

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH SUSAN YOUMANS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

and

YEBON KIM

and

PATRICK MULLEN

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

FEBRUARY 10, 2023

TRANSCRIPT BY

REV

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an oral history interview with Susan Youmans. Is that correct pronunciation?

Susan Youmans: That's correct.

SI: Today is February 10, 2023. The interviewers are Shaun Illingworth, and Patrick and Yebon, will you say your names on the record?

Yebon Kim: Yebon Kim.

Patrick Mullen: Patrick Mullen.

SI: Thank you very much for joining us. You are part of the Pioneering Rutgers College Class of 1976 Oral History Project. That is an experience we really want to delve into, but we also want to know about your life before and after Rutgers. To begin, could you tell us where and when you were born?

SY: I was born in Coaldale, Pennsylvania, June 28, 1954.

SI: Tell us a little bit about your parents, starting with their names.

SY: My father's name was Ralph David Koch, Sr. Do you want information about him?

SI: Yes, just his background, things like that.

SY: Okay. He was born September 10, [1929], in Coaldale, Pennsylvania. He was a blue-collar worker. I was not able to write his history down. [The pre-interview survey] wouldn't allow me to do that. He started his work in Atlas Chemical Company, in Pottsville, Pennsylvania. We moved to New Jersey in 1967, after a friend offered him a job at Union Carbide Corporation. There, he worked in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, and he was what was known as a traffic manager. From there, he went to Greif Brothers Corporation. They manufactured shipping containers and moving containers. He went to Rutgers night school and earned a certificate. I believe it was in traffic management, but I'm not absolutely positive, because at that corporation, he also went into labor relations and negotiated contracts with Teamsters. That was an interesting part of his life, because the kind of people that he had to negotiate with were not always the most desirable people, and his life was threatened several times. It was pretty interesting. He died young, unfortunately; he died at sixty-four. He didn't take care of himself. He smoked, he drank, didn't exercise. He passed very young. [Editor's Note: The International Brotherhood of Teamsters, also called the Teamsters Union, is a labor union in the United States and Canada that was founded in 1903.]

SI: You mentioned he was born and raised in the same town you were.

SY: Yes.

SI: I think your mother was from the same area, but do you have a sense of what that area was like when he was growing up?

SY: It was a very small coal-mining town. Everybody knew everybody, pretty much. It was very old. I don't know much about his life. I know he kind of struggled with education. That's basically all I know. He didn't talk much about his life. He had a grandmother that was ill and lived at home and was very demanding and, therefore, was not very accepting of people's illnesses. It just brought back a lot of history for him. He was a tough man. He was very, very tough to live with. He had an alcohol problem; a functioning alcoholic, I would call him. He was very good at his business but very bad at home. He was not a good family man.

SI: Working in industry and the chemical industry in particular, do you know if he was in a lot of unsafe environments with few protections?

SY: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. They made dynamite, so they would have frequent explosions. He was very lucky that he escaped with his life, because a lot of his friends were killed.

SI: Was there any kind of immigration story on that side of the family? Was his father or grandfather or grandmother or mother from somewhere else?

SY: No, they were here forever. They really didn't trace back their history. My mother's side of the family did, but my father's side did not. The name in German means cook. We had a lot of discussion because it was still K-O-C-H, so you'd get "koch," "koke." We were known as Koch ["kuck"], rhymes with duck. When we moved to New Jersey, his brother lived in the town we moved to, and they went by Cook, the English version. So, it was a little tricky at that point because I became a Cook, they stayed Kucks. [laughter]

SI: Tell us a little bit about your mother as well.

SY: Okay. My mother was born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in Amish country. She was the sixth child of eight. She had six brothers and one sister, and she also had a tough upbringing. Her father worked in the clothing business. I think he owned a clothing store and, during the depression, lost a lot. She had a very cantankerous relationship with her father. Her mother was ill. From the time I remember, she had some kind of lung condition, and when I was a child, my uncles and my mother and my aunt would pass her around from family to family to take care of her because my grandfather was unable or unwilling. He was very bright but very different, very controlling. I don't know how else to describe it. My grandmother died when I was seven or eight years old.

Anyway, my mother went to nursing school. She paid her way at Reading School of Nursing, in Reading, Pennsylvania, [and] got her RN [registered nurse] degree. My grandfather would not allow her back in the house after she got her degree. He was very much against education. My parents got married on December 20, 1953. After their marriage, my grandfather would not let come back to get her belongings, including her wedding gown. I didn't have much of a relationship, but in my older years, he would write me these very flowery letters, trying to

engage. Nobody ever spoke a bad word against him, but I had met him several times and [he was] just not my type of person.

Anyway, my mother went on to work in several different hospitals. She worked at Reading Hospital when she graduated. We moved to New Jersey, and before they bought a home, we lived with my aunt in Jackson, New Jersey. My mother worked briefly in Paul Kimball Hospital in Lakewood, which is now called something else, I'm sure. My father was very much against her working. He was very derogatory. He was also very against education and would call her Nurse Groff in a very demeaning sort of way, and he wouldn't allow her to work when we finally moved to South River, New Jersey. I need to back up, because she did work at Good Samaritan Hospital in Pottsville, Pennsylvania, before I was born. No, it was after I was born, I'm sorry. She briefly worked there. When we moved to New Jersey and she worked briefly at Paul Kimball Hospital, he didn't want her to work. He constantly put her down, and she did basically stand up to him. I can remember, as a younger child, when I became aware of his verbal and physical abuse, I kept urging her to leave. She didn't have any means, at that point, to leave. [Editor's Note: Paul Kimball Hospital was renamed Monmouth Medical Center Southern Campus in 2014.]

She went to work at Roosevelt Hospital in Menlo Park and worked her way up to infection control specialist and started keeping her salary in a separate bank account. She paid for my tuition at Rutgers, which back then was four hundred dollars a semester. [laughter] She strongly encouraged me to make something of myself, and never depend on a man. I wanted to go to nursing school. I didn't want to go to college. She encouraged me to go to nursing school, if I wanted, and my father absolutely forbade it, "We have one nurse in the family, and we're not going to have another one." So, that's how I ended up at Rutgers. My mother was a saver. When she passed from Alzheimer's in 2015, she had a nest egg. My mother studied the stock market like crazy, after my father died, and just built a fortune for herself and her heirs. I greatly admired her. She was a wonderful, wonderful, strong woman.

SI: It is not totally unusual, in that generation, to hear about the man in the family not wanting women to work, and a little less in the next generation. Where do you think your mother got the drive to stand up to her father and then your father?

SY: You know, I'm not sure, but she's always been a very strong woman. She admired her brothers. Her brothers all went to college, well, except for one. Five of them went to college and really became very successful. She was always very strong. She was, at that point, the only girl in the family, until my aunt came along probably seven years later. She had five older brothers, one younger brother. I always called her the strong German because we're of German descent, and she was just a very strong German woman. She'd stand up to anybody, and I inherited that. [laughter]

SI: You mentioned her brothers. Were they the ones that were in World War II?

