, by nuns mainly, a few teachers, but mainly nuns. Then, in high school, I made one lifelong friend. We're still friends this many years later.

SI: What did you gravitate towards in school before high school and during high school?

SPS: Well, I joined some clubs. I was never athletic. I mean, I'm just not gifted athletically period. I'm something of a klutz. On top of that, I only found out as an adult, I have a blind spot in my optic nerve, which means that I see a moving object from looking with my left eye in a different spot than it is. A tennis teacher showed me how to compensate. But it meant, for example, if you were trying to hit a softball, you clearly missed it because you hit it where you saw it but not where it was. That's my current excuse for being a klutz, but I was a klutz. But I was in other clubs. I was in the high school newspaper, things like that. I just enjoyed my high school, made good friends, and enjoyed my high school.

SI: Were you involved in any activities outside of school, like Girl Scouts?

SPS: No, no, I wasn't involved in any of those things. Some of that reflected the fact that we spent from the end of June to Labor Day at the bungalow, and my aunt and uncle had the bungalow next door. Most of my activity as a child revolved around swimming, sailing, canoeing, rowing, badminton, things we did with my cousins, handicrafts, because the bungalow didn't have power. You had a generator you had to start nightly for electric lights, but you couldn't get TV, you couldn't get radio. It gave you a lifelong appreciation for reading and for

doing handicrafts and board games and things like that. Oh, the other thing I did when I was in grade school and high school, I did have piano lessons, which I loved, and I had horseback riding lessons, which I loved.

SI: It seems like Fanwood, I know a little bit later, became affluent. What was it like then? Was it middle class or working class?

SPS: Very typical middle class. Like I say, it was sort of like a *Leave it to Beaver* suburb, like so many of the suburbs. It was a fairly large development of three-bedroom split-levels with similar people in the neighborhood. It was very comfortable middle class.

SI: Were most of your neighbors white or from similar ethnic and religious backgrounds?

SPS: They were all from a similar ethnic background, maybe different religions, but mostly a similar ethnic background, which is the way things were in those days.

SI: You went to a Catholic school. Was your family Catholic?

SPS: My mother was Catholic, and my brother and I were Catholic. We are still Catholic.

SI: Okay. Did church activity play a big role in your life growing up?

SPS: Well, just the normal going to church. We were not into any of the church clubs and organizations.

SI: As you progressed in your education and got into your high school years, what did you see for yourself in the future? What were your goals?

SPS: Well, at that time, I just wanted to get a job and work in business. Now, if you go back, let's see, I graduated from high school in '66 and I graduated from college in 1970, you have to remember that opportunities for women were fairly limited. Even as far as 1970, when I was interviewing for jobs after graduating from college, I remember interviewing for a job with an advertising agency and the interviewer saying to me proudly, "They just hired their first woman copywriter." I mean, things just weren't open for women in those days. I didn't have any specific goal other than I wanted to have a job and work in business and probably work in New York City because I've always loved New York City.

Well, when it came down, let's see, to going to college, I had some hesitation just in the sense that I wondered whether, since most of the opportunities seemed to go toward executive secretary, I briefly considered going to Katharine Gibbs. In a conversation with my mother, she said, "If everybody else in twenty years has a college degree and you don't, how will you feel about it?" I decided that I wouldn't feel too good about it, so I went to college.

Then, in terms of going to college, I was very concerned about not costing my parents too much. I mean, money was an issue, mainly because, well, just people didn't make that much money in those days. While my father was a vice president, shipping doesn't pay huge salaries, even in

those standards. My grandmother was in a nursing home, and my father was basically the support for that.

While they wanted me to go where I would want to go, I preferred to go someplace that would cost a little bit less, I mean, within pretty strong limits. I definitely wanted to go to a coed school, and my brother had gone to Rutgers-Newark. That seemed to me to be the best choice. I don't even remember whether I applied anywhere else. I just went to Rutgers-Newark and was very happy with it, though I will say as an aside, those were difficult years in Newark crime wise. That was always a concern for everybody, but I liked the school. I made terrific friends there too, again, lifelong friends. I did briefly consider transferring to Douglass, simply to stay within Rutgers, but when it came down to it, I just did not want to go to an all-girls' school. Even though I was accepted at Douglass, I stayed with Rutgers-Newark.

SI: You froze up.

SPS: Okay, you did too.

SI: Sorry about that.

SPS: Yes, it says my internet connection is unstable.

SI: You did not want to go to Douglass because it was all women.

SPS: Then, I said I never regretted staying at Rutgers-Newark. I felt like I had a terrific education there and, again, made lifelong friends.

SI: Had you gone to work part time before you went to college?

SPS: No, not before I went to college. I'm trying to remember when I had summer jobs because I didn't have a car, so that presented some difficulties. I believe I had a summer job after my senior year in college. I had a couple of summer jobs in college. I worked for an engineering laboratory in Clark, New Jersey. The one I loved was I worked for a steamship company in New York City, and that was terrific.

SI: You mentioned you loved New York City. Would you go there frequently when you were younger?

SPS: Well, we used to go to the theater a lot as a family. I loved that, yes. The whole vibrancy of New York excited me.

SI: I am just curious, I have heard a lot of stories of Greenwich Village and hearing the folk singers. Would you ever do some of that, or was it mostly the theater?

SPS: It was more Broadway shows that appealed to me. It still does. I just hope Broadway comes back, given current COVID concerns.

SI: To take a step back, your family had German, Irish and Swedish roots. Did any traditions live on in your family? Did they try to keep up anything in terms of food or language?

SPS: Not really. I mean, it shows how different things were. My mother always said that her grandmother and her grandfather, these were the German ones, decided to stop speaking German at home when their oldest child started school because they didn't want to confuse him. Eventually, she lived into her nineties, she couldn't remember any German anymore, though she had expressions she used like *Meine Kinder*, which is "beloved children," for her children and grandchildren. My grandfather, the Swedish grandfather, did not approve speaking anything but English and my father wished he'd learned Swedish, but he didn't. He knew some curse words, but that was about it. [laughter] No, my grandmother, the Swedish grandmother, had a lot of food traditions she cooked but nothing else. They all were very strongly American. I mean, the Irish ones would love Irish music, but they saw themselves as American.

SI: As you were growing up, as you were going into high school, how would you describe yourself as a consumer of information about the world? Would you listen to the news a lot, the radio? Did you follow things?

SPS: Absolutely. My family always had lively conversations at home about current events and everything else. I've always been a consumer of news. I mean, I remember following the presidential election of 1960 adamantly, just ferociously, because I was a huge fan of John Kennedy. We always talked about the news. We had newspapers, we always had a couple of newspapers. We watched the news at night. Yes, very much so.

SI: Was your family involved at any level in politics or community activities?

SPS: Not involved in community activities but certainly people who actively voted and followed whatever was happening, yes.

SI: Again, looking at the future, from high school forward …

SPS: Excuse me just a second. I want to add something about my family for a moment.

SI: Yes, go ahead.