SY: Yes. I don't know a whole lot about their history. My oldest uncle, I know, served under General Patton, and also survived Normandy. I'm not quite sure where the other two uncles served in the war, and it might have been three other uncles. They just don't talk about it. When

my Uncle Dave was in the early stages of Alzheimer's, we were at a family reunion, and I was able to kind of get his oral history. We sat down and talked, and he explained it all to me. [Editor's Note: George S. Patton commanded the Third United States Army in France and Germany after the Allied invasion of Normandy, France on June 6, 1944.]

SI: That is great that you were able to do that. Is that the one who was in Patton's army?

SY: Yes.

SI: Wow, great. Do you know how your parents met? You talked about the marriage and the dress, but do you know how they ran into each other?

SY: I think it was through mutual friends. That's what I was told anyway, because they didn't live in the same area. Lancaster is probably an hour and a half to two hours away from Tamaqua, so I'm really not sure there.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SY: Anyway, I'm not sure how they met. When they got married--going through albums later on in my adult years, everything said 1953, December 20, 1953. I was born in June of 1954. My mother, instead of admitting that perhaps I was conceived out of wedlock, just insisted that the newspaper and the photographer made a mistake on the date. When I had to put my mother in a memory care facility, I found information in her home as I was preparing to sell it, that my suspicion was correct. So, she was just, I guess, very ashamed of that. In the 1950s, I'm sure that it was unacceptable. I have a feeling that's why my paternal grandmother never liked her.

SI: You were in Pennsylvania until '67. You would have been about fourteen then. Is that right?

SY: I was in seventh grade.

SI: Okay, all right. We have questions about your early days in Pennsylvania. I know Patrick and Yebon have questions. To start, what are your earliest memories of where you grew up?

SY: My earliest memory was, I was probably three years old, and we had a huge flood. My father lost some friends in that flood. I can still remember looking out the window and seeing cars floating down the hill that was near the place where we lived, and that stuck with me.

We did not live in that house very long. We always rented when we were in Pennsylvania. We moved into a three-story apartment building that was an old brick building, owned by Atlas Chemical. It was one of those railroad apartments where you basically have a long hallway, the rooms are off the hallway, and the kitchen's at one end, and the master bedroom's at the other end, and you have to go through the living room to get to the master bedroom. No air conditioning, of course. I just remember it being very hot, and very dirty from the coal dust.

My playground, when I was old enough to go out, were the strip mines in the mountains, the old coal mines. We'd play, we'd walk in between the strip mines, and we'd have picnics up on what we called Table Rock. We played a lot of imaginary games, as well as games in the back alley, such as stickball and hide and seek and many others. I was a bad kid. Before that, when I was very young, I would escape from the porch at a very young age, which resulted in being tied to a chair on our third-floor porch. I guess I was a little hard to handle. I remember jumping off a wall that separated our property from the property next door in the deep snow, and all that stuck out of the snow was the top of my hat. My mother, being up on the third floor, was able to see me and come down and pull me out of the snow. I ate sand. I ate dirt. I guess I was a typical kid back then. As I got older, I didn't have a lot of friends. I had neighbors that I hung out with and did a lot of bike riding. It was a different world back then. You know, I could go out. I remember one time I was out until seven o'clock at night though, and I got the belt to my rear end when I came home by my father. That was the one and only time he took the belt to me, because they were terrified that something happened to me.

My grandmother lived across town too, and I spent a lot of time with my grandparents when I was young. They taught me canasta. They taught me how to play double solitaire and single solitaire. They'd let me drink Coca-Cola out of the little Coca-Cola bottles, and they'd give me candy and dried beef and jelly sandwiches--yes, I was very spoiled by my grandmother. I was very close to her. They were good grandparents. My maternal grandfather was also very good to me. He died when I was ten from black lung disease.

I remember my schooling. I went to a private kindergarten, because they didn't have kindergarten in the public schools back then. This woman, named Mrs. Valentine, was unbelievable. She taught us how to read. We were set up in a train, so if you read correctly, you moved up in the train, and people that missed a word would move down to the caboose. I never wanted to stay home. I'd want to go to school when I was sick because I didn't want to lose my place. She taught us cursive writing in kindergarten. I mean, she was just amazing. When I went to public school, I was well equipped for first grade, but I was a menace. I was a talker. I got good grades, but I always got an "X" in "Works well without disturbing others."

In sixth grade, we had to go to a different town on a bus, and the school was all sixth grade. We changed classes, and I loved that. I thought that was really neat; it prepared me for junior high. Junior high, I started junior high in Tamaqua. They put me in algebra in seventh grade, and I had the dreaded Mr. Teeter, who had been there when my father was in school. Luckily, we moved shortly after that. When we moved to South River, I continued with the algebra, but I didn't do very well. I'm not a math person. That's basically my experience.

SI: I know Yebon and Patrick have questions. Yebon will go first and then Patrick after that.

YK: It is so interesting to hear about your childhood memories and your middle school, high school experiences. My next question would be, how many siblings do you have, and can you please tell us a little bit about them?

SY: I had one sibling. He's deceased. His name was Ralph David Koch, Jr. We called him Davy. My father was Dave. They didn't go by their first names. Davy was three years younger

than me, and he was a juvenile diabetic. He got diabetes when he was nine years old, resulting from, they think, a very bad case of the mumps. There were no vaccines back then for communicable diseases such as measles, rubella and mumps. Davy was a very difficult child. He had a lot of problems. He didn't listen to my parents. He beat on me. I say the men on my father's side were very similar. He was very bright but had a difficult time in school because of his attitude and his behavior. My father would not allow my mother to take him for help. He just would give him everything he wanted. So, he got a car at a very young age and wrecked it and got another car and wrecked it, and meanwhile, I got a bicycle for graduation. He was the favored one, and that was okay with me. I just never had a relationship with him because of how he beat me when I was younger. As we got older, we tolerated each other, but I just really never spent any time with him. He died in his fifties, and he's lucky he lived that long from the juvenile diabetes because he was a drug addict and a heavy drinker.

SI: Patrick, do you have a question?

PM: I do, yes. I understand that your parents had two different backgrounds in faith. Was one more prominent than the other in the household? Did religion play a major role in your life with the community when you were growing up?

SY: It did. My father was Presbyterian, and my mother grew up Lutheran. My paternal grandparents were Presbyterian, and my father was some kind of [elder]--whatever they call it in the Presbyterian Church. My mother was so afraid that they were heretics that she snuck me off to the Lutheran Church in Tamaqua and had me baptized. I did grow up Presbyterian and was very involved in church. I went to Sunday school all the way through. I sang in the choir. I very much participated until we moved to New Jersey, and then I kind of lost it. Then, when my son was born, I picked back up again with the Lutheran Church.

SI: Did a lot of social events circle around the church?