SPS: My father at the time had a job in sales that involved weekend and evening work with customers that also would involve my mother. It's the kind of thing I understand well, having been a president of a university. Your day doesn't end at five o'clock. It might end at midnight or two o'clock in the morning and then would start again at eight or nine o'clock in the morning, so it's a different kind of a work and the kind of work that involves the spouse and sometimes the children.

SI: Yes, you have to entertain clients.

SPS: Exactly.

SI: What do you think you took away from that experience, if anything?

SPS: Well, just understanding some of the ways of being friendly and hospitable but also politely handling people who were less than polite themselves.

SI: Your brother had gone to Rutgers-Newark. Had you experienced the campus before?

SPS: No, not at all. My brother and my first cousin, one of the cousins that we used to spend the summers with, they both went to Rutgers-Newark, but they were four years ahead of me. They graduated the year I graduated from high school.

SI: It sounds like your parents were pretty supportive of you going to college.

SPS: Oh, absolutely, absolutely, there's no question.

SI: What about teachers and others in high school? Were they supportive or dissuading of women pursuing higher education?

SPS: No, they were always supportive too. Frankly, I was always one of the better students in class. A couple of things, my parents didn't want us to take too many honors classes because they felt that was too much work and not good for us, that we should have other things in our lives. It was too much of a burden. You had an option of taking more courses than what was required, and I never took the option of taking more courses either. So, that would affect your overall standing in the class, which was fine by me. I enjoyed what I had and I enjoyed what I did. I was not seeking more homework, more studies. I don't think I missed out on anything, but that also meant that while in any individual class, I was usually one of the top students, that wouldn't necessarily have made me, say, like a valedictorian in the school or something like that. But, no, they were all full of support.

SI: Do any teachers stand out as a mentor to you?

SPS: I guess my economics teacher, who ultimately became principal of the high school, but he was also the advisor for the school newspaper and I was the editor-in-chief, he stands out. Oh, one other, my English teacher in my senior year in an honors class, she was just a suburb teacher, really, really important in terms of writing skills.

SI: As you were going through high school, obviously the 1960s are progressing and there are a lot of changes in terms of how people thought about things but also how they dress and what they listen to. How would you characterize any changes you went through, say, from when you went to high school in 1962 to when you graduated in 1966?

SPS: Well, it's just that things certainly were changing. I did not change my own attitudes or standards but had always been taught to be tolerant of others as long as they didn't try to push me into something I didn't want to do. Certainly, I loved the music of the times. I never was inclined to want to drink to excess or anything like that, but my parents had also kind of clued me into that in terms of the risks. Surprisingly, they used to say to me, "If you ever feel like you

have to get drunk, drink at home. We'll put you to bed. Don't go out and do it with other people." I mean, not that we ever wanted to get drunk, but I thought that was an incredibly tolerant and understanding attitude about things. Yes, I loved the music. I wasn't tempted by the behavior.

SI: Tell me a little bit about getting into Rutgers-Newark and getting acclimated. You were commuting, obviously, but what were those first few months like getting used to college?

SPS: Meeting so many other people from different backgrounds was fun. I mean, I got very involved with a group who were, I can't remember what the group was, but we were decorating the student center for the holidays. It was a mix of Christians and Jews, and that was my first introduction to blue being an important color at Hanukkah, but things like that. There were Asians. At that point, at least in my initial circle, there were not any African Americans that I remember. Subsequently, I had sorority sisters who were African American, but it was mainly a matter of who was in your classes because you first got to know the people who were in your freshman composition or western civilization classes and it just so happened that there were no African American students in my sections of those classes. I remember, a silly little thing sticks in my mind, waiting in line to buy books, and there was a Chinese girl that I got to know pretty well. Her last name was Ng, and she explained that that's the Chinese equivalent of Smith, a kind of trivia that remained with me. It was just that most of the people at Rutgers-Newark came from places like Irvington and the Oranges. There was only, I think, one other person from my high school class who went there. I just loved them all. It was eye-opening to meet and get to know people from different backgrounds and different perspectives, and I enjoyed them all.

SI: At what point did you figure out what you wanted to do major-wise, what you wanted to focus on?

SPS: Well, I had started to think about it in high school because, again, my brother wound up an economics major in college and got his Ph.D. in economics from Rutgers, and he used to talk about it. It sounded interesting, and it sounded like something good for someone who wants to work in business. There was an economics class available in my senior year in high school, and I took it and I liked it. I decided I'd be an econ major. I used to kid later on and say, "If I was independently wealthy, I probably would have majored in history because I love history." In those days, there were very few job opportunities in history. This was true even for history Ph.Ds., as they had to hire guards to protect the few posted openings at job fairs. Economics was to me the ideal major for somebody who wanted to go work in business. I could have done a minor in some business studies at Rutgers; I just never thought of doing it. I was pretty much straight economics, no minor, took as much economics as I could and loved it.

SI: What would a typical day be like as a commuter student going to the Newark campus?

SPS: Well, it was different for me once I was in sophomore year when I joined a sorority than before that. Early on, you would try to develop a schedule that was friendly for a commuter. If possible, you'd try to get one day without classes. You'd come in, go to class, in between class go to the student center to study or hang out, have lunch, and then come home again and do your studies. In sophomore year, I pledged a social sorority. Then, I had a sorority house where I

could go in between classes. It was a lot of walking, particularly in the early days because the new campus didn't start to open until in the middle of my freshman year and then into my sophomore year. So, you had classes over on Rector Street, you had classes up on Warren Street. It really was a stretch of the legs to make it from one class to another, if they were at the opposite ends of the campus or opposite ends of the downtown, I should say, because it wasn't really a campus as such.

SI: These were like the old brewery buildings.

SPS: Yes, the library was in the brewery, and the big lecture hall was in a bank.

SI: Later on, you would join the sorority, but were there other social, student-life type activities for you early on in college?

SPS: To tell you the truth, my most vivid memories are with the folks working at the student center, I mean, working on decorating and doing things like that. The crime situation in Newark made staying for social activities later on at night a serious consideration, which was why it was nicer when you had a sorority because you had the events at your house.

SI: In sophomore year, what made you decide to go into a sorority, and why did you choose the one you chose?

SPS: Well, again, for the social ties, and I liked the people I met. I joined Delta Phi Delta, and, again, they're lifelong friends. One of the friends, we've been close forever and she's an emeritus professor of veterinary science from Purdue. I also joined the service sorority Alpha Iota Delta, and one of them is another lifelong friend. She wound up a top attorney at AT&T and the successor organization Lucent. (She also participated in the oral archives project.) It's not that we're all incredibly high achievers, but we did work hard and strive for success. Another classmate she stayed closer to became a thoracic heart surgeon, and she was in the service sorority also.

SI: Where was the sorority house?

SPS: On Warren Street.

SI: Were there other fraternities and sororities?

SPS: That was like fraternity and sorority row. Kappa Phi, I can't remember whether Kappa Phi was downstairs, we had the top two floors of one of these brownstones, and I think Kappa Phi was downstairs and Alpha Psi was one of the other fraternities on that row. Then, there were also fraternities from what was then the Newark College of Engineering on that row also, which was nice. I can remember one time we were afraid the sorority house had been broken into, and we just went to one of the fraternities and asked them to check it out.