SY: Oh, yes, yes, pie socials and ice cream socials and things like that. The friends were in the church, but I do remember that a lot of my friends were Catholic and I was very upset that, at that time, Catholics were not allowed to set foot in a Protestant church. I really wanted to be Catholic because I could go into their church, and I could go to the Knights of Columbus dances there and the Knights of Columbus basketball games. I was very enamored with the Catholic Church, and I would even go to Stations of the Cross with my Catholic friends. That didn't follow through in my life, but that was when I was beginning to be a little disillusioned and a little upset that my friends couldn't experience my religion, so I experienced theirs. [Editor's Note: The Knights of Columbus is a global Catholic fraternal service order that was founded in 1882. Stations of the Cross is a series of fourteen images that portray Jesus's passion and death on the cross.]

SI: Were there a lot of ethnicities in the community, or was it more or less one or two major groups?

SY: One or two. It was mainly German because of the area, German-settled Pennsylvania, so it was a lot of German-Americans in the community.

SI: Your family moved to Jackson first and then South River. Does anything stand out about your time in Jackson living with your aunt?

SY: It was a tumultuous time, because my father was acting out. My father and my uncle--my uncle was my mother's sister's husband, and he was a great man--but when they'd drink, my uncle would never get nasty, and my father would. Between my brother acting out, my father acting out--probably out of anxiety and fear for the move and a new job and leaving everything behind Pennsylvania; I mean, that's where he was born and raised--it was only three months that we lived there. It was just during the summer, and it was tough. It was nice living there, because I was very close with my aunt and uncle. They took me to Florida. We did a lot of things. My aunt made a lot of our clothes. She would dress my two cousins and me alike. It was a happy time that way but, again, very tumultuous with my father and my brother.

SI: Tell us about where you settled in South River and what that neighborhood was like.

SY: Well, first, they bought a house in Old Bridge, and that fell through. So, they bought a house in South River. I was quite upset, because when we were in Tamaqua, my father and his brother, my uncle, were very much into the miniature trains, the Lionel Trains and the little HO trains. Before my brother was born, they actually built this big platform in what became the master bedroom after my brother was born and made an entire town and had the trains. Well, they sold my Lionel Trains to put a down payment on the house. First of all, I was not happy about the move. It's very hard to move when you're in junior high school. I was not happy about the move. I was not happy about the first people I met, because Tamaqua was a very small town. I knew most of the people that lived there, and when we moved to South River, I decided to take a walk and explore the neighborhood. As I walked past people, I'd say, "Hello," and they'd look at me like I had two heads. I went home, and I said, "I don't like it here. These people aren't friendly. They don't talk to you, and they're not nice."

My experience in seventh grade, my first experience was humiliating. First of all, my mother put me in dresses, and that made me stand out. Secondly, they were preparing for a quiz in history class. He came to me, and he said, "Columbus Day is September 12. True or false?" I said true, because in Tamaqua, we never had those holidays off from school. We never celebrated Columbus Day. I had no clue. Well, the entire class laughed at me, of course. I had a very hard time making friends. I really didn't make friends until near the end of ninth grade. Nobody talked to me, they laughed at me, and it was extremely traumatic. I hated it. I just wanted to go back to Tamaqua, and that was my first experience in South River.

PM: In regard to your upbringing, was your household ever politically motivated in any particular way? Not to get too far ahead, but do you think that shaped your involvement in politics later on in life?

SY: My family was not political. Back then, people wouldn't even tell you what party you voted for. I'm not sure what my father was. I'm guessing he was a Republican. I didn't know what my mother was. But when Kennedy came to our town, when he was running for president, my mother was very excited and went out to see him. They brought all the school kids out to see



him. No, I don't remember politics being particularly motivating back then. [Editor's Note: John F. Kennedy served as the 35th president of the United States from 1961 until his assassination on November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas.]

What was motivating back then--and this is an aside that may come up later--is my father was extremely bigoted, and I'm not sure why. In Tamaqua, we only had one Black person in the entire town, and he was a war [veteran]. When we moved to New Jersey and he worked for Union Carbide, people under him were Black and Puerto Rican, and he called them lazy. So, that shaped me. That part shaped me but not politics.

SI: While you were growing up in South River, were you a consumer of news? Would you read a paper or listen to what was happening in the world through television or radio? Was that something you kept up on?

SY: No. My father controlled the television. We didn't watch news. We only had three channels in Tamaqua. We were in a valley, and back then, it was rabbit ears. No, we didn't watch news. I don't remember getting newspapers when I was a kid. I remember, at my grandmother's house, she would allow me to listen to rock and roll on the radio. Again, I can't remember watching any kind of news. [Editor's Note: Rabbit ears refers to a type of television antenna.]

SI: Yebon, Patrick, do you have other questions?

YK: I would like to ask something about your high school experience. Earlier in the interview, you said that your parents had divided opinions about you going to college. When you were in high school, were you always thinking about going to or applying to college, or did that change at any point in your time?

SY: You know, I didn't really think of going to college. I did get good grades. Of course, my mother was saving for college, and she greatly encouraged me to go to college. When the time came to start applying, my mother took me to Douglass College. She was pushing me into the medical field. Douglass had medical technology as a major, and I didn't like the school at all. They took me to another school, and I can't remember where it was, but I wasn't happy with that school either. I told my guidance counselor, "Well, I'm going to apply to Rutgers." She said, "Well, that's the first class of women," and I said, "I know, but if I'm going to go to college, that's where I want to go and that's the only place I'm applying." She laughed at me, and she said, "You don't have the SAT scores or the grades to get into Rutgers." I said, "Well, that's where I'm going to apply." My backup was Trenton State--I applied to Rutgers early decision--and my backup was Trenton State, just in case I didn't get into Rutgers, but I didn't even apply to Trenton State. I was going to apply to Ann May School of Nursing, and my father forbid it. So, Rutgers was it, and I got in. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Trenton State College was renamed The College of New Jersey in 1996. The Ann May School of Nursing in Neptune, New Jersey was an entry-level hospital-based nursing diploma program.]

SI: Patrick, go ahead.

PM: Regarding Rutgers, did you feel that your prior educational experiences prepared you well for studying in college?

SY: Absolutely not, absolutely not. South River High School, no, it didn't prepare. It was more of a blue-collar town and a lot of ethnicity and not really a push for college. At the time, East Brunswick was the top school, and they were very academically motivated. No, we didn't have that kind of motivation, and I didn't have teachers that motivated me to go to college. So, no, I was not prepared whatsoever.

YK: Do you remember the approximate portion of your high school class transitioning into college?

SY: It was very, very low at, I think, twenty-five percent, something like that, and the superintendent was very proud of that. Back then, when you're in a town that's really blue collar and very ethnic--we had a lot of Portuguese, Belarusians, a lot of people that were laborers--college was not a big push. Graduating was a big push, graduating high school.

SI: When you were in high school, what were your favorite subjects? What were your favorite activities, that sort of thing?

SY: In high school, a subject that really stuck with me, probably because of the teacher, was economic sociology. We had one semester of economics and one semester of sociology, and the teacher was wonderful. I learned so much from her. I took a humanities course, which was also very interesting, but [I took] the basic English, history. I took French, and I loved my French teacher. I took three years of French. That was good, and I did continue French when I was in college. Other than that, no, I was more into my friends.