SI: What kinds of activities would the sorority do?

SPS: Mainly mixers. We used to do something, we called it a smorgasbord, where we'd have a dinner for our faculty and we'd each make an ethnic food. It was a pretty unbelievable menu, because it would really range. There was every ethnicity in the sorority, but the faculty didn't seem to complain and would usually take care packages home. Then, we'd have father-daughter teas and mother-daughter teas and mixers and mixers with other fraternities and that sort of thing. The service sorority did an event at Christmastime. The pledge class would choose what it was. My pledge class did a Christmas party for a local orphanage.

SI: Are there any faculty members or administrators that stand out in your memory?

SPS: Oh, yes. Well, one of my economics professors was really a mentor, Leo Troy. I kept in touch with him for the rest of his life. He was a labor economist, and that was my area. Then, there were other economics professors who were just superb teachers. Of course, Newark-Rutgers started from the Newark College of Arts and Sciences, so they had a tradition of superb teaching that carried on. I remember my speech teacher. I think he was trying to make a career in acting and he was Jamaican and he had the most gorgeous accent and he was terrific. I had excellent English professors. I had excellent calculus professors. I can't think of anybody who wasn't good. There was a caring attitude for the students, personal attention and a caring attitude. [Editor's Note: Leo Troy served as an economics professor at Rutgers-Newark from 1958 to 2010.]

SI: Was there much student activism on campus at that time, or maybe it developed a little later, a few years later?

SPS: Well, no, because those were the days of the building takeover, and there was anti-war protests. I was not active in the anti-war movement. The building takeover was kind of an enormous inconvenience for everybody. I believe it was about more opportunities for African Americans. Honestly, I cannot remember the specifics of why they were taking over the building. I know that it must've been shortly before my senior year that Rutgers introduced a special program to help people who didn't meet the qualifications of Rutgers come in under a special program and go through tutoring and other classes because one of the students was in my sorority. She was the sweetest girl. I mean, we all loved her and we were trying to tutor her, but it just didn't lead to the result we wanted. We were all so frustrated because we wanted to help her succeed and she was very sweet and nice about it, but she didn't seem to be able to handle the work. Now, that's only one person, and it may also indicate that our tutoring abilities were inadequate.

I do know that when I graduated from college, my transcript was merged with that of an Urban University student with the same first and last name as mine, so that when I then went on to Rutgers graduate school, the record showed that I failed freshman composition the same semester that I was taking graduate econometrics. Unfortunately, it took most of my graduate school to unmerge the records, and then even at that, my transcript still had some errors on it to this day that didn't affect the cumulative grade point average but were incorrect. I have some understandable irritation with that program.

I saw a program with the same spirit at Fordham that really worked because it was a better design. It was called HEOP, Higher Education Opportunity Program, and what they aimed to do was have students who'd go to college in six years with special summer tutoring, extra tutoring during the year, but participation in regular classes in between. That program was enormously successful. I don't know whether Rutgers still has anything like the Urban University Program, but at least at the time, based on a little bit of evidence, it did not seem to be working. [Editor's Note: The Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) was created by the New York State Legislature in 1969 to provide economically disadvantaged New York residents the opportunity to attend a college or university in the state. Established in 1967 in the aftermath of the Newark rebellion, the New Jersey Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) provides financial assistance and services to students from educationally and economically disadvantaged backgrounds who attend universities in New Jersey.]

SI: I know they have programs, but Urban University I do not think is one of them. Between your freshman and sophomore years, there was obviously the riots.

SPS: Yes.

SI: How did that affect the campus when you came back? You probably would have been in Fanwood or at your bungalow.

SPS: No, I had moved to Plainfield in '66, after I graduated from high school. That was a really deep concern. There was a riot in Plainfield, too. You felt unsafe in a lot of Newark, which was part of the reason why I considered transferring to Douglass. Friends of mine who lived in Newark or Irvington had a more immediate experience and scare about Newark. It meant that some of the surroundings were all burned down, and I don't know whether they've ever been built up again.

Overall, it was an angry time. Everybody seemed to be angry at the time, and that frankly fed into my memoir that I wrote for the recent Rutgers book, that being angry all the time didn't seem to find any solution to anything and maybe a little kindness was called for. I felt it even more when I wrote that because it was around the time one of the angrier current demonstrations, so there is definitely a feeling of déjà vu. We could use some kindness again. [Editor's Note: In the spring of 2021, Rutgers Magazine featured the article "Restive at Rutgers," in which class members of 1969, 1970 and 1971, including Dr. Smith, contributed recollections about the turbulent years of the late 1960s.]

Yes, there was always something. My entire college career, there was never what I would call a normal spring semester. There was the building takeover. Then, there were riots. There was the assassination of Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy, and then there was Kent State. It felt like you were just living in a dangerous, angry time. People I knew in high school wound up in Vietnam and didn't come back. It was not fun and games.

SI: I am curious, the women's rights movement was also gaining momentum during this period. Were you, maybe not participating, reading some of the literature related to the feminist movement, that sort of thing?

SPS: I probably wasn't reading a lot of the literature, other than as it pertained to my economics classes, and quite frankly, some of the literature, as an economist, was misguided. The quotations on women making two-thirds of what a man makes, well, in the aggregate, that was true. But if women are in occupations that make two-thirds of what predominantly male occupations earn, there is some rationale for it. Now, if women are not hired into the male occupations, then there is a problem. This was the sort of thing that I've always been interested in sorting through, the emotion from the reality.

I'll give an example in the economics literature. There was a study done of insurance companies, and male and female graduates were hired into some major insurance companies. They got the same pay when they started, but as they moved on, there was a ladder that men were moved into in terms of job titles that would eventually lead to top executive positions, whereas women were moved into other job titles that didn't have much upward mobility. Then, they never had a chance for a shot at it. Now, that's prejudice, that's bias, and that's something I want to see stopped, but to say, just simply looking at the aggregate numbers, that's proof of bias against women is wrong, is incorrect.

I've always done that. There's a whole array of commentary about Hispanics and Blacks being more heavily hit by COVID than whites. Now, I don't think COVID is biased. COVID is a disease, and some of the reason that some groups are more heavily hit are other comorbidities. If those populations have a higher proportion of diabetes or high blood pressure, they're going to be more seriously affected by them. If the reasons that they have diabetes and high blood pressure are linked to some other biased treatment, it still doesn't make the disease biased. It is important to try to understand why is this going on because you can't fix it if you don't know the underlying causes.

It always annoyed me to have people complain about something and act as if you could just magically pay all women the same as men. In fact, I was in a debate on that at Cornell. It was about comparable worth, and unfortunately, comparable worth only looks at one side of a labor market. Wages are set because of both a demand for a skill and a supply of that skill. What I said in the debate was that if you were a company hiring a translator in Miami, you'd have to pay more to have somebody who could translate Russian than somebody who could translate Spanish. That isn't any bias, it's just a recognition of a shortage, but comparable worth acts as if you just ignore those things.

SI: Well, tell me a little bit more about how you became interested particularly in labor economics. You said you had Professor Troy.

SPS: Yes.

SI: Were there other factors that deepened your interest?