I ended up with a group of friends when I was near the end of my freshman year in junior high, and we were a clique, a real clique. That's when I start becoming incorrigible but very different on the surface. I got into smoking cigarettes and drinking and stuff high school kids were pretty much doing at the time, and going to school dances and just being incorrigible. We had a local hamburger joint called Gino's, which was the precursor to Burger King and McDonald's. We would go up there and throw eggs at what we called the rent-a-cop because they wouldn't let us loiter there. It was a different world back then. I mean, I had a party at the house, my father allowed us to drink, and then we got in cars and went up to Gino's, and that was acceptable back then. I can't believe it, but you're in a small town and there was really no danger. Well, I'm sure there was danger, but that's what we did. That was our life, and I enjoyed that part of high school. Yes, my clique was everything. I had a high school boyfriend who was wonderful to me, and they were Russian Orthodox. So, it was a big influx of immigrants in that town.

SI: These years you were in high school, the Vietnam War was going on. Did that have any impact or impression on you or your classmates?

SY: Not until I got into college. I was quite unaware of it when I was in high school. I mean, I knew there was a war going on, but I didn't know the extent of it until I got to Rutgers and got in on the sit-ins and the demonstrations and everything else.

SI: You mentioned your father forbade you from applying to the nursing program. Was he equally against you going to Rutgers?

SY: No, he was not. Since he had gone to night school there, I guess he figured that was okay. After I graduated, I went into teaching, and he was very derogatory about my teaching. You know, he didn't think teachers were any good. He didn't think nurses were any good. I think it was more of a jealousy. He was a very jealous man. He wouldn't let my mother have friends, and he was just very jealous of anybody that was educated.

SI: We want to start talking about settling into Rutgers, the first experiences. Does one of you want to ask your question regarding that?

PM: Sure, I can ask a quick question in regards to that. Initially, when arriving at Rutgers, due to the contrast in the number of women who were in the class compared to men, did you feel some inherent sense of pressure to perform well immediately?

SY: No. I was still kind of sheltered because my first experience was on Busch Campus. I was in the Davidson dorms at the time, and there was a mixture of women and men in those dorms. No, I didn't feel a lot of pressure. When I did feel pressure--I started in the Pharmacy School. I was accepted into the Pharmacy program, and the first thing they say to you is, "Look to your left and look to your right. Neither one of those are going to graduate as pharmacists in five years." I'm like, "Oh, this is pressure." So, it wasn't a male-female type thing. No, I wasn't intimidated at all by that, by the amount of men.

YK: Could you please share your memories of your first day moving into Rutgers College campus? What do you remember about your experiences during the first couple weeks?

SY: I don't have a whole lot of memories. I had requested a single room. I was definitely afraid of having a roommate. [laughter] So, I requested a single room. Basically, I got away with it because I was asthmatic. Living with somebody that was not real clean or wore heavy perfumes or something like that would set off an asthma attack. So, I asked for a single room and was able to get it. My biggest fear was we lived too close to Rutgers for me to be in a dorm at all. For the four years, I used my aunt's address in Jackson, so at least I could experience the dorm life. Moving in--I really have very little recollection of move-in day or the weeks that followed that. I do know that the women that were in my side of Davidson, we all became very close, but it took a long time.

PM: How was your experience living on campus?

SY: Say again?

PM: How was your experience living on campus, just generally in terms of the quality of the dorms and the accessibility to go to classes and so on?

SY: I loved Davidson. I mean, it was not main campus, and we just all formed a very special relationship in the Davidson dorms. We had a fraternity there named Squamish. Squamish had beer in the lobby, in their common area, and that was really neat. We were just all very, very close. You had to do some planning to get to main campus. They had the buses, and you really had to do some planning. But I didn't want to live on main campus after my first year at Davidson, because it was just such a neat experience. I worked in the dining hall. I have some really fond memories of Davidson. Is it still there, Davidson? [Editor's Note: In 2016, Rutgers stopped using Davidson Hall as a residence hall.]

SI: Yes, they have remodeled it to become a home for the radio and television network.

SY: Oh, really?

SI: I do not know; they might have residential as part of the complex. When I went to Rutgers, graduated in 2001, it was still residential then, and they had food service and other things there. For a long time, it was similar to how it was in your day. You worked in the cafeteria. Did you have other jobs while you were on campus?

SY: No, that was it. Oh, I had to go home once a week and clean my parents' house. I had to go home on Fridays and clean their house, so they would give me forty dollars. Actually, I think it was ten; I don't think it was forty.

SI: Okay.

SY: Anyway, that's how I got my spending money.

SI: I forgot to ask, had you worked while you were in high school, like part time or in summers?

SY: Oh, yes, I did. I started off, when I was sixteen, working at the police station in South River. I was basically a gopher and somebody that used the copy machine and filed and so forth, and that was a lot of fun. I really enjoyed that. After that, I worked at a drugstore in East Brunswick as a cashier and ended up getting fired from that job because I gave my mother a discount when she came through the store. So, that was very traumatic. I think that's it. I don't think I worked anywhere--oh, yes, I did. I did. I worked at Revlon, in the factory, second shift, with some people from my town. We would drive up there and work the second shift, and I really enjoyed that. That was a lot of fun.

PM: Just regarding the application process to Rutgers, what did that resemble?

SY: What did it resemble? A lot different from what it resembles today, I'm sure. It was just pages and pages of questions and an essay. I can't remember what the essay was. That's it, just like filling out an application. It was like an interview-type thing. It was very different from [now]. I have a grandson that's applying to colleges now, and I'm telling him things and he's like, "That's not the way it is, Nana. We don't do it that way." [laughter] Now, they let you know by email or whatever. We'd get the packet in the mail, and if it was a letter, you knew you were rejected. If it was a big packet, you knew you were accepted.

SI: Tell us about that first year. You were studying pharmacy. What stands out about either your classes or professors or the overall experience?

SY: Well, I didn't know how to study when I got to Rutgers. My classes--basically, the first year, you're taking a lot of your liberal arts classes, but I also had biology and chemistry and I don't think I ever attended a lab. I don't ever remember attending a lab. My grades were not good. Back then, a "1" was an "A" and a "4" was an "F." The first year, I had all "3's," which were "C's," and I think one "2." I was not prepared. When it came to facing organic chemistry and the thought of failing, I decided to get out, but I didn't know what I wanted to do. Somebody said to me, "Why don't you go into teaching?" "Okay," and that's how that happened. I wouldn't have made it in pharmacy. I became very disillusioned very quickly because it became apparent to me that you're going to get out after five years of school to count pills and work weekends and holidays, and that disillusioned me, too.

SI: Had your mother recommended pharmacy? Was that part of the medical thing she was trying to push?

SY: Oh, yes. I had to go for an interview with the dean because I just applied to Rutgers College when I applied. So, I had to go for an interview with the dean, and he accepted me. I went for orientation. I remember the orientation very well, and I met some nice people. It turns out one of the gals I met was my next-door neighbor in the dorm, and we're still in contact today.