SPS: Well, it just fascinated me. In fact, that's what most of my research was on, what people are paid, why they are paid what they are paid, and why it differs. But I was still set on just getting a job in business. As it turns out, that would have probably gotten me into a human

resource job, which in those days was kind of a dead end for women because it was before companies started realizing that their most precious resource is their human resources.

In any case, in my senior year in college, there was a recession, and the job opportunities didn't seem to be too good. In those days, recessions didn't last so long. I thought I'd go to graduate school and get a master's, and then by the time I got the master's, the recession would be gone and I'd get a better job. But of course, I wanted to get some sort of a fellowship. Actually, come to think of it, that's when I was thinking about going to Katharine Gibbs, believe it or not, as a college graduate, because the opportunities still weren't that great for women, but my parents would have had to pay for Katharine Gibbs. Then I got a fellowship, a three-year fellowship, at Rutgers. I still did not intend to go onward for the Ph.D. I thought I'd get the master's, but after I was in graduate school, I realized that master's didn't really make that much of a difference in pay, so you'd have to stay on for your doctorate, which I did. I had a three-year NDEA Title IV Fellowship, and then I got a Manpower Administration Doctoral Dissertation Grant that paid for the fourth year. [Editor's Note: The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) was signed into law on September 2, 1958. It provided funding for education at the elementary, secondary and college levels. Title IV of the act provided funding for graduate-level fellowships to increase the number of university professors.]

SI: Was Dr. Troy your mentor and advisor during that period, or were there others?

SPS: We stayed a little bit in touch, but by that point, I was just at Rutgers-New Brunswick. There I had Professor Michael K. Taussig, who wound up my dissertation advisor, and Professor Monroe Berkowitz, who taught the labor courses. The next mentor I had outside of my family was Albert Rees, who I worked for in my first job. [Editor's Note: Albert Rees was a notable labor economist who taught at the University of Chicago and then at Princeton University, where he also served as the provost. He served as an advisor to President Gerald Ford and as chair of the Council on Wage and Price Stability from 1974 to 1976. He later headed the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.]

SI: Tell me a little bit about your research. You were looking at what people were paid. In general, was it more qualitative or quantitative?

SPS: Quantitative. I wanted to do a dissertation in labor economics and I had been thinking about doing something at that time called a regional Phillips curve, which looks at the relationship between unemployment and inflation. I spoke to Professor Taussig about it. He had just come back from a year leave in Princeton and he told me about this topic they'd been talking about, which was looking at federal wages in comparison with private wages, were they more or less, because there had been a lot of legislation in the early 1960s that was supposed to fix the federal pay scales. I said, "Gee, that sounds interesting." I decided to switch to that, and he became my thesis advisor. He and a friend of his from Princeton and a graduate school classmate of my brother's helped me prepare an application for a Manpower Administration Doctoral Dissertation Grant and I got it to work on federal-private pay differentials. The second semester of my third year and my fourth year, I just worked nonstop on the dissertation.

I applied for a teaching job at Princeton and for some other teaching jobs. I think I got an offer at Fordham in their Economics Department, but Albert Rees, who is a kind of legendary labor economist, was applying for an NSF grant to look at federal-private pay differentials. When he saw what my topic was, he asked me if I'd like to also be considered for a position as his research associate. It was a title equivalent to assistant professor, and I said, "Sure." Well, they didn't hire me for the assistant professor, but when he got the grant, he offered me that job.

He became a mentor for the next nineteen years and a very good friend. We only worked together for about two months that first summer, and President Ford offered him the position as chair of the Council on Wage and Price Stability. We had already covered more in our research than he thought we'd get done in the first year, so he asked me to take over the project. I took it over in practice; in name, there had to be a Princeton faculty member named as principal investigator in charge of it, but I was basically running it. Al used to come back weekends and we'd discuss things. It became my project. I was still only supposed to be there a year. Al could have stayed another year in Washington, but Princeton was having some problems and Princeton University President Bill Bowen asked Al to be provost of Princeton. He accepted that, and he asked me to stay a second year and complete the project, which is what I did.

Midway through the second year--I was applying for jobs in the second year, but also, in the second year, I had basically gotten as many journal acceptances as I could get with that topic and I still had three boxes of printout to discuss. I asked Orley Ashenfelter, director of the section, if he would fund me for a summer, so I could write a monograph. He did, and I wrote the monograph. I will proudly say, to make the long story short, that became the best-selling monograph in the history of the industrial relations section at Princeton. That was pretty thrilling. [Editor's Note: Dr. Smith is the author of *Equal Pay in the Public Sector: Fact or Fantasy* (Industrial Relation Section, Princeton University, 1977).]

As I was leaving Princeton, I was interviewing for academic jobs, but I really didn't want to become a teacher. I had taught at Princeton along with the research. So, I interviewed with the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, and that was like everything I found fascinating, working on real projects in New York City, what more could I have, so I went to the Fed.

SI: Was your brother able to complete his dissertation?

SPS: Yes, he got his Ph.D. in 1970, the year I graduated from college, but he had already left the year before. He worked on his thesis while teaching full time at Bowling Green in Ohio.

SI: In terms of women in the program, were you one of a few, or were there other women?

SPS: Oh, there were very few. There were very few. I think there was only one other woman in my class. She eventually got her Ph.D. and became a teacher. She was a high school friend of my lawyer friend from college, so I heard a little bit more from her. I think I was the first person in my class to get my Ph.D. because I did it in four years. Of course, I had the fellowships, so I did not have to be a research assistant or a teaching fellow. I chose to be a teaching fellow the spring semester of my third year just to get the experience. I taught a course in econometrics. Then, when I had my doctoral dissertation fellowship, I was still commuting, so I did not need

the extra work and it meant that I could finish the thesis. I wanted to get on with my life. I didn't want to be a perpetual student.

SI: Tell me about your work with the Federal Reserve. What were your early experiences like there?

SPS: Paul Volcker was the president. I was part of a group brought in to study the economy of New York City. It was when New York City almost went bankrupt, and, in fact, at one point, the Fed considered being a lender of last resort for New York City. It was exciting, working on real things in real time, doing confidential analysis and being in the middle of things going on and then being part of the group that did the briefing for Paul Volcker when he went for his hearings to become chair of the Board of Governors. It was really exciting. Again, I made some lifelong friends there too. It was just a good camaraderie, and we felt like we were doing good work, important work. [Editor's Note: Paul Volcker served as President of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York from 1975 to 1979 and then as Chair of the Federal Reserve from 1979 to 1987. He later served as an advisor to President Barack Obama.]

The biggest study I did on the New York economy was on the Port of New York and New Jersey, and I tapped into all my father's colleagues to get some inside information on it. It was fascinating. Then, I also did an analysis that came out of the data I had from my wage study. There's a classic topic in economics called the north/south wage differential, and to give away what I found, I wrote an article for the Bank's Quarterly Review publication and also for an academic journal eventually entitled "The North/South Wage Differential: Has the South Risen again?" It has; wages were above what they were in other parts of the country. That was the kind of fascinating stuff you could work on that had real implications. [Editor's Note: Leonard G. Sahling and Sharon P. Smith are the authors of "Regional Wage Differentials: Has the South Risen Again?" published in the *Review of Economics and Statistics* (1983, vol. 65, issue 1, 131-35).]