SI: Now, the Pharmacy School had already been coed. Is that correct, or did it also go coed the same year?

SY: You know, I'm not sure. I think it probably also went coed the same year because all of Rutgers College was not coed, but I'm not sure.

PM: Did you remain in contact with anyone else from your time at Rutgers?

SY: Oh, yes, a lot of people, all Davidson people. As a matter of fact, one of the gals that I've remained in contact with is the one that got me involved in this interview. She did it, so she suggested that I do it, too.

SI: We are happy for that. Did you stay in Davidson all four years, or did you move anywhere else?

SY: I stayed in Davidson two years. Then, a couple of Davidson friends and I moved into the new apartments that they built on Busch Campus. I spent my junior year there. My senior year, I was married, so I lived off campus.

SI: I know maybe ten years before you came here, there were a lot of rules regarding students getting married, and you had to ask the dean for permission. Were there any vestiges of that, or was it just you could do whatever you wanted?

SY: You could do whatever you wanted. I guess once the women came to Rutgers, some of the rules relaxed.

SI: You went into education. In that field, do any classes or professors stand out, again, like your student-teaching experience?

SY: I had wonderful professors. I majored in elementary special ed. Dr. Adair, who was also my advisor, and Dr. Nixon. We did pre-student-teaching every semester, where we'd have to go one morning or one afternoon a week into an area school. That prepared us for the student-teaching when we were seniors. I had a fantastic student-teaching experience in East Brunswick and remained close with the people in that school for a long time. I really wanted to teach there, and I could not land a teaching job in East Brunswick. It was very difficult. No, it was great. My whole experience majoring in education, it was the right move.

PM: How did your experience at Rutgers contribute to the style of teaching that you displayed in your career?

SY: I guess with all of the pre-student-teaching experience that I had and observing different styles and liking some and not liking others, I think that really, really shaped me.

SI: You also noted that while you were at Rutgers, you became more politically or socially aware. You got involved in some activities in that regard. Can you tell us a little bit about how that started and what you got involved in?

SY: Well, I guess it started at the end of high school. I started becoming more politically aware. We went to Washington, D.C. for my senior class trip, and when we visiting the Capitol, we met a page who took a small group of us downstairs in the building to the offices. I met George McGovern and had a conversation with him and was very impressed by just the little contact we had. I started paying attention. I went to a rally where he was there, and Sargent Shriver was there. I had a conversation with Sargent Shriver and decided I was going to become politically active, and I campaigned for them in the Davidson dorms. I went around from room to room, I met people that way, and I also campaigned for him and, of course, was very, very disappointed when he lost. Yes, that was the beginning of my political--I don't know if you want to call it activism, but I guess the activism part was the sit-ins and the demonstrations for the Vietnam War. [Editor's Note: Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern and vice presidential candidate Sargent Shriver lost to Republican incumbents Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew in the election of 1972.]

SI: Did that start before you came to Rutgers, or was it once you got to campus that you were involved in anti-war activity?

SY: Once I got to campus, yes.

SI: Tell us a little bit about that. Was it that you would see a rally happening and you would go there, or did you join a group? What level of involvement did you have?

SY: Not much. I'd just see a rally and take part in it. It was a little bit of a disconnect back then not being on main campus. I'd read *The Targum* and get information from that, but, no, I'd just kind of run into these events and join in. [Editor's Note: *The Daily Targum* is the official student newspaper of Rutgers University.]

SI: Oh, go ahead.

PM: Would you say that the political ideals you developed during this time have stayed consistent over your life, or have they shifted at all?

SY: No, they've stayed consistent.

SI: Were you at least learning about the women's movement or involved in any way?

SY: Back then, no. Later on, yes.

SI: Yebon, do you have questions?

YK: I am wondering, what was the approximate ratio of African American, Hispanic, Caucasian, and Asian women at the time when you were on campus? Even if it is not an exact proportion, how much diversity did you see on campus?

SY: If I remember correctly, it was pretty Caucasian back then. I had no people of color in my dorms. We had to take a diversity class. I took an African American Studies, and I don't remember anybody of color in that class either. There were only four hundred women. When you're an education major, it's basically women and football players, so, yes, I guess the football players, there were some African American football players, but that's all I remember. There was not a lot of diversity back then.

YK: Do you think you saw more diversity happening as the years of college went by?

SY: No, not while I was there, not that I was aware of anyway.

SI: What are some of the things you think of the most when you think of Rutgers, your favorite memories or the things that stick out in your memory the most?

SY: Just my life experience there and really growing up, because growing up in a small town and attending a high school where there just wasn't much going on, I did a lot of growing up. I met a lot of people, and I just loved my whole experience there. I made the right choice. It was wonderful. I'd do it again.

SI: Did you ever have any encounters with the administration, deans or others? Did they leave any impression on you?

SY: Dean McCormick. He probably wasn't there during your time. He was initially my history professor, and then he became a dean. He was the only one that I really can remember. I do

remember the president at the time because he'd have a reception every year for anybody that wanted to attend. I remember that, but, no, I didn't have a whole lot of contact with the deans. [Editor's Note: Richard P. McCormick served as a Rutgers faculty member in history from 1945 to 1982 and as the dean of Rutgers College from 1974 to 1977. Edward J. Bloustein served as the president of Rutgers University from 1971 to until his death in 1989.]

SI: Yes, McCormick comes up quite a bit, both as a professor and as a dean.

SY: Oh, he was fantastic. What a great history professor he was.

SI: Yes, he was retired by the time I was a student, but since I was a history major, we always had to go down to the archives and he was always in there writing something.

SY: Oh, I bet. [laughter]

SI: Did you take any courses outside of education that stand out?

SY: Let's see, I took a genetics course, because I was really interested in genetics. I didn't do very well, but I really, really enjoyed that. I enjoyed the history classes I had basically because of Dean McCormick. What else did I take? Oh, I loved my psychology classes, but that's all part of education. Yes, I continued on and got my master's in counseling psychology because it just really interested me. I did use it basically in the classroom, but my goal was to become a guidance counselor and then decided I really didn't want to do that.

SI: You mentioned Davidson had this really great social scene. Would you go to other places, like to fraternities or out in the local town or anything like that?

SY: We went to a couple of fraternities. I wasn't real into the fraternity lifestyle, a lot of drinking, a lot of partying. I loved main campus for the food trucks and I had friends that lived on main campus, so I'd go down there. My boyfriend at the time was a year older than me, and he lived on main campus. So, I would go down there, but then he did move up to Davidson the second year. Yes, I went to the Student Center many, many times just to hang out. They'd have bands down there. I was involved in life down there, but my main life was at Davidson.

SI: Do you remember any of the acts that came through, bands, or sometimes people remember comedians, things like that?

SY: We didn't have a lot of--you probably have a lot more today there than we did. No, I just remembered that some of the bands were really, really good. It was nobody big. We didn't have big concerts. It was just like local talent.