Of course, what also was exciting was when my monograph came out, it got picked up in an article in *Harper's Magazine*. Then, I was interviewed by Rudy Maxa at *The Washington Post* and I was on TV in Washington. It was exciting times, really, really exciting times.

SI: You may have mentioned this, but what was the title of the monograph?

SPS: The monograph was *Equal Pay in the Public Sector: Fact or Fantasy?* I'm into colon titles. [laughter] The other one was just an article, but the monograph was *Equal Pay in the Public Sector: Fact or Fantasy?*

SI: How long were you at the Fed?

SPS: Let's see, five-and-a-half years, including a semester leave when I taught up at Cornell in the Industrial and Labor Relations School.

SI: After the work on the city's economy, were you working on other projects, or what did you do during that time there?

SPS: There was always projects. I was one of their labor economists, so I was working on things to do with that. There were special assignments. There was what was called the Red Book. You called business leaders to get their take on what was going on in the economy, and that was the input for the Federal Open Market Committee and the meetings before the Federal Open Market Committee meetings. There'd be special projects for officers or for the president.

The Fed, at that time, you stayed about five years, or you stayed for a career. Basically, I wanted to get back into--my fantasy was to get into labor relations, real labor relations. There was an opportunity for an economic analysis job in AT&T, which could then lead into working in labor relations, so I went for it, which was after five-and-a-half years with the Fed. I worked in economic analysis at AT&T, and the chief economist helped me get a job, move over into labor relations. That was really exciting because it was just as AT&T was divesting for the first time. You had a company with over fifty years of bargaining history suddenly becoming a new company that was ninety percent represented workers but competing for the first time with companies that weren't represented and you had to bargain your way into a better position. At various times, I basically redid my thesis but for the purpose of helping determine if AT&T was overpaying its workers or underpaying them. I had to try and figure that out because you can't bargain either a raise or a restructure if you don't know where you are, and that's what I was doing, as well as costing out contract ideas in real time. It was thrilling. It was absolutely thrilling and part of a very energized team.

I went from economic analysis to labor relations, and again, the guidance in AT&T suggested that you were supposed to move into other jobs to get rounded experience. Then, from labor relations, I went into corporate strategy and development, overseeing their IT units, their corporate headquarters and their real estate unit, which meant I spent most of my time with the real estate unit. That was interesting, high pressure, but rather frustrating, and about that time, I started to think that AT&T had lost its way. I really believed they would find their way again, but I feared that by the time they found their way, they would decide that I was "too old" to promote. I decided to cut my losses, and I started to look for another job. I was still there, of course.

Well, that's when my good friend and mentor Al Rees stepped in. He had gone from being provost at Princeton to a return to the faculty and then left Princeton to become president of the Sloan Foundation. His good friend, Bill Bowen, who had been president of Princeton, was now president of the Mellon Foundation. Bill thought that the upcoming uncapping of retirement was going to be a huge problem for all universities because the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, which eliminated mandatory retirement for everybody for whom age is not a bona fide occupational qualification or who was not a high policy-making executive with a certain specific guaranteed pension, was to be postponed for faculty to allow higher education the time to analyze and decide whether they needed a permanent exemption. Congress never authorized the funds for any study, so Bill decided to authorize the funds from Mellon. He engaged the support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Hewlett Foundation, and he wanted Al to do the research because Al was about to step down from Sloan. Al said he'd do it if he could get the person he wanted to work with him, and that was me, which was thrilling.

There we were, about fourteen years later, working back together again, and it was terrific. It was two years of analyzing whether or not retirement was going to be an issue for higher education. Should they ask for a permanent exemption because when you have a tenure contract, you have a life contract. If you don't want to retire, unless you can be found inept and incapable of the job, you can't be forced to retire or unless there's financial exigency, which most schools are reluctant to plea. We were really the only game in town that collected original data. The National Academy ultimately was funded to do a study, but they didn't have enough time to collect original data. There were some other small studies and I coordinated with all of them, but we had collected our own data and we modeled what would happen. We collected as much data as we could from a select, not a random, but a select set of schools that were private research universities, public research universities and elite liberal arts colleges, because Al felt those were the areas that would be most impacted if they were affected by declining faculty energy. The liberal arts colleges because one faculty member might be the expert on medieval history and while any faculty member becoming incapable was a problem, if the school loses its entire medieval history specialization, that's much more critical. At the research universities because faculty teach less, they consume huge institutional resources, particularly in the sciences. If they have a lab and they can't do the work anymore, that's a crisis for the advance of knowledge and for the school.

We collected this data for as close to ten years as we could, so we could construct flows of faculty, in and out of tenure, by hire, promotion, as inflow, or leaving by retirement or death or moving on to a resignation, as outflow. I constructed flows and then we modeled the implications--we had age distributions--and we could model what would happen to the state of faculty if you changed the retirement rules. It became the underpinning for informing the higher education associations, who had sponsored us also, on their position with Congress, so they did not resist the change.

Now, in the meantime, since then--that study was completed in '90--in the meantime, of course all sorts of financial crises have hit universities and, in fact, they have shrunken the number of tenure spots. I believe that now less than fifty percent of faculty are tenured or tenure stream, but it was still an issue. We ultimately concluded that faculty would retire, on the whole. If they didn't retire, most often you wanted them to stay on. If you didn't want them to stay on, then it was really a management problem. You had to persuade the person to retire. Having been in that position, it's absolutely true. You've got to hold people to a standard. You can't just say, "Oh, Joe is a good guy. It's okay though. He doesn't do any research anymore, but he's a good guy. He did good stuff years ago." You can't do that. "He doesn't meet with the students." Well, you can't do that. You've got to hold them to a standard. The standard isn't the normal standard that you would have in a regular job, where you have a year to perform, you can check what they're doing. Some things in research take a lot longer.

In fact, the oldest retiree in our study was somebody in an institution that was capped, but they let him stay on because they wanted to enable him to finish his dictionary of Middle English. It was so funny because I remember the attorney at Princeton saying people would come to him and say, "Oh, you've got to get rid of this one. He just isn't up to it anymore." Then, he'd say, "Well, will you testify?" "Oh no, I couldn't do that. He's a colleague." Or another institution would say, "Everybody knows So-and-So is no longer up to the job," but they don't want to come

out in public about it. "He's actually sixty-four, we can handle it for another year." Well, if he's sixty-four and there's no retirement age, he may stay on forever. It sounds callous, but it's saying, "Why should this other person be held to the many obligations of being a faculty member, when you let somebody else just stay long and be a free-rider on the things that have to get done?"

In doing that study, I had to really try to understand a college as an operating entity, and I decided, "Yes, I'd like to run one." Also, at that time, my brother had said to me, "You know there's a lot of opportunities for women now because of affirmative action for women in administrative positions." I applied for deanships, and I was selected as the first woman dean of a Jesuit school of business. At that time, I think there were twenty-five women deans in twelve hundred schools of business. That's how I went from the corporate world back into academic research and back into academic administration. I never really planned anything. I sort of sought opportunities, which isn't a good idea, but I've never liked planning. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Dr. Smith served as the dean of the College of Business Administration and Graduate School of Business Administration, now the Gabelli School of Business, at Fordham University.]

SI: Along the way, were you mostly just focused on your work wherever you were, or did you also get involved in professional associations?

SPS: Well, I never got really involved in the professional associations. In the corporate world, it's kind of hard to really; the job, you'd come in, in the morning, and you'd have to go to Washington that night. That wasn't the way it was. In the Fed, I'm just doing my research, and the idea was trying to get publications. Once I was back at Princeton again, it was trying to get publications. That's the way you kind of enhanced your reputation. Then, once I got into Fordham, then there were various associations I needed to be a part of, and I was. I went into the Association of Colleges of Business Administration, the Association of Jesuit Schools of Business, AACSB. All those things I was involved in. [Editor's Note: AACSB is the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.]

SI: Tell me about getting into the deanship. What did you see as the major challenges that you would face there?

SPS: Well, at that time, Fordham's business schools had separate deans. There was a dean of the graduate school, who was also the dean of the faculty. The faculty taught in both schools. I was the dean of the undergraduate school. But I did not report to the dean of the graduate school. We both reported to the vice president of academic affairs.

The dean of the graduate school was a fascinating person. He had been president of CBS, and, in fact, when Bill Paley fired him, it was frontpage news in *The New York Times*. But he was just charming, brilliant, challenging to work with, but still a joy to work with, and it was a question of learning how to operate with different people. You didn't have to compromise on anything, he had very strong standards, but you had to make sure he didn't walk all over you, because that was the kind of a person he was. But he listened, he'd really listen to other points of view. That was kind of a different relationship but terrific, a little bit like some of the things I had in the corporate world, because he was much more corporate than academic. I resonated with that

because I've always been more corporate than academic. [Editor's Note: Arthur R. Taylor (1935-2015) was an executive, entrepreneur and educator who served as the dean of Fordham's Graduate School of Business from 1985 to 1992 and as president of Muhlenberg College from 1992 to 2002.]

Then, of course, the challenges were learning the ins and outs of a Jesuit institution, certain values and ways of doing things. The biggest challenge was the school was terribly underfunded, it was ridiculous, so trying to manage that. At the same time, Fordham, as many schools were at that time, was deeply challenged in enrollment. The incoming class decreased by, I think it was like, twenty-five percent just as I was arriving, and we were tuition driven. It kept falling for four years. New York in those years was not seen as an attractive place then, nor was the Bronx, where the undergraduate business school was located at that time. Those were the years when the Bronx was on fire. It was a big challenge, but it was a wonderful place.

I had this absolutely fabulous president, Joseph O'Hare, Father O'Hare, who was just wonderful. He basically let the deans do their thing unless they got in trouble, but he wasn't a micromanager by any means. I worked with the faculty, and we did creative things. We had a creative team of other people in admissions and the other undergrad liberal arts colleges, and the enrollments started coming back. We rebranded ourselves. I built new programs that made connections in the business world, and it started to explode. It all came back again, and it was just so thrilling to see it all happen. The school was transformed. [Editor's Note: Father Joseph A. O'Hare served the President of Fordham University from 1984 to 2003.]

Of course, when I first went there, majoring in business was sort of something you apologized for. Majoring in business is now the largest major in undergraduate schools. We had a really strong major, and we kept making it stronger and adding exciting things all along the way. I was always looking for some sort of a gimmick that could leveraged where we were, like we did a combined BS/MBA program that enabled you to get both degrees in five years, whereas the undergraduate degree was a four-year program and the graduate degree was a two-year program. I said, "Look, guys, if you've had six credits in accounting in undergraduate, you don't need another three credits with the same teacher in graduate school." That plays into another book I subsequently wrote, but basically the MBA started as a degree for liberal arts students who needed to learn business skills. If you've got a really good undergraduate business program, you don't really need it anymore. You're better off with some sort of a specialized master's, and so that was one of the things we did. We added all sorts of specializations. We always had a major in business administration and a major in accounting, but then we added a major in finance, a major in marketing, I think we had a major in IT, all things to enrich the curriculum. That got better job placements, got better internships. We added a program that enabled students to be paid to be a research assistant.

My predecessor as undergraduate dean, who had been an executive at AT&T, had started something called the CEO Breakfast Club. We used to have breakfast with major CEOs in the city, so kids could just meet them and talk to them and get exposed to things. We added a study tour that they could go abroad in the time between the fall and the spring semester and get three credits and maybe travel in Switzerland or Italy or even China and so that they'd have that on-site experience, meet businesspeople, and pick up three credits. We also added a small inter-session

in the same timeframe on campus, so students who knew they were going to be doing a really tough internship or were short a class could pick up a class in that period and then have a little lighter semester afterwards and still graduate on time. It all came together in a very, very exciting way. Ultimately, I wound up also dean of the graduate school and dean of the faculty, but that was much later on.

SI: How many years total were you at Fordham?

SPS: I was at Fordham for fifteen years.

SI: You got there in what year?

SPS: In 1990.

SI: 1990, okay. I remember, when I was a senior or junior in high school, I applied to Fordham and went for an interview, and one of the things that really stood out was they went to great lengths to say, "This is like an island in the Bronx. You're not going to be out in the Bronx."

SPS: Yes.

SI: Were you part of those conversations for how to separate that in people's minds, in potential students' minds, or part of conversations on how to improve the local area so that it was less of an issue?

SPS: Well, it's funny because it was an island, but maybe we did that more to reassure family because it's a very, very urban area and yet the campus is, frankly, greener than Princeton because it has this huge green center. We might have said that a little bit, but there's a thought that the most challenging thing Jesuits ask people to be is contemplatives in action. They were very involved in the community, but the community didn't just overlap with it, which, frankly, it did with Rutgers in Newark, or it does with NYU [New York University]. There's no delineation between the town and the campus, but this is a walled campus. I can understand how that might give a bad impression, but, to some extent, I guess I think it's a realistic impression when there's really bad crime right next door. As an employee, you don't want to feel like you've got somebody coming in with guns and knives on crack walking into your office, no. But the school was trying to make things better.

SI: Well, that touches on something else I wanted to ask about. You mentioned that the Jesuit system has its own values and practices. What are some of the other ones you had to confront and integrate into your own way of doing things?

SPS: Certainly as a Catholic, the Catholicism of it was fine with me. It was nice to be able to go to Mass on campus. There was some--obviously not at Fordham since I was hired as a dean--but there was some resistance to women in some circles. The other values, I only had one survey of philosophy course, so I was kind of weak on that, relative to many of the others. There were some people who were certainly more conservative in their religion than I am, so that could be real uncomfortable. On the whole, I found them all enormously tolerant and easy to get along

with. I know there were a number of Orthodox Jewish faculty who felt comfortable and at ease in that environment, because they were fully accepted and they were totally comfortable in it.