SI: What would you do during the summers?

SY: During the summers. [I'm] drawing a blank. I'm sure I worked. One summer, I went to summer school; I had to take a geography class. I think that's probably the time I worked at



Revlon. That probably wasn't in high school. That was probably in the summers when I was in college. Yes, I don't remember. I hung out with friends, but I don't have too many memories.

SI: Yebon and Patrick, do you have other questions from the Rutgers years?

PM: Yes. Did you face any institutional challenges that just showed that Rutgers really was not prepared for having a coed class, just from the structure of the dorms or anything like that?

SY: No, not at all, but, again, I wasn't on main campus. So, it could have been very different down there. I was just in a bubble. I was in such an ideal situation that there were no struggles. We had dorms that were all women, we had dorms that were all men, and then we had dorms that men were on one side and women were on the other and then the common areas in the middle. So, I didn't see any struggles.

YK: Do you know of any incidents, or had you witnessed, heard, or seen any difficulties other women, your colleagues, were facing possibly?

SY: Not that I can recall.

SI: You got married your senior year, or was it earlier?

SY: I did in the summer between my junior and senior year.

SI: Okay. We do not want to get too into your personal life, but do you want to say anything about that, just for the biographical continuity?

SY: I got married too young.

SI: As you were approaching graduation, what were your plans? Did the school offer support in terms of trying to find jobs, things like that?

SY: No, no, I was on my own.

SI: Where were you looking? You mentioned you were trying to get a job in East Brunswick, but what else were you looking at besides that?

SY: Well, I put in applications in many different places. We lived in East Brunswick at the time, and I had such a wonderful student-teaching experience. I really wanted to be in that district, and it just wasn't happening. My mother-in-law at the time worked for the assistant superintendent in Middletown Township. So, I applied there, and she was instrumental in at least getting my application seen by the superintendent, who then turned it over to a panel of principals. I had to meet with the panel of principals that had job openings, and I was hired. That was difficult for me the first year or two until I proved myself, because the talk was, "Oh, she only got the job because of her mother-in-law." It was a slow process, but, eventually, people saw that I could do the job.

SI: This was in special education.

SY: No, no, not at the time. I wanted to be in special education, but back in those days, districts would go between farming the special-ed kids out to another district and paying tuition and then deciding the tuition was too much, so they'd bring them back in district. Well, I was in that place where they were out of district. So, I got hired for kindergarten. Another gentleman got hired at the same time as I did for a job, and he wanted kindergarten. He got hired for first grade. He really wanted kindergarten because he wanted to start some kind of special program that he had developed. So, I got first grade. The teacher that had the first grade for many years was a Black woman that probably was beyond her prime. She was very angry that they moved her to fourth grade. My first experience was walking into the classroom, and she was in there with a shopping cart emptying the classroom. So, I started with twenty-seven first graders and no supplies. It was interesting, but we got through it.

SI: What was that like? Was it very different from your student-teaching experience?

SY: It was very different. First of all, the district East Brunswick is quite an affluent district and Middletown is too, but it's an entire microcosm. The school that I started in was, at the time, called East Keansburg Elementary School, and [there were] very poor students. Back in those days, they didn't have breakfast; they didn't have programs for them. In a sense, it was rewarding because the parents were very, very thankful for anything you did for their kids. They were very supportive of educators, and I loved teaching there. It was wonderful. The school was helpful. Being that I had no supplies, they went to their supply closet and supplied me with old construction paper and things like that. I think that first year, being that I was a special-ed major, I recognized kids that needed help, and I think I referred eleven kids that first year out of twenty-seven. That was when the kids weren't in district. Of course, working with the child-study team, they weren't about to classify these kids, but by the time they were in fourth grade, they were all classified.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: We were talking about your days in East Keansburg. How long did you teach there?

SY: That was a little fuzzy. I think I left there in 1982. I taught first grade for two years and then second grade for three years, and then they were going to move me to fourth grade. The principal thought that I looked like a fourth-grade teacher, and I just wasn't ready for that. They were bringing the special-ed kids back in. So, I moved over to New Monmouth School and taught what they called--at the time, it was--"learning disabled," but back then, they separated neurologically impaired and perceptually impaired. I started with perceptually-impaired children, and I was very successful with special ed.

I remember that somebody applied for a grant in word processing. This is when computers were first starting. They brought in these six Apple computers to teach word processing basically because of spell check; they could check their work. They gave the computers to me. The woman that wrote the grant didn't get the computers. Something was going on with her that they didn't like, so they gave me these computers that I didn't even know how to turn on. I eventually

got them going with the kids and then eventually went around to different seminars and taught other teachers how to do this with the word processing.

I loved my job. I loved my kids. The teacher across the way had the neurologically-impaired kids. We did a lot together. My experience there was wonderful. I think I was at New Monmouth from probably '82 to '86 [1987]. I don't remember why I moved on, probably just because I liked to have different experiences.

A lot of teachers will start in one school and stay there for their entire career. I didn't want to do that. I loved the staff that I was with in New Monmouth, but I think one of the biggest problems was they put the special-ed students in what they called the pod, which was six classrooms. It was totally open with just partitions in between the classes. For these special-ed kids, being in a situation with that kind of noise and distraction was not a good move, and I just wasn't happy with it.

I moved to River Plaza School, which was still Middletown Township, but it was considered Red Bank. I had a wonderful experience there. They gave me a class of middle-school kids that they didn't have room for in the middle school, and they were great kids. I worked with another teacher that had the younger perceptually-impaired kids, and we started a food service. We shopped with them, we cooked with them, we taught them how to take money, we basically just served the staff, and we taught them life skills. It was great. Back then, you could put kids in the car and drive them to the store; there was no problem doing that. I loved every minute of that experience, until they started dumping kids on me.

If you're good at what you do, or if you were in Middletown--I'm not sure it's like that anywhere--they just kept getting waivers and putting more kids and more kids. At one point, I had an eight year old and I had twelve year olds in the same class. When the twelve year olds told the eight year old that there was no Santa Claus, I'm like, "I'm done. This is it. I can't do this anymore. I'm going to the middle school." So, I moved to the middle school [Bayshore Middle School] and taught there until I retired.

SI: That was the school in Leonardo?

SY: Yes.

SI: Okay. You spent a long time in the same field. You had these interludes in other forms of teaching, but what were the major changes you saw in special education over your time there?

SY: The major changes I saw were in the parents of the students. It went from being the teacher's right, the teacher's good, to talking about the teacher around the dinner table and the kids would come to school and tell you what went on at the dinner table. If their child got a bad grade, the teacher was bad; they'd go to the principal. If you didn't have a supportive principal, it was difficult. That really changed as years went on, and it became very difficult to teach, especially in a middle school like Bayshore, which was, again, a microcosm. You had your very, very wealthy kids, and you had your very, very poor kids, fishermen's kids, and we had quite a

few children of color. The parents just became very vocal, and it just wasn't fun anymore. I loved the kids.

SI: Regarding the students you worked with, was there ever any discussion of trying mainstreaming, or were the disabilities too much?