This was--I can't say it was necessarily Jesuit, but you were always conscious of the fact that at the end of the day, you went home to your home and the Jesuits went back to the community. You didn't really know what conversation was going on over the dinner table in their community that you were not a part of, which is probably not different from any other organization. In the military, if the military live on base versus those who don't live on base, there are conversations that take place. There were a lot of awfully good conversations that took place at lunch, where it was everybody. That was the only thing we used to talk about a little bit, that you're not a part of that conversation, so you don't really get your point to be made maybe at the right time.

SI: Once you had these other positions under your belt, what did you see as your vision for the way the school should be going?

SPS: I wanted to take advantage of the different programs and do some more interdisciplinary things, which I did on my own. The proudest thing I built was the international program, because I was very conscious of the need for businesspeople who were globally knowledgeable, informed and comfortable, but that wasn't just business. That was language and culture, and that actually was the biggest engine of growth for the undergraduate school because I shopped around the two different liberal arts colleges until I could get one to come in with me, where we would have a business language course be post-intermediate level and our students would then be able to qualify up to the post-intermediate level in language and then take an advanced course in business language. That's not "ou es le fax machine?" It's really understanding the culture and the language of doing business in France or Germany or Russia. Then, they would take some electives in liberal arts that would enhance their understanding of that culture. We had the first business Arabic course in the world, and I would have wanted students doing the Arabic specialty to then take Islamic philosophy, because as General Schwarzkopf said, "A hundred percent of the culture of the Mideast is Islam, so you've got to understand it." Then, on the business side, they'd pick one area in which they would become an expert on the international end, whether it was finance or marketing or accounting. I was so proud of that program. That took the collaboration and cooperation of people in the liberal arts too, and that worked. I wanted to see more of that. [Editor's Note: Norman Schwarzkopf, Jr. was an Army general who led coalition forces during the Gulf War as the commander of the United States Central Command.]

I've done the same thing at Pittsburgh. I want the interdisciplinary stuff. The world, the interesting things are in the cracks and the discovery. I've always loved that line from [the movie] *Working Girl*, "You never know where the big idea's going to come from." Well, actually, it's usually hiding there in the cracks. When you're in one discipline, you start to think in their paradigm, and you need to look at it from another perspective. Economists won't find all the answers, though I think they find a lot of them, but they look at it in a particular way. If you take a lawyer, they'll look at it in another way. If you take an engineer, they'll look at it in yet another way. The best will be if you can bring all of them together. [Editor's Note: Dr. Smith served as president of the University of Pittsburgh-Greensburg from 2007 to 2019.]

SI: Were people more or less welcoming of this approach, or did you face any resistance?

SPS: Well, no, not necessarily, but fortunately--this sounds callous--but fortunately, I got a grant from the Department of Education, which enabled me to pay people to develop new courses. The idea was they would develop them in an expedited way. Most people do respond to carrots, and that was helpful. In academia and in a lot of places, there's kind of traditionalists, and they don't like to think of things in new ways. The world is always changing. You've got to be agile; you absolutely have to be agile. That was the thing that I was trying to get people to think about, be agile.

SI: Were you able to continue either teaching or research, or was it just focusing on the administrative work?

SPS: It was mainly administrative. I liked the research, but I really loved the administrative stuff, so I just kept working on that. My final big piece of research was done in 2005, when I went on leave from being a dean. It was '05, the fall of '05, and I wrote a book with a colleague about business schools.

SI: What was the title of that book?

SPS: *Finding the Best Business School for You.* [Editor's Note: Everette E. Dennis and Sharon P. Smith are the co-authors of *Finding the Best Business School for You: Looking Past the Rankings*, published by ABC-CLIO in 2006.]

SI: That was around the same time you left Fordham, is that correct?

SPS: Well, I went on leave in the fall of '05 and then actually left in the spring of '06. Everette Dennis and I write quickly. We wrote it in a couple of months.

SI: Did you go next to Pitt?

SPS: No, I went to National University in southern California. I only stayed there a little over a year. It was not a good fit for me. I went as provost. The chancellor of the system wanted to make a big move into for-profit, and most of the classes were online. Originally, I had thought it was a good opportunity to try to get the school some of the recognition it deserved, National for years has been the largest producer of teachers in the State of California. It's the second largest private in California. The chancellor, who I thought was interested in getting some recognition in the traditional ways, really wasn't. It was not a good fit, so that's why I went to Pitt. I went to Pitt in the summer of '07.

SI: What attracted you to Pitt?

SPS: Well, a combination of reasons, of course being president of a school that highlighted personal attention for the students, which I really like, and good teaching and the whole overall reputation of Pitt. Pitt's chancellor at the time, Mark Nordenberg, had basically transformed Pitt and raised its reputation enormously during his time. He's a good friend too. He's a terrific guy,

absolutely fabulous. [Editor's Note: Mark A. Nordenberg served as chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh from 1996 to 2014. He had joined the Pittsburgh School of Law as a professor in 1977. He is now chair of the university's Institute of Politics.]

SI: Once you were in the position of president of the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg, what did you see as the major challenges you had to tackle?

SPS: Well, again, money; it was underfunded. Around that time, the enrollment was a concern, and the area is a challenge because it's basically like rust belt. It isn't actually rust belt because it's a little bit more rural than rust belt, but its major employers have left. In fact, there was just an article this past week, it's number one in the country, the county, in terms of areas that are losing more people to death than birth. It's a declining area and it's a huge challenge, but that's bigger than one person. I've been part of groups trying to reinvent it, and it hasn't worked yet. I don't know when it can come back. Pittsburgh reinvented itself with, as they said, meds and eds [health care and education]. This area is about thirty-five miles east of Pittsburgh and is as challenged or more so. All the places where the regional campuses are for Pittsburgh are challenged. Titusville, in fact, Pitt is closing down that campus and turning it into a community college and a skills center, but Titusville is a small city that has lost its employer base. Johnstown is not exactly vibrant economically. It's basically the tale of much of the Midwest because that part of Pennsylvania is more Midwest than mid-Atlantic.

SI: Are most of the students from that area?

SPS: Yes, most of the students are from the area. They're great kids, really great kids. We aggressively were trying to be diverse, and our diversity was about twenty-two percent, which may not sound diverse around Rutgers, but it's much more diverse than the region. To give you an idea of the region, we had a lecture one time about the Whiskey Rebellion. One of my employees was descended from somebody who fought in the Whiskey Rebellion, and that's not uncommon there. Most people had been there like five, six, seven generations. It's very, very set in its ways, but the kids were wonderful. The idea was to try to add appropriate, vibrant majors, and probably the one I'm proudest of is we added a nursing program. We graduated the first class of nurses this year. We partnered with Pitt's School of Nursing, which meant we were already a part of one of the most prestigious nursing programs in the country. We launched it, and that is something we're really proud of because it was desperately needed and it's just the right way to go. Then, at the same time, we added a major in healthcare management, which is also an important major, and we enabled our nurses to minor in it. That was a big deal too. [Editor's Note: The Whiskey Rebellion occurred in western Pennsylvania from 1791 to 1794 to protest the new United States government's whiskey tax.]

Then, we added an education program that got high rankings from all the schools, elementary, secondary, and then we added special education and we added Spanish education. Since I've left, it was under development when I was there, they added data analytics. We were trying to do a partnership with the School of Occupational and Physical Therapy to see if we could get a tie in there; that's not done yet. It was a little harder to do the partnerships there than it was at Fordham because of the distance. If you wanted to partner with the Pittsburgh campus, it's thirty-five miles away. While students do take classes there, it's a lot harder than just taking a

Ram Van from the Bronx to Lincoln Center. That was a little bit of a challenge, but we did a lot of really good programs. They already had an incredibly strong foundation in communicative skills, and that was something that was so important. I was blown away by these kids. They were so articulate and so comfortable, talking to the trustees, talking to business leaders, not at all arrogant or full of themselves, just comfortable. We kept growing our science majors. Actually, when I went there, I think it was just bio and chemistry and a math major, and we added a whole array of others because I'm sort of figuring, I'm not sure, I think it's something like forty percent of students major in sciences there. It's just a question of looking at a curriculum and keeping it vigorous, keeping it up to date, seizing on opportunities, encouraging students to seize the opportunity. Don't wait for it to happen to you; make it happen.

SI: What I have heard from other institutions, when you are in the president's job, a good deal of that is fundraising, dealing with donors, that sort of thing. Was that true in your case?

SPS: Yes. It's a delicate balance at a place like Pitt because there's a central fundraiser. Fortunately or unfortunately, and this happens at Fordham too, you've got an alum and if the alum is really successful and generous, everybody wants a piece of the action, to put it bluntly. [laughter] There's that challenge. My school was much younger than the Pittsburgh campus of the University of Pittsburgh. The University of Pittsburgh is one of the oldest schools in the country. I think it's only a couple years younger than Rutgers. They've got more alum and alum who are very successful. When your alum are only out of school about fifteen, twenty years, they aren't as successful as the ones who are out forty, fifty, sixty years.

There's that. There's socializing. There's getting involved in the community, which I did very much. I was on many boards. I was chair of the hospital board. That, to me, was the way I needed to become known and know the community. It worked well. It's a good community, good people, caring people.

SI: You talked about the long-term challenges, but are there any events or periods of crisis that stand out?

SPS: Oh, yes. At Fordham, the one event that stands out understandably is 9/11. I, in fact, was supposed to have been at the World Financial Center that morning for a meeting with Lehman Brothers. It was cancelled at the last minute, so I was up in the Bronx. But I can still remember hearing the fighter pilots flying overhead. I lost someone I was very close to; he who worked for Keefe, Bruyette & Woods and he was killed. Everybody knew somebody, and unfortunately, a lot of people knew a lot of people. A man who on the board with me, on one of the boards there, his sister's husband and son were both killed. That was what happened. It's burned into my memory, that day and the days afterwards. A silly little thing, trying to decide do you cancel the executive MBA who was due in that weekend? Dealing with students who were irrational about it, and I said, "No, we're going to cancel classes." Then, one of the students got mad at me for cancelling the classes. I said, "Look, we don't know whether you can travel in or not." Oh, but he was mad. That's the trivial in the midst of the huge tragedy. That, too, is sealed in my memory.

Some campus security issues hit Greensburg that I remember well. We did blacktop exercises to plan for them, but planning for them is never the same as dealing with them. That stands out in my memory. Happy times stand in my memory. When you see somebody who's successful, that's just spectacular. Or seeing one of my students from Greensburg who I stayed close to, she worked in my office and she was a very good student, but she didn't really know what she wanted to do. I said, "Well, how about law school?" "Oh, gee, I don't know about law school." I said, "Try it." Well, to make a long story short, she tried it and she fell in love with the law, did beautifully, she's great. Her whole life changed because she found a passion. To be able to help people find their passion or just to have somebody who's got a problem and you can help, if not fix it, tell them, "It's going to get better. It really is." Those memories are fantastic. There's something everywhere, I mean, the happy and the sad, and they stay in your memory.

SI: Why did you decide to step down in 2019?

SPS: Well, I decided to step down because I wanted to have time to do the things I'd like to do when I'm still healthy enough to do them. I was just shy of seventy-one when I stepped down, and I thought, "That's enough." I like it, but I wanted a turn for me and for my family and my friends. Now, of course, I didn't anticipate that, what, less than six months after I retired, we'd move into a pandemic and everything would lock down, but I wanted to move out here to Arizona to be close to the family I have here. It was time. I love being able to do things that I like to do. I miss some of the things, but I don't miss the twenty-four/seven aspect of the job. It's time to give somebody else a chance.

SI: Is there any aspect of your career that we missed or that you would like to talk about a little more?

SPS: I don't think so. Is there any other question that you might have? Let me just say this. Maybe permeating through everything is the importance of relationships, that you don't know how much is friend and how much is business, but I guess I learned that from my parents, particularly my father, because of his job in sales. It's listening to people, enjoying people, and trying at least to be alert to opportunities, because you never know what might happen. It could be really exciting.

SI: Do you think there is anything from your Rutgers-Newark days that influenced you?

SPS: Actually, yes, being in the sorority and president of the sorority was an enormous learning experience in leadership. They were my sisters, but I was also responsible for them and we didn't all have the same--I don't want to say values but maybe codes of behavior, and I wasn't going to impose on them what I felt was the right way to behave as long as what they were doing didn't endanger in some way me or any of my sisters. I'll use an example. If some of them were smoking pot and it's their decision, but if they smoked pot in the house, every sister might have been suspended or expelled and those who were trying to get into medical school would never make it, so that was not anything that could be tolerated. You want to smoke? Fine, but not in the house, because your behavior will hurt somebody else. It was learning--people might have thought I was prudish or something--but learning to be more openly tolerant of other people's behavior and also learning some communicative skills. That's a lifelong lesson, whether it's

things like smoking pot or being friends with somebody whose political ideas you absolutely abhor. You figure out a way to handle it, and one way, if nothing else, in that instance is just to simply say, "Well, let's just agree to disagree, and we won't talk about it. I'm not going to try and convert you. You're not going to try and convert me, and we'll just be good friends outside of it."

SI: One final question we have been asking people, how has the pandemic affected your life?

SPS: Well, it affected it dramatically in the sense of I was just getting out here and I tried to get involved in some activities and meet other people, which went on hold. Fortunately, I have family here, so that was great. Fortunately, I've always loved to read and I like handiwork. I had things to do. Fortunately, the weather is such that even with an unheated pool, and my community has a really nice pool, I can swim six months out of the year. All of those things were great.

At a purely personal level, one of the people I worked with at Fordham that I know of, died from COVID. One of the faculty that I worked closely with and was very fond of at Pitt died of COVID. That's a tragedy. I feel extremely fortunate that I've been vaccinated, that a couple people in my family have had it but have recovered. It's still a tragedy remembering the people who are gone.

SI: All right, well, thank you very much. I really appreciate you answering all my questions, and I really enjoyed hearing about all the aspects of your life. Thank you very much.

SPS: I enjoyed chatting with you.

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

Transcribed by Jesse Braddell 11/11/2021
Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy Rizzi 1/11/2022
Reviewed by Sharon Patricia Smith 1/23/2022