SY: No, we did mainstream; we did limited mainstreaming in elementary school. I had two boys that were very gifted but very impaired in behavior. One was probably on the autism spectrum, and the other one just had violent outbursts. We did some limited mainstreaming with them because the one boy that was on the autism spectrum was very bright, and I had to individually work with him because he was so advanced. We did try mainstreaming with those two students. The one on the autism spectrum was successful. The one that had the behavioral problems was not. I did have a younger student, when I was at New Monmouth, that was also on the autism spectrum that we did mainstream. The other students were pretty much too impaired, until I got to the middle school.

In middle school, I taught resource center, which was a pullout. If they needed reading or math or study skills, they'd be pulled out. The last couple of years I was there, they started what they called in-class support. I would go into the classroom and I ended up working with all the students, but I was supposed to focus on the special-ed students and help them be successful in the class. I worked in a history class and I worked in a math class, and I loved doing that. I preferred that to working in the resource room because in the resource room, when I first started, we had five students for a forty-minute period. Then, they upped it to ten students for a forty-minute period. Then, they upped it to fifteen students, and that was very hard to manage, fifteen students with varying disabilities. That became very difficult. I was kind of disenchanted at that point.

SI: Are there other aspects of your career that we have not talked about that you would like to discuss?

SY: We did have a strike. Being that it was quite a wealthy district, our Board of Education, most of them, sent their students to private schools and weren't really interested in funding public education. They had two strikes in Middletown, and I was there for the first one and was very active in the strike process. That was settled without too much difficulty, although we did have to go to court in Freehold with the threat of being put in jail. Luckily, that didn't happen to anybody. But the later strike, after I was gone, after I had retired, they actually put teachers in jail. They put them in the Army barracks at Fort Monmouth, even pregnant teachers. I'm glad I was gone by that point. [Editor's Note: In 1998 and again in 2001, teachers in Middletown went on strike for a week. In 2001, over two hundred teachers were jailed for defying a judge's return-to-work order.]

What caused me to retire--I had put twenty-five years in, and my classroom that I did the majority of my teaching in was a very small room off a small hallway to the main hallway. We had asbestos ceilings. We had leaks in a number of ceilings, and I had toxic mold growing in my ceiling. I was sick all the time and the kids were getting sick, and they wouldn't do anything about it. Finally, I wrote to OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration], and right

before OSHA came in, they took the ceiling panels out of my ceiling. When I went in on a Monday morning, it was like teaching in a Home Depot. I had no ceiling panels; it was just the beams. OSHA, of course, didn't find anything. So, that was that.

Well, shortly after that, they started building a new middle school. They were butting it up to the old middle school, and my classroom was one of the rooms that they were butting it up to. I had absolutely no ventilation in that room, so I was still getting sick. They provided me with an air conditioner that didn't vent anywhere, and that didn't help. I was out all the time; I was sick all the time. I was at the doctor all the time, and she said, "You've got to find a new place to teach." I said, "Well, that's impossible. I have to finish out the year. I'm sick all the time." I said, "What, are you going to write me a note?" She said, "Yes, absolutely." She wrote me a note, and I think five days later, I walked out. I was done. I didn't want to go out that way. I miss it terribly, but I was so sick all the time. That was the end of my career.

SI: I grew up in Hazlet, right next to Middletown, and I heard some of these stories you have alluded to. I did not realize that they were quite so bad, doing these things to you. You mentioned the strike. How long did the strike go on, the one you were involved in?

SY: The one I was involved in, I'd say a week, maybe longer. It wasn't too terribly long. It may have been two weeks because we did get threatened with jail, and we did have to appear in Freehold, at the court in Freehold. Yes, maybe two five-day weeks or just short of that. It was very traumatic though, not as traumatic as the second one, I'm sure, but it was hard.

SI: Were there things that they would try to do to you to break the strike? Did they bring in other teachers?

SY: Oh, yes, they brought in other teachers. Yes, they kept the schools open. A lot of the parents kept the kids home, but, no, they kept the schools open. We didn't interfere with that. We just went on with our picketing and didn't engage because that wasn't who we were. We just wanted fair pay. You're getting two percent raises and you're getting ridiculed by the school board and they want to take programs away--they want to take art, music, physical education away--to cut costs. I was very fortunate at Bayshore because I had the president of the teachers' union at Bayshore, and she was just a wonderful person and very knowledgeable and just guided us all through it.

SI: You retired in 2001. Is that correct?

SY: Yes.

SI: Then, you mentioned in your survey this long sojourn into RV-ing. Was that right after you retired or later on?

SY: No, that was shortly after I retired.

SI: Okay.

SY: We decided that that might be a good thing to do. My husband was also retired at the time. It's very hard to live in New Jersey on retirement pay, and my retirement pay was cut by twenty-four percent because I retired at forty-seven. I did have my health benefits, which I greatly appreciate; New Jersey's great for that. As I met other teachers across the country, we were blessed to have that. Anyway, we decided we couldn't retire there, and we looked into Delaware and just couldn't decide whether it was for us or not. We had camped in a tent, but we had never been in an RV and everybody thought we were crazy. We went out and bought an RV and took off. I sold my house. We took off and traveled, and it was the most wonderful experience. I mean, it's something I'll never forget. The people and the places were just incredible. We did it for twelve years.

PM: In what ways did traveling across the country change or broaden your worldview?

SY: Oh, in a lot of ways. We visited every state in the union except for North Dakota, and the lifestyles are so different in each state. I mean, it was just amazing. The people in this country are wonderful. We just met so many terrific, terrific people, and their political views, when we were doing it, it wasn't nearly as polarized back then. You could actually talk about politics, you could talk about social issues, and it got increasingly more difficult as we were traveling. But our political views shaped us, shaped the fact that we settled in California. Visiting some states that weren't as liberal as California weighed on our decision not to settle there. Between that and weather, we just kept navigating back to California because [of] the weather. We tried Florida, we tried South Texas, we tried Arizona, all wonderful places; the climate was good, but there were things that we didn't like about each place. So, we settled out here.

YK: What was your favorite state to travel to and why? Was it California, like you mentioned, or was there another state that you liked traveling to?

SY: People often ask us that question. Every state is unique, and we really liked a lot of states. Our favorite state in the summer, when we were RV-ing, was Colorado. We loved the entire state of Colorado. We traveled the entire state and went back there for several summers. We loved Montana, Utah. We're very much into nature and the national parks and hiking and things like that. So, we would navigate to places like that. We navigated to California basically, first of all, for the weather in the winter. Southern California has the best winter weather, not this year, but for the main part, they have the best weather in the winter. In the summer, it's not the place to be, so we do leave. We still leave in the summer; 122 degrees is a bit much.

PM: Considering all the different places you have traveled to, have you ever left the country? Were there any travel plans you made that maybe did not pan out?

SY: We did leave the country. Well, in the RV, we left the country. We went to Canada and visited several provinces in Canada, just in the west, British Columbia, Alberta. We'd been to Ontario when we were traveling on the East Coast. We went to Mexico too, but not with the RV. We've been in Mexico on cruises. We like to cruise. We've been on a river cruise on the Rhine. So, we've been to Amsterdam in the Netherlands. We've been to Germany, France, Switzerland. I loved every minute of that too, but I'm glad we got to see our country the way we did because it's not like flying on vacation and spending a week somewhere. We got into the culture, the

lifestyle, of these states, because we'd spend a month or two, or if we didn't, if we only spent a couple of weeks, we'd go back to a different part of the state. That was the best kind of travel in my book. We really enjoyed that.

SI: Did you always travel on your own, or were you part of these large groups that go around that I have seen?

SY: No. We traveled on our own, and we would meet up with people that we had met along the way. We have very dear friends from England that we would meet up with all the time, and they would leave their motor home here and fly over for a month or so and pick up their motor home and travel around and we'd meet up with them. We did belong to an RV group and we had been to a few rallies, but we never really traveled with anybody, even when we went overseas. We're comfortable with each other. We just like each other's company. We have to; we lived together in a four-hundred-square-foot house for twelve years. [laughter]

SI: How did you meet your current husband?

SY: We met in Al-Anon. We were both married to alcoholics. This is my third marriage. My second husband died. My first husband, my Rutgers husband, decided that when we had our son that he didn't want to be a parent, so he took off. I went to Al-Anon, and we met there. I was determined not to ever speak to a man again after that, but he just kept bothering me and bothering me and we got together. We liked the same things. We're still together after all that travel and after taking care of my mother with her Alzheimer's, yes, my life partner. It only took me three times. Three time's the charm.

SI: Well, you got it right. That is good.

SY: Yes. [laughter]

SI: You mentioned you have a son also.

SY: I do, yes. His name is Jason. He attended college at the University of Delaware. He wanted nothing to do with Rutgers, but he watches all the Rutgers football games and is very involved with Rutgers but didn't want to go there. "Mom and Dad went there; I'm not going there." He joined ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] at the University of Delaware. He met a captain that he really connected with and went into ROTC and spent six years in the Air Force. He was a captain, and that's considered a lower officer. They were getting rid of the lower officers and offering them buyouts. He was not a pilot. He wanted to be a navigator, but once he took the flying lessons that they required, he decided it wasn't for him. He had majored in accounting, so he went into MWR, which is Morale, Welfare, and Recreation, and became the accountant for that. They were switching that over to civil service when he got out. He separated on a Friday and went to work on Monday as civil service in the same job.

He's moved around quite a bit. He spent time in Turkey, and we did go over to Turkey, when it was still safe over there, and did quite a bit of traveling with the personnel on the base over there. Then, he went to the Azores, which is part of Portugal, islands belonging to Portugal. He

worked there for a few years and then decided he didn't want to be in management. He took a job at Luke Air Force Base in Arizona and then decided that that wasn't for him either. So, he began applying for positions again. Now, he's a GS-13 at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia and likes his job very much. He was glad he got out. I have one grandson. I actually have [six] grandchildren, but five of them are step-grandchildren and then my youngest is my biological grandchild. We're all one happy family.

SI: It sounds like you have stayed in contact, at least a little bit, with some of the folks that you were at Rutgers with.

SY: Yes. We were going to reunions, but then when we were in the RV, it just became too difficult for me to come back. We all plan to be there for our fiftieth.

SI: Is there anything else that we have not touched on that you would like to discuss?

SY: I didn't put this in the interview, but it brought me a big chuckle, and I wish I had saved it, *The Home News*, that was our local paper. When I got accepted at Rutgers--first of all, my guidance counselor said, "There's no way you're going to get in Rutgers," and I, being the type of person I am, said, "Watch me." I got accepted early decision, and the newspaper called me up. I don't know where they got this information and I don't think it's true, but they said, "You were the first woman accepted at Rutgers. How does it feel?" I get a chuckle out of that because I know. Then, they said, "Well, why did you want to go there?" Being the sarcastic kind of person I am, I said, "The boys," and that was in the newspaper. [laughter] I didn't save it. I'm so sorry I didn't save it, because it was so comical at the time.

SI: Yes. It sounds like on campus nobody made that kind of a fuss.

SY: No. [laughter] Well, there were four hundred of us, so we were probably all the first. I mean, you don't accept one person. You accept many at a time.

SI: Yes, yes.

SY: I'm glad I didn't listen to my guidance counselor. I'm that type of person; if somebody tells me I can't do it, it's like, "Watch me."

SI: Yes.

SY: I really can't think of anything else. I retired, I took up golf, I took a pickleball, and life is good.

SI: Good. Yebon, do you have a question?

YK: Yes. I have gained so many insights through your story that you have told. What do you think today's students should know about your experience regarding this interview and what you wanted to share?



SY: I really don't know, because this is something that I never in my life thought was happening at Rutgers. I think it's a wonderful experience. Whether they'd be interested in my interview, I doubt it. I haven't led a very exciting life, but I like the fact that this is an ongoing thing. I like the fact that there's an oral history on the military people that attended Rutgers, and I just think it's a great thing that you're doing.

SI: Well, thank you, but I think a lot of people will be interested in your story. A lot of people use the collection for insights from educators and all sorts of things. You have really led a very fascinating life.

SY: Well, I was brutally honest. [laughter]

SI: That is all we can ask. That is exactly what we want.

SY: Oh, I didn't tell you about my master's. I got my master's degree when I was in my forties. Well, first of all, Jersey City State started offering courses in Middletown, so I just started taking courses. Every so many credits, you'd get a raise. I took lots of courses. Most of them, except for my last three courses, I took off campus. I only had to drive up to Jersey City my last year. I obtained a master's in counseling psychology with a certificate in guidance. Like I said before, I wanted to be a guidance counselor until I did my practicum in guidance, and I love counseling kids. I did so much of it in the classroom in middle school with the special-ed kids. When I went into the practicum and saw that middle school guidance counseling is basically a lot of paperwork, that wasn't what I wanted to do. I wanted to work with kids, and I was doing so much counseling in the classroom. I mean, I had eighth grade boys that you wouldn't believe some of our conversations. They were pretty incredible. They would open up to me, and we would discuss things. I thought, "I'm doing what I want to do right where I am, so I'm going to just stay put in the classroom." That's all I can remember that we didn't talk about.

SI: Okay, great. Later on, if you think of anything, you can always put it in the transcript.

SY: Okay.

SI: We can put in a postscript. For now, thank you very much. I really appreciate all your time, and I think Yebon and Patrick learned a lot as well.

SY: Yes. It was nice meeting the three of you, and it's so neat that we have Zoom, that I didn't have to--I wouldn't have flown across the country, because with the way things are with the airlines anymore, it would have been a definite no. [laughter]

SI: Yes, this was the one silver lining from the pandemic. Everyone learned how to use Zoom.

SY: Absolutely, and it's a beautiful thing. [laughter]

SI: Yes. Let me conclude. Thank you very much.

SY: Thank you.

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